

VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

“Does the government want development of people in the highlands? Or development of people outside, based on what they can get out of the highlands?” Himalayan farmer

As the pace of development accelerates in mountain regions, more often driven by the needs of urban, lowland populations and industry than by highland communities, so the social and physical environment is changing. The implications for the wider world are likely to be significant.

Panos has been working with community-based environmental, cultural and development organisations to record the oral testimony of local people, and to communicate their experiences and their understanding of the challenges ahead.

The project has involved local people as both interviewers and narrators. Ten collections have been gathered: in the Himalaya (**India** and **Nepal**); the Karakorum (**Pakistan**); the central Andes (**Peru**); the Sierra Norte (**Mexico**); Mount Elgon (**Kenya**); the highlands of **Ethiopia** and **Lesotho**; southwest and northeast **China**; and the Sudety mountains (**Poland**). Each booklet contains a selection of the interviews gathered in that locality. The full international archive holds the views and experiences of some 350 individuals, and represents a wealth of material – vivid, challenging, full of human detail and variety – to complement and illustrate other forms of research into sustainable mountain development. For more information on the themes, projects, participants, and the unedited but translated transcripts, visit www.mountainvoices.org.

Each collection is a snapshot, and does not claim to represent an entire mountain community. But the range of individual voices provides a remarkably comprehensive picture of highland societies, their changing environments, and their concerns for the future. The challenge is to meet national development needs without further marginalising mountain peoples. They are the custodians of diverse – sometimes unique – environments, essential to the survival of the global ecosystem. Further erosion of mountain people’s ability to care for those assets will be the world’s loss, not just theirs.

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ORAL TESTIMONY



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VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

ORAL TESTIMONIES FROM
NEPAL



— VOICES —
FROM THE MOUNTAIN

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The Panos Institute exists to stimulate debate on global environment and development issues. Panos' main offices are in Dakar, Kampala, Kathmandu, London, Lusaka, Paris, Washington.

Voices from the Mountain is a series of booklets published by Panos London's Oral Testimony Programme (OTP) as part of its international Mountains project. The OTP has been working through partners with a variety of highland communities for several years, involving local people both as narrators and interviewers. The aim is to explore the changing environment and culture of these regions through the direct testimony of those who live there; to raise awareness and understanding of the accelerating impact of development; and to communicate people's experiences and perceptions of the changes—social, economic and environmental—taking place as a result.

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Booklets are free to the media and resource-poor non-governmental organisations in developing countries. Copies otherwise are £5.00; bulk discounts available. For copies or further details, please contact oraltestimony@panoslondon.org.uk.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The interviews are only a selection from those originally gathered. Extracts have been chosen for interest and to represent, as far as possible, the range of concerns, views and experiences found within the overall Nepal collection. They have been edited, primarily to remove repetition or confusion (and questions). Similarly, some re-ordering has taken place. Square brackets indicate "inserted" text for clarification; round brackets are translations/interpretations; and three dots indicate gaps in the text. Words that are glossed appear in **bold** the first time in an interview; botanical terms are italicised and glossed where possible. All interviews have been translated, with varying levels of professional experience and in some cases from a local into a national language and then into English, so some misinterpretations may have occurred.

The numbering of the testimonies (eg NEPAL 8) relates to the full collection: to view the rest of the material, unedited transcripts, more background information and any new developments in this project, please see www.mountainvoices.org.

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INTRODUCTION

"Because of development...we have more facilities, such as irrigation"—Ram Bahadur explains the rise in food production in the steep terraces of his Himalayan village. He was speaking in 1995, when many of these interviews were gathered—and when the conflict between the Maoists and the government had yet to cast its long shadow over the lives of Nepal's rural poor. People spoke of piped water, health centres, roads, electricity, new crops and fertilisers making their lives easier and more productive. Cultivable and grazing land was increasingly under pressure, however, from growing families and their settlements, as was tree cover—but again, many mentioned improved forestry practices and the development of small nurseries and wood lots. The feeling of these narrators was that life was getting a little better.

The women among them were more cautious in their optimism, several pointing out that they remained excluded from much decision-making, property ownership, employment and training opportunities, although there had been improvements in school enrolment and access to credit and other NGO initiatives. Wider access to education was breaking down caste as well as gender barriers, said many, although those who spoke most glowingly of the decline of caste prejudice tended to be Brahmin and Chettri, those with the highest social status. And one more recent interview illustrates just how powerful the forces of caste prejudice remain.

While education was universally prized, seen as the passport to a brighter future, traditional skills and knowledge clearly remained integral to most people's lives. Herbal and other healing practices were described, as were traditional methods of water management. Indeed, in some cases such methods were being revived after a period of neglect.

Yet despite improvements, the communities described are by any standards isolated and poor, their inhabitants surviving on some of the lowest incomes in the world. Links with modern facilities and markets remain limited and migration has increased as men search for wages to supplement the family's farming income. Migration by younger women is not uncommon either, especially to the carpet industries of Nepal's urban centres. And there is frequent mention of how traffickers trade on the villagers' poverty, persuading, tricking or even forcing young women into prostitution in India. This booklet contains first-hand accounts by women of these two kinds of migration.

The deep poverty of rural Nepal may have been gradually improving—but progress is slow, and in some areas non-existent. Soon after the first collection of interviews was complete, the

Maoists launched their fight against what they saw as a corrupt regime with no interest in eradicating poverty. Since 1996, their activities and influence have spread from the more remote western districts to other areas and to the heart of government. Nepal has been wracked by violence and unrest and, according to some estimates, 7,000 people have lost their lives. Many more have been displaced from the most conflict-ridden areas, primarily western Nepal. While the Maoists' prime targets are the rich and the corrupt, the reality is that the rural poor have suffered most, targeted by the army and the police as Maoist supporters and by the Maoists in what has become a devastating atmosphere of suspicion, broken trust, attack and counter-attack. Much development infrastructure has been destroyed, including schools, and productivity in the worst-hit areas has plummeted.

In 2002 Panos commissioned extra interviews to bear witness to the dramatic changes that had taken place since the first collection. "We had a chance to make some progress," said one woman who agreed to talk. "Even that is gone now." Several narrators describe such reversals of any small development gains, as well as a pervading sense of anxiety and fear. The human cost of being caught between warring sides in remote areas where there is no state apparatus or support is most vividly evoked by two narrators, who speak of how people close to them have been injured, imprisoned and killed as a result of the conflict. A glimmer of hope resides in the continuation of the ceasefire of January 2003, and of high-level talks between the government and the Maoists.

Partners

This booklet draws on interviews recorded at three different times. ActionAid Nepal gathered the first interview collection in 1995, primarily from Tamang people in Sindhupalchok district, but also from Nawalparasi and Sindhuli. It was coordinated by Sanjay Rana. In 1998, Panos South Asia (PSA) undertook a collection of interviews focusing specifically on water-related issues, ranging from traditional management systems and new initiatives to the spiritual significance of certain customs. These were published by PSA in Nepali (*Paaniko Purkhyauli Gyan*) and English (*Water Wisdom*). In 2001 a selection of both testimony collections was put on the on-line archive www.mountainvoices.org. In 2002, Sangeeta Lama, a journalist who had worked on *Water Wisdom*, gathered nine more interviews with women which touched on a number of subjects, including caste discrimination and migration, and which highlighted the impact of the Maoist insurgency. A Nepali publication drawing on all three collections is planned for 2003.

THE TESTIMONIES

Sanumaya

NEPAL 31

Sanumaya, a Tamang, has sole responsibility for family and farm during the week, while her husband works in Kathmandu. Migration for work is now a necessity, she feels, adding that—as well as wages—men “bring wisdom with them” from their experience outside the hills. Life is easier than in her youth, she says, but “working day and night” has made her old before her time. Sanumaya is 47 and lives in Raile village, Kavre district.

I get up at 4 o'clock. If there's a lot of work I get up at 3 o'clock... Today it rained and I got a little free time to talk to you and I feel happy. Now many of my chores remain unattended to. [I have to] cook gruel for the buffalo, cut pieces of straw and feed [the animals], and cook meals for us...then I fetch fodder and *sotar* for the cattle...weed maize plants in the field, supervise the farm labourers... Today...due to the rain they are not there.

It is hard...in the hills. You fix a day to do certain work and it starts raining... A wage earner doing his daily work may be leading a more comfortable life... Now these days when we talk of hardship it's not the type we had in the old days when one had to walk far and carry heavy loads, but our hands are not free for a moment...

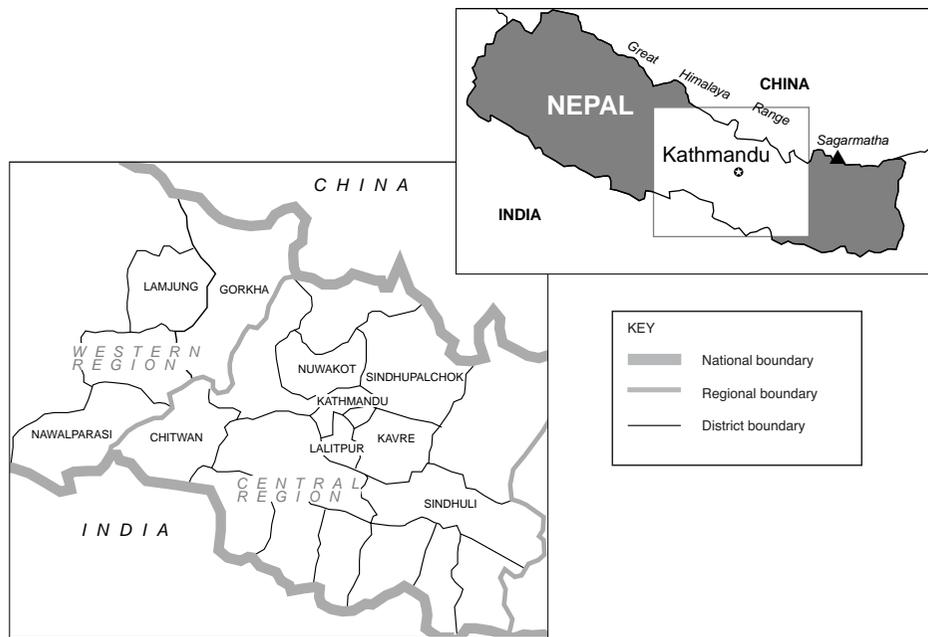
Fodder and firewood used to be got easily before... Maybe [there are] too many people or something, but the forest is finished, gone completely... There was [a forest guard] before, but not now...due to the fear [of Maoists]... He wouldn't even let us bring back trimmed branches...[but today] there are no restrictions...

But now there is no need to go to the forest all the time... Many have started planting their own fodder trees... Fodder and firewood from [these], together with a little bit from the forest, amounts to quite a lot... One or two people brought *utish* seedlings from faraway places and planted them in our village... Everyone in the village now has a few.

New crops, new tastes

[My husband has worked in] Kathmandu for 22 years... He comes home Friday evening...and goes off on Monday morning. Due to that, I have to look after the household and the farm...

It is the time for weeding maize. After the maize crop is harvested, some will harvest mustard and some wheat... In the past, there was no practice of cultivating mustard and wheat. Before, they sowed only maize and barley [and millet]... Now everyone has stopped planting millet... It's good for the diet [but] without family manpower it is difficult to plant... [And] these days, kids say millet porridge is chicken manure...



Not many sow [barley] either... Most eat maize gruel and rice... All good things have been given up... [Kids] are attracted by shops, by rice, craving **chow chow**... When we were small there wasn't even the practice of drinking tea... [Now] if I don't take tea for one day, I feel uneasy and restless.

[Vegetables?] Only radishes and *rayoko saag* were planted in the old days. Now garlic, onion, coriander, cauliflower and potato are all grown. Tomatoes, chilli, cauliflower, spinach, garlic, onion—all grow here if planted... After seeing the neighbour's vegetables, we started to plant too... My husband comes home once a week and that's when he does the planting, weeding, watering and all that. I just cannot find the time...

Before, due to the water problem, nobody was interested in growing vegetables. [We never knew] whether there would be rainfall in the summer, and in winter we could not even find time

Ram Bahadur (M, 48 years), Chettri

NEPAL 2

In those days we used to cultivate crops twice a year, but nowadays because of development we cultivate crops three times a year—because we have more facilities, such as irrigation in our fields. But in the peaks of a mountain they cultivate only one crop a year, because of the cold weather.

to carry drinking water... Where would we get water from to plant vegetables? With piped water coming to the village it is easier now.

"Life is more comfortable"

We do not have to go to Bhaktapur to sell firewood and buy salt or spices. Before, you had to go on the downward slope, shivering on the slippery track in the rain, with a load on your back and a stick for support... Now all those difficulties do not have to be faced... A bus is available...

Out of the money got from the sale of firewood we used to buy, standing in line, the cheapest boiled rice for festivals. We could not afford other good rice... Now we eat **Mansuli rice**—the type that comes from the shop... That is what [the children] eat [every day]... Back then you could not get anything to eat without asking the father-in-law, mother-in-law and elders at home... [and then] only during festivals... These days meat is eaten once, twice a month...

And elders of olden times were not like our types. If they saw daughters and daughters-in-law sitting idle for a moment they would come forward to rebuke us, asking how we dared to stay inside the house lolling around and expecting to eat what they had [harvested and] stored. Those elders worked very hard too...

Life is more comfortable than before but women's responsibilities have not decreased. We don't have time to spare... Before, when we used to go for fodder, *sotar*, we had to...rub salt, ash and a kind of hot black pepper into our hands and feet before going. [The leeches] came in real force! They hung in packs up to your knees and waist. They were not small leeches, [but] big red *khari* leeches.

The necessity of migration

There was [hardly any] migration... Nowadays, many men work outside the village. Some outside Nepal, some within...one or two from almost all houses in the village... Before, they all used to go to India. These days...most are in Kathmandu. One or two from our village are in the Gulf states...

Tamang boys have also started going out... They come back a little more educated...with new ideas and understanding, teach new things to the children. Due to that, things are better in the village than before. Now if everyone just stayed in the village, would anything have happened?

It is difficult to survive on farming alone... Young men don't do any household work...only do a little bit of work on the farm. And when not much work was to be done, some turned into all-time

Many men work outside the village

Tara (F, 25 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 15

Since the men go away to work the women have to stay back to look after the house, the children, the animals and the fields. No matter how difficult life is we cannot leave our house just because the men have gone away. There are cases where the husband had gone away searching for work and never came back, but the women have stayed back, working for wages or doing odd jobs to look after their children because of their love for them.

gamblers, some turned into thieves, some turned to jealous thoughts. Men used to fight in the village itself after drinking beer and [other] alcohol... They used to beat their wives...

Now, is it not better that instead of them staying and us struggling with such people, men go out to earn a living? They do not only earn money; they also bring wisdom with them... [They] have learnt that we should not abuse others. If [my husband] had remained at home, he would have become dumb like a sheep... [That's what happens] when you stay in hills...

[Of course] manpower for farming is reduced. But then they come home once a week... To the extent that you can find the time, you do [the farm work] yourself. If you cannot make time, then farm labourers will do it for wages... If you have a male at home he will clear a heap of dung... Staying at home is good. But what to do? Money is required. Now how is it possible that you want both: the money and the man? ... Without money we could not educate the children... If he had stayed in the village, the children would have been one-eyed—uneducated—like us...

If I go to Kathmandu...my husband will not let me stay... He does not take me sight-seeing... The moment I am in Kathmandu he starts grumbling about home, [saying] that buffalos have died, goats have died and what not. No, he would not allow me to stay... Now I myself have reached old age. He has had a comfortable life in Kathmandu and he is still young. [He is] three years younger than me. Even now he looks...much much younger than me. In my case, working day and night has made me like this.

Changing attitudes

Some [men] come to ask for my daughter's hand... She says she will take care of marriage herself after getting a job... I am happy and have encouraged her to study [but] the time has come for her to get married... You cannot put pressure [on girls] these days... Once our parents wished it, then we had to marry—whether he had goitre [or was] old, or lame... Girls had no choice... Otherwise, why would I have married and come to this troublesome place? ...

Dawa (F, 28 years), Sherpa

NEPAL 11

In [former] days a boy could marry a girl by force... My third sister-in-law got married that way... She tried to run away and hid in the livestock shed. But they broke down the door and took her by force... Now, girls are aware of the law. They know what to do... If somebody forces them they are also able to protest.

In those days there was the practice of checking the background of parents [and] relations when looking for a bride... [Today], except for blacksmiths, tailors and shoemakers, all are accepted... [It is not] like before, this issue of caste discrimination... Now if [my daughter] wants to marry [into another caste] of her own free will, what could we do? ...

Now we are together [with higher castes] in farming... We live together as if we had a common courtyard... Their time to despise us has passed. In the old days they...used to call us **Bhotini, Janryani**... They used to make us work without payment... We had to do what they ordered us to do...

This generation is not like our fathers' and grandfathers'... Now, if they do try to oppress and order us to work for nothing, we straightaway tell them we are not their slaves and servants. Now they...cannot intimidate us... Now everyone is educated...



"Terraced fields helped retain moisture in the soil and checked erosion"

At night there is fear Today children at school study Nepali. I do not speak hill language—Nepali—that well... When I go out I find it difficult to speak Nepali [but] I feel shy to speak Tamang in front of others. Therefore whenever I go out I speak broken hill language... You can't trick present-day children with hill language. Nowadays they know more than we do. [They] can take us for a ride! Now children are too smart for words!

The shadow of fear

People are different...their ways of eating, dressing, speaking and even behaving towards others. So many differences...many good things...[for example] there was no electricity in the village before... [But] no one has only good things... The bad part now is that you do not get to roam around the forest freely and cannot go happily together in a group to work in a field... There is no fear [of Maoists] in the daytime when you're in a group... At night, there is fear... You are haunted by the feeling that a Maoist may be already there... Now getting up alone to open the door is what makes you scared. Dusk and dawn are times to feel fear... It's not free in the village these days.

Mani

NEPAL 4

Mani, 23, lives in Sursung, a remote Tamang village in Sindhupalchok with no transport or communication facilities. Life is tough and economic opportunities are limited. But Mani speaks proudly of how his caste is now gaining self-respect and confidence as a result of education, and "with a good education" he says, "you can get any job".

My parents can't read or write... My father used to drink all the time; he did nothing... I started ploughing in the fields from the age of nine. I nearly died because I was so thin... I didn't go to school... But when ActionAid came here I got a chance to read. I took adult education classes... [Now] I can understand and write Nepali...

Before, people used to run away when they saw new people in the village because they didn't understand or know anything... They were afraid to speak... When **Bahun** and **Chettri** people came everybody would run away, thinking they might be the police... They thought they would beat them and take them to jail... Now we have a school and everybody has started to read and write. People don't run away nowadays...

In those days only Chettri and Bahun had [education]. All power was in their hands... If they came to the village a Tamang

would look like a dog that was beaten with a stick. They would order us to do something, we had to do whatever they said... If we didn't they would scold us. Nowadays, they cannot dominate us... We all are the same. If we cut a vein our blood comes out red.

Look at me—when I didn't know anything people dominated me. Now I know something, they can't... If I had got the chance to learn to read in my childhood I would be a different person...

[But] the school is not good. Only one master is there. Sometimes he comes; sometimes he takes holiday... And the school is also far from here. If the master were there [regularly] the students would be 40 or 50 in number. But...the students are not sure about the master, whether he will come or not. That's why the students have decreased in number to 20 or 25.

Diminishing natural resources

In my family, we get enough to eat because we all work... My father lives in the water mill; we help him to plough the fields... We get something from the land and the water mill. Sometimes hail will damage all the crops... But from the mill we get 4 *mana* to 1 *pathi* [of grain] daily—so we don't depend only on the fields... [We grow] maize, millet, wheat, barley, but no rice. But [we] are also trying to grow paddy at the riverside. In [the old] days, we would get more maize compared with the present... Millet grows well sometimes; it depends on the weather and the land...

The jungle is becoming thin... The forest was dense and thick when I was seven or eight years old... If the jungle is thick then it is always cool on that side and the soil also remains soft... Now everyone cuts down trees... That's why the soil is decreasing and the production capacity too... Many things are happening here because of this situation. We don't get enough soil and the birds are also disappearing. Water resources are drying up... We get drinking water from the stream, which is very dirty. It takes one hour to bring water from there... People throw their waste into the stream.

But now the population is increasing [too]. Production is less; fields are occupied by buildings and houses. That's why we have to go regularly to bring back grain [to supplement what we grow].

[If people don't grow enough food] they work as daily wage labourers...at a **Sherpa's** house. They will earn 40 rupees per day. Men will get that much and women will get only 25 rupees... [The tasks are] to cut firewood, to carry loads... This kind of work—carrying loads from one place to another—will be given to them by Sherpas... Mostly people go to Helambu and Kutumsang to work for Sherpas.

Fields are occupied by buildings

Honouring the dead

We worship Gautam Buddha. In the olden days Tamangs used to perform **Ghewa**. It was expensive... We can't abandon this totally, but we are doing it less than before... [For] the one who is dead, it doesn't matter to them. But for those who survive and have to do these things, it is a real burden... [For Ghewa] we need a minimum of 15,000 to 20,000 rupees... They think if they observe Ghewa it will reach the dead person and they will get benefit from it... But I don't think like this. Because of spending so much money, even the living will die... We have to bring rice from outside. That's why it costs more... We have to give something to the **lama** too.

Rich people will start and finish [the ceremony] in four days. But those who are poor will finish in two. To pay back the loan, they will sell their animals...and also pay interest little by little. Those who don't have animals have to sell their land to pay back the loan... It is a very difficult custom to perform, Ghewa.

To do Ghewa, we need **janr** and **rakshi**... But I don't like drinking. Ever since childhood I haven't liked it. They will drink without limit and finish all the money in one sitting. How they manage I don't know. After drinking they will fight and quarrel... Tamangs drink too much, play cards and observe Ghewa—that's why they become poor.

"The son is always in the lap"

If [a woman] has given birth to a son the family will care about her. But if she has given birth to a baby girl they will neglect her... She cannot do [family planning]...until she gives a birth to a son... The son is always in the lap, but the daughter will be put outside...

In my opinion [the reason is that] the daughter has to go to her [husband's] home one day, but the son will stay with them... That's why women are always neglected... In my view we have to give more education to daughters than sons, as they get no property...

In my opinion, to respect men more than women is wrong. In those days people used to say, "Don't listen to women's talk." But I

Gaumati (F, 51 years)

NEPAL 8

I do remember how my life was without giving birth to a son. I used to come from the forest after cutting the grass but there wouldn't be any food for me, so I used to cry... This is not like the city; here you are neglected if you cannot give birth to a son. Now we have many [NGOs] here, [telling us] whether you have a daughter or a son it's the same. But the villagers... say that daughters are not equal to sons. Those who have lost the seeds must plough again. Sons are the seeds of men so one has to try for them.

Women are
always
neglected

Dawa (F, 28 years), Sherpa

NEPAL 11

Our big festival [as Buddhists] is Lohsar. It falls in the month of **Maagh**. It starts one day after the day of no moon... [and] continues till the day of the full moon... We put **tika** [on people] with **ghiu**... We put up flags in front of the houses and also take some bottles of **rakshi**... Many guests come and we serve them **bhote** tea with bread and vegetables... Father will put **tika** on the other members of the family and also give some gifts of money. It costs about 5,000 to 6,000 rupees to celebrate this festival.

know that many tasks are done by women... When she wants to talk, why do people stop her speaking?... People say, "What will women do, going to school?" But in my opinion women will do better than men at school.

"Selling their pride"

Girls also go to foreign places. Out of [every] four, two will go. I don't know about their work. Some will return; some will settle there. Some bring more money—30,000 to 35,000 rupees. Some will bring nothing... They go to Bombay, Calcutta... In my memory, in the olden days girls were many in number here in our village; now girls are becoming fewer...

[Outsiders] will tell her that she will not have to do hard work and will get everything. She agrees to go with them. Forty, 50 girls have gone...only 15 girls returned. They will come back after three or six years. Some build their house and buy land. But they don't get much profit... Some will spend money carelessly. The money is gone and her body is also useless...

Most people think it is good to send them there. If others' daughters have gone there then they will send their daughter also. They think if others' daughters can wear new shoes and dresses, why not our daughter? I don't like it. I feel they are selling their pride to another country. [But] when [a girl] returns and tells others about that place and shows them her fashionable clothes, others will be attracted by those things... Among 10 [who return] only three or four say, "It is bad, don't go to that place."



Buddhist prayer flags

Satya Lal

NEPAL 19

Aged 92, Satya Lal (from Sanagaon, Lalitpur district) recalls a time when, “inspired by religious sentiment”, individual benefactors had ponds and wells dug as an act of service to the community; for its part, the whole community took on the responsibility for construction and regular maintenance. With the coming of tap water—which, Satya Lal says, lacks the freshness of well water—such practices have all but disappeared, much to his regret.



Earlier, when there was no tap water, the water in the wells was clean and pure... We do not even have to filter well water... [which] is tastier, fresher and purer than tap water... The water from one well here cures goitre. If one drinks water from that well before all others every morning for seven days, it cures it...

People built ponds in the olden days at various places... Such ponds were excavated jointly by the people of the locality... Some ponds had natural spring water; others had to be filled up by diverting water from other sources through man-made canals. We get water for this pond from the Godavari River through the main canal... [which] is maintained and cleaned once a year... But, today, not everyone joins hands... With water available from taps these days, people... have stopped appreciating the significance of these ponds... Who listens to the aged? So much excess, yet even the deities remain silent spectators. What to do?

Now when **Asaar** comes, [we] clean out the dirt accumulated in the main canal. The damaged sections are repaired [so that we can]

Bishwanath (M, 66 years)

NEPAL 20

We had a community irrigation canal... [we] tenant farmers made it. There were no drawings and no overseer... no pegs were placed and no ropes used... Believe me, water would reach exactly where we intended... It was also mandatory for every household to contribute labour to maintain the canal... When the canal was functional, there was enough water for our seven households to cultivate winter crops... What has happened [now] is that the Melamchi Drinking Water Project was conceived to take water to Kathmandu. To make a road for that project, they covered our canal. They told us then that even if the canal were destroyed, we could still bring in water through concrete pipes... I have no faith in their words, now. The old canal has disappeared, and we have no alternative. I am worried that all the paddy fields will lie barren.

Lal Bahadur (M, 62 years), Majhi

NEPAL 21

Earlier, on some days up to 20 or 25 people came [to our water mill]. This number has gone down considerably since numerous motor-driven mills were installed in the area... As far [back] as I can remember there were many water mills here; up there, on the other side, this side near the stream, behind the village. But most have been abandoned. [The new] mills are 10 times faster than ours... Nowadays, if they know how, just about anybody runs [water mills]. Even *Bhotes*, *Danwars*, *Chettris* and *Bahun*s operate them. In the old days, since Majhis lived near rivers it seemed as if it was the vocation of only the Majhis.

bring water to transplant paddy. The main canal is cemented now, and guards have been appointed to ensure that there is a regular supply of water to the village. They are paid in kind by the landowners...

It used to be the practice to dispose of the silt in the fields as manure... People who went to clean the pond divided the area, saying so much pond sediment for me, so much for you... [It] was better than the present-day chemical fertilisers... Now people no longer put silt from the pond on their fields because they cannot find anyone to carry it...

Come what may, we have to protect and preserve these two [remaining] ponds. They are useful to everyone in the village. Moreover, deities reside in them... They also add to the beauty of the village.

“A pious act”

Sacred ponds... were as old as creation. Our ancestors judiciously built them at strategic places... It was considered auspicious to look at the water in these ponds before leaving the house on important business. Then the task would be successfully completed...

Anyone inspired by religious sentiments and a desire to do a good deed built ponds and wells... Because it was considered a pious act, all the people in the village helped dig and carry the soil. The benefactor provided free meals to everyone engaged in the work. Because of that, the pond would be named after him...

Similarly, as an act of piety, wells were dug in the fields. People get thirsty while working in the fields, and it was difficult to get water immediately... Isn't it a godly act to make water available to the thirsty?

“Lack of faith”

But now people do not speak of such pious deeds. Boys have destroyed these ponds, fenced the area and converted them into playgrounds. When we tell them they should not do so, “Why do

Today not everyone joins hands



Paaniko Purkhyauli Gyan, a booklet of testimonies from Nepal on water resources, published by Panos South Asia.

nowadays, saying, “Hey... Why ask school and college students not to eat anything touched by the lower castes, they retort: “Why not? Do the lower castes have two respiratory systems? They have teeth and mouths just like ours.” That is why the caste system is disappearing. It wasn’t so bad even eight to 10 years ago. There was some respect and a value system. Now nothing remains.

Bimala

NEPAL 28

*Bimala, 28, is of the **Kami** caste and lives in Krishnapur, Chitwan district. Clearly capable and hardworking, she has been thwarted in her plans for advancement because of discrimination from higher caste village women. Her investment in a small shop failed when they refused to buy food from her, even though they were in the same women’s savings group. Eventually the group broke up along caste lines.*

When there were not enough people [in the women’s savings group], **Bahun** and **Chettri** women visited our homes often and persuaded us [to join]. They told us that if we took part in the group there would be support. Even when we said we did not want to

you need that pond? We need a playground,” is their reaction... The present generation has forgotten religion. All these ponds, wells and resting-places with provision for water have vanished because of the lack of faith... When we tell them that they must not destroy our ancient heritage because it is a sinful act, they yell at us, “What religion?” What is the point of telling them? The educated have turned out that way...

And with the advent of democracy, it has become a free-for-all... There is no hierarchy. There is no common courtesy and respect for old and senior citizens. People have stopped bowing... When we tell them something, young boys and girls run off

participate, they insisted...

Well, there would be meetings every week. We sat at one friend’s house today and at another friend’s house the next week... Of course for us [lower castes] it was outside and the balcony only. Only in elder sister Bhagawati’s house are we allowed to go up to the upstairs room.

[How did we feel?] After all, we too are human beings... We grew up together from childhood, isn’t it? We all used to have fun and play around, got along well... But today at these meetings and gatherings why do all our sisters do this to us? They get up and walk away in case they have to eat food touched by us... It has hurt us a lot...

The reason for forming the group is to coexist, for all sisters to be united... I went to the [group] picnics expecting laughter and merrymaking but it was just the opposite and I felt like crying... We could not touch any food items nor were we allowed to wash, cut and cook. From morning till evening we had to sit separately from the other sisters...

There were no problems in the beginning when there were 10 to 15 people... After about a year from the time of joining the group, gradually the issue of untouchability started being talked about openly... [The group expanded and] later they were the ones to discriminate against us... We worked hard to develop the group and later on they acted as if it was only theirs... [Finally] they grabbed the shares and expelled us.

“Women are far behind”

Our Bahun and Chettri women simply do not realise that being women themselves they should not look down on other women and make them feel small. With such foolish ones who have this habit and behaviour we have let things go and kept quiet. We have also to consider their relatives and their husbands who have prestige: tomorrow we may need that same society... [But] in future if this happens we will not tolerate it, this is what we have been thinking... Our males are less bothered about this matter. They go out and their Bahun and Chettri male friends don’t resort to that much untouchability. But women are far behind when it comes to untouchability...

Before, even if others looked down on us, despised us for being low caste, the people of those days kept quiet—believing that to be our destiny... Now it’s not like before. If there is caste discrimination, the matter will be dealt with by law, will it not?...

If someone discriminates because of low caste or is found

Women should not look down on other women practising untouchability, he is taken, locked up and fined 5,000 rupees. Now on radio, TV, they say that in cases [where] the oppressed castes are discriminated against, they can straightaway go to the police to lodge a complaint without hesitation and that those concerned will have to face punishment... Now due to radio, TV, all are informed.

“We too are human beings”

Our parents...had to bow down while walking in front of others... If they tried to speak up, a person from the higher caste would say, “Being a blacksmith, why do you have to speak? Keep quiet...”

I used to get disheartened. We too are human beings... We were young children then. We used to be scared to enter anyone’s house. We had a separate drinking water spout... Forget the past, it is still like that now. If you touch their well, they come charging to beat us. They will kill us...

The children have not told us of such happenings at school. Of course, they are small. The son is seven years old. The daughter is six... But outside, older children and even elders tell my children that they are Kami... I cannot tolerate upper castes despising my child and other oppressed ones... I speak out, so they get a little scared about discriminating against me... I feel my children should not have to undergo the sort of untouchability that my parents and I had to face.

New shop opened...and boycotted

In our women’s group there was one **lakh** and some thousand rupees... Whatever could be used by the sisters in the village was used and the rest was deposited in the bank... Some raised buffalos, some tended goats and in my case, I opened a shop...with the advice of sisters from the group. Later it failed. If I had not opened the shop [so close to home] but taken it down to the bazaar, maybe this sort of untouchability issue wouldn’t have been there. But...my children are small...it was inconvenient to go far...

At the very start—for one, two months—all came to buy. But later [I don’t know] what happened...some people influenced their thinking, [asking], “You want to feed bread and **chow chow** bought from her shop to [Bahun] children?” ...When this kind of thinking came into the minds of sisters in my own group the shop dried up. Our village is small and there aren’t many households here.

Before, it was [the other women in the group] who said to keep a shop... Later they used to come from the back, taking a detour from my field to buy things, in case others saw them buying from the front... Does a business run when it’s done that way? ... Since

the shop was opened through the group, these women should realise that...it’s the investment that the group has made that sinks... This thought didn’t come into the mind of the sisters: that we need to go and buy goods ourselves so that her investment will grow... Outside of the groups, there are just 10, 15 households. It isn’t enough... My shop was bound to dry up when 28 households stopped buying...

It is a practice from the time of our ancestors that higher castes have not allowed our caste to progress. If we move forward we will bully them, that’s what they think... [But all] we have said is, whatever rights Bahun and Chettri women are getting, we should get those too, that’s all... Like they don’t allow us to worship in temples where they worship... We are saying everyone should worship together.

Ramji

NEPAL 12

*Unlike many of his contemporaries, who left the hills to find work elsewhere, Ramji is still farming; in his perception, however, “there isn’t much difference in our living standards”. He is active in development projects in his locality of Bansbari, Sindhupalchok district, and observes that better communications with the outside world have benefited all but the very poor who used to work as porters. He is 35 and a **Brahmin**.*

I went to school because I thought maybe I could bring about a change in my life and work...and in the community as well... If children are educated they can help the country in its development; in agriculture too there are new methods and techniques...



“If children are educated they can help the country in its development”

The number of students is good and even increasing, but they are not getting as good an education as they should... There is no one to monitor the quality of school and education. Again the children have to work in the fields sometimes and they miss school, so they are always lagging behind...

The percentage of School Leaving Certificate passes from our village high school is very low... I don't think it is any more than 3-4 per cent... During the holidays the children are busy working in the fields; they do not have time to study at home. That is why the results are so poor... There aren't sufficient teachers, so the primary school teachers are teaching the secondary level students...

First, the [school] administration committee should be educated itself. We need a committee that understands the value of education... [not one] that is politicised like we have now.

Conservation and development

In the lower region they have transport facilities, so many organisations come and work there. But here in the higher mountains nobody comes, so the main aim of our forest conservation organisation is to establish its office here in the villages and operate from here. I am also a general member...

We [established] the forest conservation organisation on the advice of the forest division, and there are 127 households and families as consumers. We have a working committee of 19 members who collect 10 rupees from each member every year. The working committee has a meeting every month. Each consumer member has to stand guard to protect the forest, so I also have to do that duty; everybody has to attend once a month. That is why our forest conservation project is successful. This programme is like giving the key to a thief... Whenever there is a need we can use the fallen trees and branches, but the committee has to authorise it...

No outsiders can take anything from here. The consumers can use only the bushes and shrubs as firewood... If someone needs wood to build a house, if his house is burnt or has collapsed, the committee makes the decision and the consumer has to pay 10 rupees for each beam, which will be deposited in the committee...

Ram Bahadur (M, 48 years), Chettri

NEPAL 2

In those days the forests were dense and thick. We could get grass easily for the animals. That's why we had more animals than today. Animal dung helped us to run our livelihood. Nowadays, the forest is becoming thin; it is difficult to get grass for animals, that's why we have only a few. But we use chemical fertiliser in our field and it helps to grow more crops. Because of this we have a good earning source.

Badri Prasad (M, 58 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 22

When people look at the forest cover now, they ask in disbelief, was there a landslide here? Now we have planted trees... it no longer looks like a landslide area... Now that I think of it, I guess it was our own irresponsible actions that were to blame for the landslide. We did not arrest and check that which we could have prevented on our own; I suppose it was because of our lack of knowledge. I don't fear the landslide any more. When I compare the situation then and now, I feel totally secure.

There haven't been any immediate benefits [from the forestry programme] but still we are hoping to benefit after 10 years... We will definitely have profits...to deposit in the committee's account, which will definitely make us strong... We must have good drinking water...and the surplus water should be used for irrigation... We almost [all] have fruit orchards, so that in 10 years we all will be independent and self-sustaining...

[We also decided] we should have a goat development programme, which can be beneficial to all the farmers... We started with 12 members... After some time we had 40...

We were inexperienced and the number of members kept increasing. We thought we would benefit with a bigger group...but later we faced difficulties in our monthly meetings and our savings. We were collecting 2 rupees per person per month [but]...not all [the money] was collected... [Now] we are making another small group again... We have decided to have fewer than 20 members.

Greater prosperity...for some

[Social relations are] very good here... You can find all of us in all kinds of festivals and ceremonies. There are 114 households, out of which 14 are **Kami**, so except for the Kamis we are all **Chettris** and Brahmins [and] get together on any occasion... The relationship between the three castes is like that of brothers. The Kamis need the farmers and vice versa...

Before Nepali year 2022 (1965 AD) most of the villagers didn't have enough to eat. Almost 5 per cent of the people were not able to feed themselves when we didn't have chemical fertiliser. The main reason for better harvests is chemical fertiliser. Then we had a goat development programme and now people can sell the milk...

Sher Bahadur (M, 77 years), Magar

NEPAL 5

There is no way to open factories in the village. We don't have the road... People who live in the plains—they have electricity, transport, markets; they can get everything easily. Here we are not getting any facility. We can't get anything; that's why we are backward.

*With the road
it has become
easy to sell
local products*

Those who have earned more have bought land in Kathmandu and built houses... They are doing it because of high profit margins. They profit more by selling the land in Kathmandu than selling the land here... With the road, it has become easy for the people to go to Kathmandu... It is easy to sell local products, such as potatoes, rice, maize and millet... It has also become easy for us to bring salt, fertilisers, tin corrugated sheets and other construction materials for the houses up from Kathmandu.

[But the very poor] haven't benefited at all. Before, they used to carry our goods to and from Sankhu and earn wages, but now they can't get that work. So people are migrating to cities or going higher up to Helambu in search of work. So their economic condition or living standard has gone down.

Chandra Bahadur

NEPAL 23

*According to Chandra Bahadur, a **Brahmin** aged 55, "There is no other way to raise the living standard of people in this remote area except by improving agricultural practices and setting up markets." He describes how the people of Jhankri Dara, Lalitpur, achieved this and overcame the problem of distance from marketing centres by constructing a ropeway—"far more useful than a motorable road" in a mountain environment.*



This southern part of Lalitpur district is a remote, mountainous region with no road network. It was difficult for people here to market their agricultural and dairy products. We used to carry the produce on our backs to Mangal Bazaar in Lalitpur town. In the beginning we used to collect and sell butter. Later, when it was found that **khoya** was more profitable than butter, people in

this area began processing milk into **khoya**. But we realised that this led to the destruction of forests.

Let's calculate: boiling 500 litres of milk every day would require—one litre needing, on average, 1 kg—at least 500 kg of firewood. Of course, we also needed fuelwood to cook our food and fodder for our cattle. Additional firewood to boil the milk led us gradually to uproot and burn even tree stumps. With the destruction of forests, natural calamities followed. Landslides occurred and, in their wake, property—land, houses and farms—was destroyed.

Tackling erosion first

We learnt about the Bagmati Watershed Project...[and] presented our problem to them... We first began controlling the water around our houses. We did this by diverting the flow of unwanted water during the rainy season to rocky and hard areas...[and planting] fast-growing shrubs and trees along the terrace edges. We were encouraged when these tree branches could later be used as fodder. The terracing of fields helped retain moisture in the soil and checked erosion...

To educate us about conservation, technicians from the Bagmati Watershed Project selected a landslide-prone area [and] built a conservation pond. The excess and fast-flowing water of the rainy season collected in this huge pond... We planted trees in eroded areas. As a result, even the landslide-prone hill is safe.

Ropeways rather than roads

All this conservation effort and effective management of rain water led to increased production of vegetables, fruits and dairy products...but now we had to market and sell the produce... Those of us living one or two hours' walking distance from the motorable road could somehow sell our milk in the city. But many others from our village and the neighbouring villages were not able to carry their milk to the roadhead.

We needed a quick and easy transportation system to take our goods to the market. The market needs fresh products. Spinach from Bhattedanda taken a day late to Lagankhel will not sell. It loses its freshness...[the same with milk]...

So we thought of an alternative...this ropeway... [It] is far more useful than a motorable road. It does not destroy our environment or our forest. Roads in the mountain get damaged during the rains. It is not always possible to construct roads everywhere, and road construction requires huge investments. We saw this ropeway as a simple, easy and quick alternative and made a request for it... It is now three years since it was built, at a cost of 65 **laks**...

This ropeway line is 3 km long, starting at Jhankri Dara... [It] has a capacity of 300 kg and covers the distance in about 15 to 16 minutes. Roughly, it makes two round trips in an hour...We charge a transportation fee of 50 **paisa** per kg. We spend some money on stationery, payment of salaries to five workers, diesel and grease, and on repairs and technicians. So far we have managed to operate the system since it was handed over to us by the Watershed Project. We haven't faced any difficulties...

Twice a week we collect local produce like milk, curd,

*We planted
trees in
eroded areas*

*Development
requires many
elements*



vegetables, wheat flour, millet, barley and buckwheat flour, corn, goats, chicken and fish, and take them to Lalitpur, Lagankhel... We have been provided with stalls to sell our produce. We are proud of this market. If this ropeway had not been built and if there were no roads [as well], our pumpkins, cucumbers, pumpkin buds and other vegetables would have perished and gone to waste. There would have been no source of cash income for us...

We can only cultivate maize and millet. The yield is enough to feed us for three to four months only; the rest of the year we have to buy rice. Our only source of income [before] was selling milk, butter and other milk products. How could that income be enough in today's world? ... In our fathers' time there were no schools; they did not have to send their children to school, they didn't have to pay fees. Thus, even without cash income they could manage their lives. Things now no longer work that way. Even if they are poor, right-thinking parents must educate their children, by working for daily wages if necessary...

Everything we grew earlier was for our own consumption... With an assured market, we now cultivate garlic and onions, [other vegetables] and earn some money... We did not use middlemen but started selling everything directly on our own. We sold whatever the community produced... We sell 300 litres of curd alone every week... [but] we are now getting more money selling fresh milk than butter and other milk products.

All houses here were made of thatch before. When there was a fire, a lifetime's earning was destroyed. Now 95 per cent of the houses have tin roofs... All [these things] have been possible because of the improved method of cultivation, the ropeway and the road.

Ram (M, 53 years)

NEPAL 17

After the rain, people used to grow vegetables in the sheltered cold or moist lands; otherwise their gardens were barren. But now with the irrigation canal, people are planting whatever they like in their gardens. Some even grow mustard and extract oil themselves, and sell it in the market too. There have been a lot of improvements in agriculture now.

Inkumari

NEPAL 18

Inkumari, 35, insists that as long as discrimination against women persists, "the nation will not develop". She firmly believes in the power of education gradually to break down the "social obstacles" to women having equal rights with men. Inkumari lives in Siddheswor, Sindhuli district, where she works as a teacher and also runs a shop.

I live in a remote place; there the women are not educated. When I was at school, there weren't any [other girls] studying there. They enrolled me in the school at my father's request. It was all right when I was studying in my village school, but when I went to the school in the district headquarters, the villagers started to say all sorts of things. They said that if a woman is educated and goes away to study or work they will be spoilt. At that time I felt really bad and I was really worried, but I took it as a challenge and was able to get educated. If I had listened to what the villagers had to say and stayed at home I wouldn't have been able to reach this standard.

When I got my School Leaving Certificate I was sent on a training course in Pokhara. At that time too the villagers didn't want me to go, but I didn't listen to them and my father also didn't care. Whatever the villagers said, I took it as encouragement to prove myself...so I went to Pokhara and successfully completed my training. Then I came back and started teaching their daughters. When they saw what I did with my education, they also became aware of the importance of education, and started to send their daughters to school. Now, there are many girls who have passed School Leaving Certificates...

I've been a teacher for 14 years and for the last five years I have also had the shop. I am a businesswoman during the morning and evening; during the day I teach.

"Men have made the rules"

If a boy is born, everybody is happy and they celebrate, but when a girl is born the parents become sad and worried. The parents really don't care about the daughter, but they send their boys to school for education. They think that the girls are really others' property and it's of no use to educate them. It's not only that; even in our religion the men are above the women. It is said that women should treat men as gods and be their slaves. [Men] have made such regulations that they have been exploiting women ever since. The men have made the rules according to their needs.

That's not all. When women work along with men, with as much skill and strength, they are still mistreated. The women do

Bhagawati (F, 33 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 27

It is due to this society or the dominant way of thinking that a son boasts of being a son. My son and daughter are one or two years apart in age...but he never works as much as she does... I don't want to practise any discrimination...but still I haven't been able to make him mature in his thinking. "I should not make tea and give it to others; I am a son"—that sort of thinking is still in his mind.

the same kind of work but whereas the men get 1 *pathi*, the women get only 4 *manas*. During religious celebrations [the male celebrants] need women to clean the place and provide them with all the necessary items. Most of the work is done by the women but the credit goes to the men. It's the same with jobs; the men can go far and get any line of work but the women cannot even go out to study. The parents are always worried that, if they send their daughter out, others will not think well of them, so it will be difficult for them to get married in the future, or they may be ill-treated after they are married... That's why you don't see that many women in the offices. Women haven't really been able to work anywhere. It's not because they can't do [the work] but because of social obstacles.

It's not only that. Women are deprived [of the right to] the wealth or property of their parents. Men have the right to their parent's property from the time they are born, but women can get their share only if they do not get married, and stay with their parents, and they are only eligible when they are 35 years old. But if they marry after that, they have to return their share to their parents.

When a woman is married, she shares all the property and wealth with her husband—the husband can do anything with [it] but the women cannot do anything...without the consent of her husband. If her husband dies and she has to look after their children, she cannot use her property until the son is 16 years old, but again she must have her son's consent after that also. I think...the daughter should have the same rights to her parent's wealth and property as the son does.

Bhagawati (F, 33 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 27

If—as a woman—you have your own [money], you can manage the way you want... If family members want to sell and use money for a daughter's marriage then you can say, "No, I want to educate [my children] as I have money from the sale of that female calf and a deposit in so-and-so bank or in the group."... So it makes a lot of difference when you have your own [money].

Tara (F, 25 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 15

[At festival time] men and the women have different tasks. The men buy goats, paint houses, buy clothes and other things necessary to celebrate the festivals. The women have to wash clothes, make the house nice and clean, cook and provide rice...wash the dishes, look after the animals and many other things... The women always have more work.

"You cannot clap with only one hand"

The other thing is, the father has the obligation to rear the son and the husband [to look after] his wife but...in the law, there's no such thing as the father having to look after his daughter...

As long as discrimination between men and women is there, this nation will not develop... You cannot clap with only one hand—the cart cannot move on one wheel. Men and women should be equal in all respects in order to develop a nation... Men alone cannot do everything for development, but if they allow women all the facilities that they themselves get, the development of the nation will be enhanced...

Now, even in this illiterate society, people think the daughter must be educated. At least they are more aware now. This is the biggest change I find these days.

Goma

NEPAL 24

Goma is a 29-year-old Tamang woman who left her mountain village for Kathmandu as a teenager; her plan being "to earn some money in a year or two...weave carpets, go home". But exploitation by factory owners, an unhappy marriage and the collapse of the carpet industry have left her with barely enough to live on and so she is unable to return to the hills. Her regrets on her move to the city are clear: "Yes, wisdom did fail me."

I don't know exactly how many years [I've been in Kathmandu], maybe 13... I ran away with my village friends... At that time I was...not yet 15. [My friends] said it would be good. We could weave carpets, roam around, and enjoy ourselves in Kathmandu city. We...would not have to work hard, like in the village... [where we did] household chores, farming, collection of fodder and firewood, and cleaning the cow shed.

Realities

How could [Kathmandu] really be as they described? [The factory owners] did not pay us for three years. Nor did they give us any clothes... Many of those who were working with me returned

home. They did not let me go... In the carpet factory they first take you to the proprietor. They keep you to train you. For three months they do not pay any money. Only food is given in the morning and evening, that's all... Even after I had learnt to weave carpets, the instructor took my salary. When I demanded it, he beat me...

[For three years I didn't go home.] I didn't even have 25 *paisa*... How to go from there? There was no one to ask on my behalf for the money I had earned... As they found I couldn't speak out they dominated me, and I used to fall ill at times... "You're always falling ill," they scolded...and if they spent 300 rupees [on medicine] then they inflated that to 1,000 rupees and billed me accordingly... They used to say, "Your debt is more than what you get from working," and they didn't pay me anything...

[I left once but] that [woman] brought me back and beat me... After getting a lot of beating I really bit her hand and she stopped. "I have taught you and you cannot go to another place," she said.

[Finally] I managed to run away from that place with great difficulty... [I went to] Kalanki carpet factory...[and] out of nowhere my elder sister's father-in-law arrived... [My relatives] talked here and there, and married me off [to a boy from] Kavre district. It is in the hills... I had never seen that boy before... I knew him one week before the marriage... My husband used to weave carpet on the same loom. At that time I thought that boy might be good... He was young and I was also young.

The cycle of debt

At times I wonder why I came and started to learn weaving carpets... I used to get excited hearing about Kathmandu. As it was our capital, we really imagined it to be a beautiful place... If you work hard here you get to eat, otherwise not... The village is [better for food]... Rice, maize—whatever you want to eat is at home. Here, if you don't have money you won't be able to manage...

Before, one could earn around 2,000 to 2,500 rupees [a month]. Now it's not possible... If the design is not in order, or looms and borders are loose, there will be a cut in wages...[and] if you have to cook food, get children to school, then you can't earn even 30 rupees per day. Accommodation is provided free...[but] only if there are two or three people working... We—husband and wife, two children, mother-in-law—[live in one room]. Together, five of us... Whatever little is earned is just enough for five people to eat... There is not even money to admit one child to school this time...

Before, rice was cheap. Everything could be bought with less money... The factory where we stay now dried up two months ago.

Other factories dried up long before... There's no work... The proprietor...has debts. He thinks he will not be able to pay these later, so he does not give [much payment]... [Even] after working for a long time the wages won't be enough and you have to borrow from the proprietor and that becomes your debt. Then the proprietor cuts your wages, saying you can't repay him...

[Now] my husband has started working outside... He delivers cloth on a bicycle. He says it's hard labour; his chest hurts. A thousand pieces or more of cloth have to be carried... He has to go to 80 or so places. The whole day he has to ferry goods from this side and that side on a bicycle...

Sometimes [my husband] says there is no need to educate the children... "My parents didn't educate me and made me one-eyed... [so] I landed in trouble... Now I am not going to educate my sons. I will make them the way I am," he says, when he is angry... [But] I will not allow that to happen to my children. [I say], "Whether you do it or not, I will educate my children, whether it is by working for others, whether it is by forgoing meals..."

My husband used to take a lot of home-brewed beer... He used to resort to beating... Not daily, say once a week or fortnight... No excuse was required... [Sometimes] I landed up in bed for a number of days... I feel I want to leave...then I look at the children's faces [and] I'm not sure where I could go; their tears won't let me find the way. So I continue to stay for the sake of children... [But] he is a little better now... Now [the beating] is from time to time—every six, four months...

I do feel like returning [to the hills] but don't have a single *paisa* in hand and however small it may be, a house has to be constructed to live. [Our home there] has fallen to pieces... The neighbours have taken all the timber and other materials. Nobody looks after my husband's land and it has turned barren... Now how is that house to be constructed? ... People will laugh if one goes back without anything, since that was the reason for coming to Kathmandu.

Ram Bahadur (M, 48 years), Chettri

NEPAL 2

In our village, sometimes neighbours fall sick... At that time villagers will...cultivate crops in his field and he will pay for their help when he gets well... Sometimes... I would not be able to do my work by myself. Then my neighbours will decide to help me. If they do not help me I will be ruined. So this is a good system. When the time comes I will also help them.

If you spit alone it will dry soon. If we all spit together it will become a sea—it is our proverb. If we work individually it does not count; if we work together we will be able to do anything.

There's no work now

Bright lights; dark times

[When we first arrived] wherever you looked, lights were glittering. Wherever you looked, big, big buildings...gleaming motorcars. It was enjoyable. We didn't have electricity in our village... In villages you have...to collect and bring fodder, firewood, drinking water, and you become dirty, filthy. Cattle have to be tended in the village and you have to feed and look after them, and due to that people are quite dirty. Here you don't have to do all that. [But it's] only better for that, actually. For other things, it is better in the village itself. If you can educate [the children there] it will be good... There will be many friends and so it is fun... I have friends here who weave carpets but all are competitive, I-will-earn-more-than-you type of friends... Even if a small mistake is found most of them disclose it to the proprietor...to gain favours for themselves and discredit others...

And Kathmandu people really abuse people coming from the villages. "Uncivilised," they say... [They] detest us... Those who have houses here abuse us. The proprietors where we work abuse us... "Where have these savages, this uncivilised lot come from?" [city] people say... [It is mostly] the **Newars**. In most cases quarrels take place at the stone springs... "Don't touch the water," they say... "Savages" cannot touch the water till **puja** is done... To tell the truth, I also say, "You **Kasais**, we are a **lama** caste and we read books... In our village nobody takes even water touched by such butchers." ...We can't control our anger and we too abuse them...

We don't live with many Newars. Though we take rooms, we are mostly Tamangs staying together... [My children] speak their own language fine. I don't think they will forget the Tamang language so long as their parents do not do so... Your own language has to be spoken constantly. You have to speak Nepali language constantly too, and when two languages are spoken equally, you learn both...

In the beginning, the idea was to earn some money in a year or

Bimala (F, 28 years), Kami

NEPAL 28

In the whole village there are only two women who treat us as equals... [They say to other high caste women], "They are also our own sisters." ... [In our savings] group... only one elder sister, Bhagawati, eats things touched by us. What we need is people like elder sister Bhagawati. Though a **Bahun** [herself] she does not practise untouchability.

Bhagawati (F, 33 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 27

In all I feel it's not the "ignorant" oppressed class but the **Bahun**s who have failed to understand. The **Bahun** caste has to be counselled, I feel.

two...[and] go home... [But I] got married here. Now life is gone, it's gone for nothing. Just problem after problem... I cannot sleep the whole night, thinking about it...

When I go to my parents' place I feel like staying there... [Yet] I feel I have understood certain things and...compared to other women in the village, I feel I am little smarter... I have courage...

For those who can earn and have money, Kathmandu is a great place to stay... But for the poor it is not the right place. As far as possible it is better to stay in one's own home... Of all things, the worst is to be poor. If you are poor then even relatives are not around... They are also in need and don't have enough for themselves. What can be done with love alone?

*Of all things
the worst is
to be poor*

Kedar

NEPAL 6

Kedar, 37, is a vet and a traditional healer, using medicinal plants whose properties "others don't know about" and which he learnt about from his grandfather. He explains that in return for curing them and their animals, local people cultivate his fields for him. He comes from Thakani, Sindhupalchok district.

I am a farmer... I [also] give vaccines to the animals...and cure [them] when they fall sick... I also sell vegetable seeds [and] distribute plants at a cheap price.

I have [another job]... I treat [the villagers] with **jadibuti**. People are interested to use **jadibuti** instead of going to the hospital. Because if they go to the hospital for one tablet they will charge them a high price and give them a long list of medicine—Aspro, Citamol—which cost 40-50 rupees... Even in hospitals they use medicine made from **jadibuti**... It is far to go to the hospital from here...but for serious care we send [people] to the hospital.

"We are the experts"

People tell us not to mention the name of **jadibuti**. It is our secret. We have to look for it discreetly... We are the experts. We recognise these **jadibuti**, others don't know about it... I learned from my grandfather... Sometimes we mix three varieties, sometimes we

Jay Singh (M, 55 years), Tamang

NEPAL 13

When [people] use **Dhamis** they have to sacrifice chicken and goats, it costs... at least 1,500 to 1,600 rupees... But if they go to the hospital, they spend 20 to 50 rupees at the most... [As a **Jhankri** myself] I would talk them into going to the hospital. I'd read their future [as a fortune teller] if requested, but I am against the sacrificing of chickens and goats.

Bishnu Prasad (M, 56 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 16

There weren't that many medicinal plants [here]; we could get one called *parwanbet*, and now we find *chiraita*—it is a very bitter grass which people eat when they have fever. Nowadays these... are sold easily. Now all the poor people collect them from the jungle and take them to Sindhuli Dhure Bazaar so that the people from the city buy them. Since people get money for the herbs, they collect and sell them.

mix four or five things, it depends on the disease. For fever, we use one *jadibuti*, we don't mix anything there. We mix three things to care for fractured legs and hands...

We also make medicine from *banmara*. But someone who does not know will say it is dangerous. If we cut our hands or legs then we can rub *banmara* on it and the blood will stop... We also use the leaf of *urchalu*. It is just like iodine; if you put it on the wound, crushing it with your hands [first], it makes the blood flow stop...

If we eat *kharani* it will kill any worm in our stomach. It is a great medicine, discovered by old people in the past. We don't have to go to the hospital to cure worms...

We use snails, *tulsi* leaf, cucumber seeds, deer's horn, young bamboo shoot, cumin seed, etc. We mix them all and make medicine, which is always effective for us... Even for children we have *jadibuti* to cure them when they suffer from illness. [When a woman is in labour] we bring the root of *chhatiwan* and tie it with that woman's hair, then it will help [her] to give birth... Sometimes we give her glucose, sugar water, *karkalo ko jhol*. This makes her relax and she is able to give birth easily...

[Some] people say they are troubled by a witch... People just believe in this kind of thing... I never saw any witch... If you have faith, even using only the leaf of *sallo* will cure you. If you don't have faith, even using hospital medicine will not make you well...

I am thinking about [how to conserve plants]. I have brought these plants and I'm planting them in my garden... If this kind of plant will grow on a hillside or in a steep area, I will bring it and carefully sow it in my field. I will love and preserve it...

Shuvalakshmi (F, 60 years), Tamang

NEPAL 32

Many of the children died... Out of my nine, five died... It was not because there wasn't enough to eat; they died before their time because they did not get medicines. You know, they came down with fever and a bit of a cough and would die like flies. Not like today. Now, they come routinely to give injections... It's not necessary to give birth to so many these days. People go for [contraception] after a couple of children. It's easy now... It's good to do it.



A villager's interview being recorded. After a lifetime of farming and caring for a family in the high hills this woman has much knowledge and experience to share.

In the past I did everything for free. If one goes to do this work one has to devote the whole day. Now I am thinking about taking fees for treatment... [then] they will realise its importance... If I don't take money I will ask them for a favour...

Now I cure the villagers' illnesses—that's why they look after my field and I don't have to work in my field... They say, "He gives vaccines to our animals, he cures us and our animals." If I protect them they will protect me.

Indira

NEPAL 9

Indira, a Brahmin aged 25, is an adult literacy teacher in Sindhukot, Sindhupalchok. She discusses some of the many aspects of discrimination against women—lack of educational opportunity, being married off at a tender age, the practice of dowry, lack of property rights—which she sees as a "deep-rooted convention of society". She remarks that her husband, also a teacher, shares her feelings about "the welfare and rights of women".

We have a few fields and a little backyard garden... The cereals are just sufficient for us for 12 months. Just sufficient... From the teaching I do, I meet requirements like clothing and celebrating festivals...

I passed SLC—School Leaving Certificate—and after that I became a teacher... My father used to live in Kathmandu... Having no sons and seeing girls being sent to school there, he must have decided to send me to school. I also became interested and I began to study... Many marriage offers were brought to me but my father did not consent to them... After I passed SLC, my father died.

“Sent away like buffaloes”

In our hilly regions...the convention is to send the sons to school while the daughters are made to attend to domestic chores like collecting fodder and looking after the young ones. If they are sent to school, they barely reach the age of 15 before they are considered ripe for marriage. In their own homes they are considered “strangers” who must one day attend to the care of another’s home. So, they are sent away like buffaloes...

In Sindhukot, [literate women] amount to around 30 per cent. But...only 2 or 3 per cent go so far as to do the SLC examinations. In our village, there must be about four or five women who have passed SLC... From the legal point of view, [men and women] are said to be equal, but there is much discrimination. For instance women are always engaged in their chores, collecting fodder, cleaning the cowsheds and the like. Once they go to the husband’s house, there is the obligation to work. The convention is to consider women as born to go to another’s house, and therefore no importance is attached to providing them with education... Rather



“Women are always engaged in their chores”

than [being the fault of] the parents, it is the deep-rooted convention of the society...

In marriage, the girl must bring a substantial amount of dowry. If dowry is lacking, adjusting becomes a difficult affair for her because she is accused of not bringing much dowry... The boys say, “We are not marrying anybody’s daughter without getting wealth as well. The girl alone is not enough.”

The dowry system is strongest among the **Bahun**s and **Chettris**. The practice is non-existent in the **Tamang** community. We have advised girls not to go with boys who demand dowry... Likewise, we have advised families not to sell their belongings in order to have their girls married.

“Impossible to revolutionise”

In any institution there are more men, only a few women. And if they are working, whether in any institutions or schools, [women] are looked down upon. [People] say, such and such girls are not decent... This discourages women from working in institutions...

[Wages for labour?] The rates prevailing in our village are 30 rupees a day for men and only 15 rupees for women... This [imbalance] dates back to times immemorial... In my opinion, it is not right. The women have been working as much as they possibly can... So they should get equal wages...

Within the 24 hours, women are busy working about 18 hours. From dawn until late in the evening when all the household chores are finished... [Men] don’t work more than 12 hours... After [women] get up in the morning, the house has to be washed with clay and cow dung mixture. After [preparing] the evening meal, other household chores have to be done. The rooms have to be swept, the men’s beds must be made... This is absolutely wrong... Men can make their beds themselves... They can sweep their rooms themselves. It is not right that only women should cook meals...

In our hills and countryside, it is simply impossible to revolutionise these things... The notion exists in our village that all the tasks are for the women... Men also must acknowledge the fact that men and women have equal rights.

Shuvalakshmi (F, 60 years), Tamang

NEPAL 32

I used to get up early in the morning and finish all the household chores. I massaged the baby with oil, warmed him and put the child in the hammock and left. I cut and brought back fodder. The baby would still be asleep when I returned so I would cook and eat. I cared for the baby, took care of the animals and then set out again in the afternoon, too... I would be out doing work 12 to 13 days after giving birth... The child I raised like this is a driver [in Kathmandu] now.

Women's dignity has increased **Learning for change**

Up to now about 100 women in our village have studied [in adult literacy classes]. In our experience, there have been many changes... They did not know anything about child hygiene. They did not know about saving. In contrast, since the literacy education, they can now read, sign their names, they send their children to school. They pay attention to hygiene...

They have formed a savings group... Before the introduction of the classes they used to think there was no use in piling up money... They have deposited some of the money in a bank, and some of the money they have invested in keeping goats [and in] pig farming and poultry farming... The savings group's income is increasing because of the interest. This in turn lets them make bigger investments...

Formerly, men used to think that women were not able to do anything... Now that the women have engaged themselves in income-generating activities and are making profits, their dignity has increased markedly.

"The hen has begun to crow"

In these [local] institutions of ours, the representation of women must be [only] about 5 per cent ... The reason behind women's scanty representation is lack of awareness... "Awareness" means being able to think and act according to what one thinks is right... It is not blindly following what others say...

Whenever there are meetings, seminars or other activities, 25 per cent of the womenfolk participate. In activities like the afforestation tour, the involvement of women is scanty [because]...the men take over. The women don't get their turn... Their lack of participation is due to the lack of opportunity... Those who have been brought up traditionally think that women have no significance... When women attend meetings, they say, "Look, the hen has begun to crow." ...

In addition to all the family members being educated, women must have rights to...family property... Even when they are married and sent away, they should get a share of their family

Bhagawati (F, 33 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 27

[Savings groups] didn't do a good job as they focused on men only... Whatever was saved women didn't get, and it was swindled by men... Now the NGOs of these days encourage women to come forward... If you go to Nepal Bank to repay money they appreciate that women repay in time and if women were in charge then self-reliance could be there.

Gaumati (F, 51 years)

NEPAL 8

Without loans it is difficult to live... We have to pay for the plough and cattle, and for planting... we need the money for three months only... As far as possible we manage among friends, otherwise we borrow from the bank... My husband deals with the bank... I think [the interest rate] is 4 per cent... It is quite easy in the bank, but not very convenient, you have to be there on time. It is convenient in the village but the interest is... minimum 20 per cent.

property. In my opinion, consent should be required from both the sons and daughters when it comes to selling family property, usually land.

In our region...75 per cent of the women exercise their voting rights on the instructions of their family members: father or brothers, and their husbands. That is because they are illiterate and cannot read newspapers and magazines. They don't have the opportunity of hearing what is happening around them. They are not allowed to attend meetings.

The provision [of equal rights] is confined to the constitution... The provisions have not been put into practice. [They] remain in the constitution and the women remain in their villages.

Some progress

But there is a...difference... Women are seen more in schools... Incidentally, free education is provided up to class 7. This has led to...more girl students attending schools. Under this multiparty democracy women also have more democratic participation during elections...

[Poor] women have to work more. [But] in poor families, the boys work as much as the girls do. They have to work for wages. They have to support their families in this way. In fact, women and men seem equal in poor families...[where] discussion is undertaken even in small matters...

Loans can be given [to help women] but the woman may not get the consent of her husband, father or brothers... It is the men who hold the purse strings, so people consider it doubtful whether women will pay back the loans.

"Money for a better life"?

[Girls going to work in India] started in 1950 and since then the trend has continued... They saw a girl who returned from Bombay in fine clothes and were lured into the idea that they too could buy such fine clothes, for their parents could not afford such clothes for them... [Some] are even sent by their parents because they see the girls bring back money. They say that...by sending their daughters

Awareness is not blindly following others

to Bombay, they will get money for a better life. Then there is a [third] kind. Some people lure girls by promising to take them to Kathmandu to...marry them. But they are taken to Bombay.

[Some bring back] in the range of 100,000 to 150,000 rupees... A lot of them spend money to provide nice clothes for their family and relatives... About 25 per cent of them spend money on acquiring land and building houses. Some [even] come from Kathmandu by helicopter!

Within [Tamang] families and within their community, they are treated well, you see. Among other communities—the Bahuns and Chettris—they are looked down upon. Most of the women who have returned from Bombay do not get married here...

[Some suffer from AIDS]... Within this region of ours, there might be 10 or 11 women infected... [These women] provide information on AIDS and its prevention... They say that whatever has happened to them can't be helped—but that the rest of the girls must not go there. It is very effective... Once they admit to what has happened to them, it is not necessary to repeat it... What we hear from others could be tell-tale, but not what these women say. What they say is true.

Rita

NEPAL 30

Rita, a Gurung, tells the story of her abduction by sex traffickers to the brothels of India from where she was rescued by a client. She recalls her initial naivety—she thought she had agreed to act as a carrier for diamond traders—but her experiences have made her mature and compassionate beyond her 23 years. She now works in Kathmandu as a counsellor with other former prostitutes.

My home in the hills is in Gorkha district... My father died when I was two years old. After that my mother kept me at my aunt's place. She got married again. I stayed at the aunt's place from two to 18, 19 years old... I never got my own mother's affection, nor a father's love... If anyone had given me a little bit of affection probably I, too, might have become something. That's how I feel... I was [always] running about in search of affection.

The move to Kathmandu

I could not study because of the financial situation... One *dai* arranged a job for me in a hotel [in Kathmandu]...[where] I got acquainted with a friend... She was a dancer and I a waitress... I had to work from 10 in the morning till 10 at night...

Some months later my friend said, "Look, how long am I going to be a dancer in this restaurant and how long are you going to be a waitress here? Let us look for some other work or business."... She said she knew some brothers [and that they] were really good people and they dealt in diamonds... They said they had to use girls because girls were not checked as thoroughly as men.

Mainly because I trusted my friend...I agreed... While we were waiting for something to eat they gave us a soft drink. We never thought of what might happen to us... After drinking it we felt very sleepy and sick... So we went with them. We crossed over the border into India.

They took us to a big house... There was a fat woman sitting there... Then they took us into a room and kept us there... I was a bit frightened and uneasy and held on to the hand of one of the boys. And I asked him why we were being kept in the room like this... All of a sudden I suspected that we were being sold... [The boys left, we were separated and]...I was taken to another house... A girl said, "Your brothers will never come back again. They have sold you and left." ... I felt as if I had fallen off a cliff...

Then they snatched my citizenship papers... They realised I was trying to run away. Two, three of them beat me very badly; all were women... They seem to have many houses... If you don't agree to work in one place, they sell you to another place, [another Madam].

Forced by circumstances

I didn't eat for two, three days... I suffered a lot and was forced by circumstances to do that work. In the beginning a Muslim man came and told me to go with him... I cried. He asked me why... I told him how I was sold, told him to take me away from there... Some men are gentlemen... He said, "You are a beginner; you are new. Since somebody has sold you I will not do this to you."...

[The customers were] Indians. Those studying in campuses, school students, businessmen—only these kinds would come. Some involved in illegal trade, some good people, too, would come...

I asked many men who came there to help me get out... Most were too frightened to help... No Nepali customers are allowed to come in there. They are afraid that they will tell [other] Nepalis...

After three months an Indian brother came. I told him everything... I gave him my home address. After that he came to **Maiti Nepal**...[which] also has an office in Bombay. And so Bombay's Bal Krishna sir, an Indian social worker, came to get us out... The newcomers agreed to come, but the girls who had stayed

Most of the girls sold are from the hills there for 15 or 16 years didn't want to come... "What will we get if we go to Nepal? We'll get nothing but misery. We've been sold like this, we've become prostitutes. We will not be accepted by society, we won't go," they said. "Even if we go, we will go only with money," that's what they say. And even the policemen who come to raid say they will take only those who wish to go and not those who do not want to leave.

[The brothel was raided and] 21 of us agreed to come... I told Bal Krishna sir that my friend was in [another] house and to go and get my friend too. But...the Madam found out the police was coming and hid her. She was left behind. I still feel sad thinking about her. I couldn't help set her free... And I found out from other friends later that my friend was sold to some other place...

They have separate places just for hiding [girls]. Somehow they get information even before the police arrive... They bribe them. I think the police of the lower ranks provide information.

Conditions in the brothel

I stayed for about four months... There are many customers when new recruits arrive. I had to service 20 to 30 customers in a day... We don't get a single *paisa*. Just whatever the customers give us separately we can [keep], but only if you hide it...

It is very difficult [to get time to sleep]... Had to service customers from five o'clock till one o'clock at night. Can't describe how we felt, we were given vitamins and medicines... It is painful, very painful...

All are Nepalis there. Most of them are **Tamang**...from villages in Sindhupalchok, Nuwakot... [The girls] cannot [escape]. The windows and doors there have steel grills... There will be male guards on both sides... The Madam sits outside 24 hours a day... [We were] not allowed [to make friends]. I became friendly with one of the girls, and the Madam beat me...

We never knew anything about HIV/AIDS. We knew that we could get pregnant having sex without a condom but didn't know about other things. All of them used condoms. Some of them didn't want to use a condom, but we would refuse... What seems to be done there is that those with a disease like that are sent home...

We would be beaten really badly [for refusing a customer]... I had blue marks all over the body... If they ask, we have to say we fell down the stairs. And there was an ointment available to remove the marks—and [the Madams] would apply that ointment...

To say that only the uneducated are sold there is also wrong... There are many educated girls, too; they are also being sold... Many

are taken away with the promise of marriage and later sold... Girls from Kathmandu...have reached [the brothels]. Of course, most of [them] have come to work in Kathmandu from the hills. And thus most of the girls sold there are from the hills. Just like me, they were coaxed, misled and taken there.

Girls are coaxed, misled and taken

"I consider myself lucky"

[Before I came to] Maiti Nepal I had come to totally detest Nepalis because I was...sold by a Nepali. After coming back I used to get angry just looking at Nepali people. But...I underwent training for six months. As one by one the days passed by I felt like making friends... [The training is] stitching and cutting, stitching and cutting. Then things like making bags, stringing beads, looms. There is conversation training. There's study, too, and counselling...

[Now] I work as a counsellor. Those who have been sold and have returned are suffering lots of pain and grief. They aren't able to tell others or share this with anybody. We go to them and talk to them, hoping to lessen their grief, and we give them advice...

We are harassed by lawyers and police here after we come back to Nepal. The way they question—it is like scratching a wound... They have done this willingly, that's what they think... When I went to the Jawalakhel police station...there were many boys and men present... Forget about giving us justice—instead, in front of everyone they ask us questions like: how many [men] did you sleep with? They shame us in public. It's more painful because of this.

[But] I consider myself lucky. The way others have contracted HIV—that has not happened to me... In life, support is needed. My pains, my past incidents, if somebody understands, if he is willing to accept me even after knowing everything, I will get married.

Anonymous

NEPAL 26

This 29-year-old Gurung woman describes how members of her family have both supported and been attacked by the Maoists. While she seems sympathetic to some of their beliefs, she also sees their "many weaknesses" and despairs at the way both the Maoists and the government kill innocent people; a sister-in-law was shot dead by the police. She has now left her mountain home in Lamjung district for the comparative safety of Chitwan.

My youngest unmarried sister-in-law was...involved in a movement demanding a reduction in school fees... She had an inclination towards the Maoists... Our [home] is in a Maoist area... That way she joined the students' movement.

A huge public meeting was supposed to have taken place in our village school [demanding] that...the children of poor common people must get an opportunity to study. My sister-in-law was present... After the [meeting]...they had gone to drink water. Who reported what, I don't know, but she was arrested...as she was coming, carrying two small water vessels...

According to reports, she was told to take off her clothes after the arrest. And she was shot dead... A local person who saw the incident reported that. Later we went to bring back her dead body... Her arms were held on both sides and she was riddled with bullets, that child...

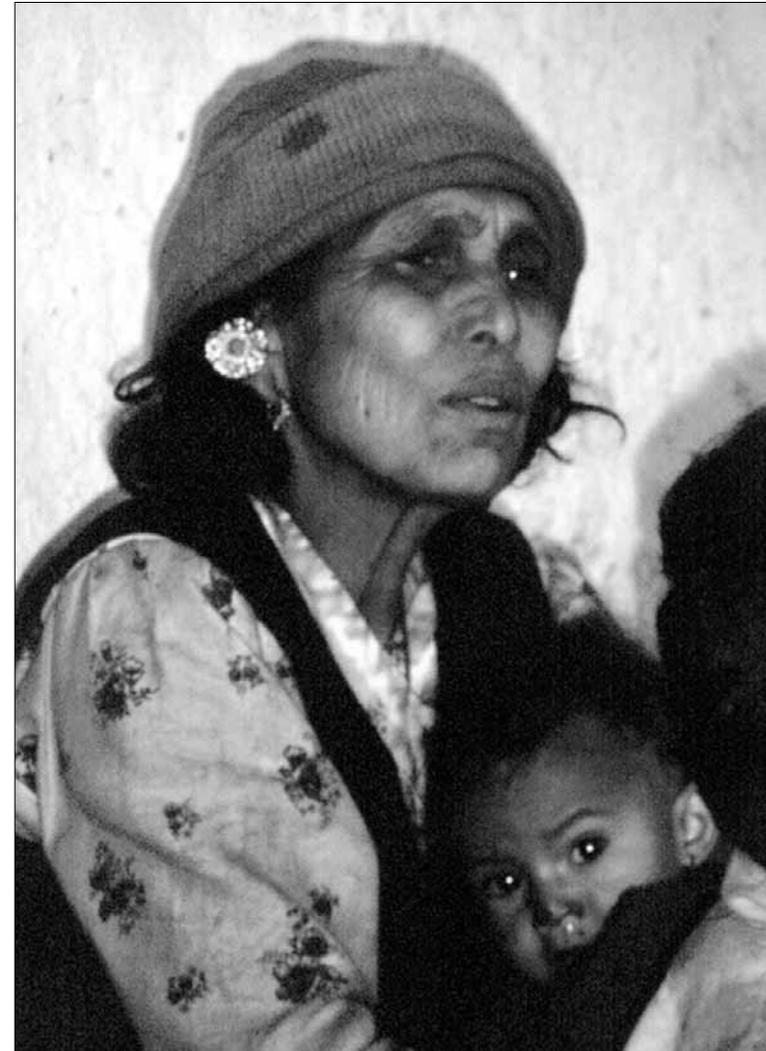
Before that, perhaps no one had gone to bring back the bodies of Maoists killed by the police... That may have been the first incident... [Everyone] from our village went to bring back the body... "She is our daughter," they said. There was no question of saying this [person] is a communist and that one is a **Congress** man... After the body was brought back, it became a challenge for the government. There is an area police office in our village... "You all went to bring back the body of a Maoist. I will lock all of you underground in the cold. I can kill those I like," [the inspector] told the villagers... Immediately after that...maybe for revenge...nine policemen were killed in an attack on the area police office... There was talk at that time that the Maoists did the right thing. After that the administration also could not do anything.

"The practice of killing"

I go home [to the hills] only occasionally. My husband is also engaged in journalism outside. He was detained by the army... He was kept blindfolded for the entire 28 days... "All your family members are Maoists—where are they and who else are Maoists?" they said... He is still like a sick man. The army kicked him and beat him with sticks...[until he lost] consciousness... I have two young daughters. We stay here [in Chitwan] in rented accommodation. How difficult it has been...

My parents' home is also in a Maoist area... The Maoists had asked [my mother] for 20 kg of paddy... Then they asked my elder brother's family for money. Thereafter he did not stay at home. He is said to be around Kathmandu... That elder brother...was the one who had adopted our distantly related orphaned elder sister... He embezzled that elder sister's wealth and looked after her badly. The Maoists must take action against such a person, even though he is my own elder brother. Not only Maoists but anyone should take action against such a person who has mistreated an orphan...

I am not on the side to say whatever the Maoists did was right. They also have many weaknesses. It's not good that Maoists are also levying tax, collecting 20 kg of paddy from the general public. Now for the poor, 20 kg of paddy will be enough to eat for two days. [Also] maybe one or two may have reported to the police about



"The poor and ordinary people who stay here do so under constant fear of both Maoists and the army"

The ones who suffer are the poor Maoists but on that pretext it is not good [for the Maoists] to kill ordinary people. When the police and army beat and threaten to kill someone unless he tells them who the Maoists are, that person may point to someone and say the person is a Maoist just to save his own life...

The practice of killing from both sides is not good. In the name of Maoists [the army] may have killed some ordinary people...[and said they were] killed in clashes... I do not believe the news reports about so many Maoists killed with weapons in their hands because of one incident that took place recently...

My close relation was there. It was the time for sowing maize... Army personnel dressed in Maoist uniform started a Maoist rally [in the village, saying]... "So please come, comrades, this is what is happening in the country..." And they delivered a speech saying we have to do this and that... All the local people gathered there—women, children, men... And after everyone had gathered, army vehicles and personnel reached there and cordoned off the area... Some were afraid, some started screaming, some started to cry...some started running to try to escape. After that the army opened fire... One person we knew died... An only son. Having spread manure in the paddy fields all day he still had manure on his hands when he was shot dead... The army [said], this one is a real Maoist... My elder sisters knew him quite well... We listened to the evening news after that incident took place. We heard...one "terrorist" had died in a "clash".

Since hearing that news programme the local people of that area, that place, have changed... Though they are not staunch Congress people, they are of the type likely to give [Congress] their votes... But Congress will not get votes from there in the forthcoming election. People there have started saying: "They have killed in front of our eyes and they say in the news it was in a clash—that is not done..." Now they've reached a point where they say they will not give votes to anyone.

Life is not easy and secure in the hills like before... Development in the village has ceased totally. Now, due to the

Tara (F, 25 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 15

If a woman cannot feed the children she will work for wages. The villagers call them, and because they are poor, they know that she is in need so she will come... [and] work in the fields, plough, cultivate, irrigate and harvest. She can work on the construction of houses, carry stones and soil... She keeps the wages for herself and if the husband asks she replies that she worked hard to earn the money and has spent it on food and children.

Maoist problem, we are not able to take our paddy harvest to the market... Many people have been displaced... The poor and ordinary people who stay here do so under constant fear of both Maoists and the army... Those who can run away...have already run away [and] the poor are still staying. In the end, the ones who suffer are the poor.

Development has ceased

Durga Kumari

NEPAL 25

Durga Kumari, who may have "passed 50", began her interview pointing to her maternal home which lies "across one river from here" in Nuwakot. Her mother died when she was very young and "at 16 or 17" she left home to marry and had six children. She fears greatly for the safety of her three teenage sons, because she has seen how local people, including two of her sons-in-law, have been dragged into attack and counter-attack by the army and the Maoists.

Because of [irrigation], it's comfortable in the village now... It's been about six, seven years since we started having two harvests... The same maize and millet...[and] they've added wheat, mustard and paddy... There was no practice of planting vegetables before [either]. There was no water... How could anything grow? ... We ourselves built a canal...investing our own money... The situation in the past wasn't good, but that is in the past. Conditions now are quite good. On the other hand, the Maoists are causing trouble.

Well, some say there are killings; some say something else. Some say they plunder. They've caused so much trouble. Even if nothing happened to me, the army took my son-in-law and gave him a lot of trouble...

They destroyed buildings, the telephone exchange, etc. They attacked the VDC building... The villagers repaired [the bridge], but they say the telephone line will not be restored for five years... Now, not having a telephone is like having a broken limb... We are unaware of the happenings, good or bad, in the city... [And if we go there] the army checks five, six times on the way... We have to get off and on the bus at many places... Earlier, it was quite good; the soldiers would simply glance inside the bus and leave... These days they tell us to get off the bus. They ask to see our bags. You can't keep your bag on the seat... A few days ago they even made everyone untie their hair just to make sure that women were not hiding anything under their buns... It takes three hours to get to Kathmandu from here... Now, it takes longer...

It is frightening for the kids. They say they are scared to go to

I'm afraid my sons may die study, they feel the Maoists might abduct them... I am frightened, of course. I have no one. I have already married off my daughters. Wouldn't it be terrible if they took away my sons too? ... It's not about being scared of dying [myself]. I'm only afraid that my sons may die or that they will be taken by the Maoists or the police. I only have them to depend on... One is 19 years old. One is 16 years. Another is 13.

Development prospects destroyed

It's been around a year since the Maoists came to the village. They completely destroyed the women's savings group that we had established...three years [ago]...for the first time. About 20, 30 [women joined] in the beginning. [I had borrowed] 5,000 rupees from our cooperative. I have not taken a loan from outside... The Maoists came and began pointing their guns. We were told not to have meetings, and they wouldn't let us organise any programmes...

[The cooperative] was doing well. Every member had accumulated 1,100 rupees, we were told. We used to deposit 5 rupees every seven days... Now, many have withdrawn their money because of fear... Out of 22 altogether, only nine are left...

The Maoists have burnt our cooperative building too... They began kicking the doors, yelling that the money should be given to them and not the group... By buying some goats or doing some



"We had a chance to make some progress. Even that is gone now."

business, there could have been some profit at least. Perhaps...we could have done something big... We had a chance to make some progress. Even that is gone now.

Caught in the crossfire

[The soldiers] haven't settled here... Just once or twice [the army] came, quickly arrested many people and took them away. And then the Maoists walk around the whole night, shouting slogans. They yell... "Fulfil our demands", and the like... The situation has become dangerous...

About 35 [villagers] have been taken [by the army], I hear... My own son-in-law was involved... [He] was a farmer... That day my son-in-law had come to my house—and that's the time the army took him away... Poor chap, what politics would he do? He would just plough and live. He isn't educated... His father died when he was just a child. He looked after five or six [family members]—how would he study or be involved in politics? Poor chap, he knows nothing... [He] was released after a number of days... He was beaten [by the police], they say. My son-in-law is walking around, but the village teacher was beaten...so badly, he can't even stand on his feet. Now there is no teacher to teach in the school.

My other son-in-law is in Kathmandu hospital after the Maoists broke his limbs. He still can't move his hands and feet. They haven't let his family live in peace in the village, beating and chasing them... I believe he was hit with an iron hammer. He was hit all over. And he had to leave the village... Since he wasn't allowed to stay, his entire property in the village has been taken by others... The children couldn't go to study and couldn't even take their exams. The children were chased away from the maternal home too... [The Maoists] say he was no good...but it doesn't seem to me that the family behaved badly before.

Broken trust

There are fears that [the Maoists] just might take control. If that happens, people will stop farming, isn't it? [But] one has to eat... The Maoists want to establish their own authority, I suppose... They want to do away with the King...do you think they will do good later? ... They completely destroy what has already been built...

Everyone in the village was like a brother or sister... Now it seems like everybody is fighting among themselves... None have gone [to the Maoists] from our village...[at least] not openly. They say there are some, but I simply don't know. We have no right to point fingers at anyone.

Everybody is fighting among themselves

Soma

NEPAL 29

This 74-year-old **Tamang** woman from Raile village, Kavre district, is moved to tears as she talks of the hardships of the past. Of her seven children, her only son and two daughters died when young. Her memories of village women gathering and selling fuelwood indicate the scale on which this once took place. Today, she says, “there are many comforts”; life is only spoiled by fear of the Maoists.

We worked the whole day. We had these infant sons and daughters; toiled so hard, fed the cattle. We used to chop firewood all night in the forest...walked in the darkness carrying firewood to sell at Bhadgaon for 5 **mohrs**. We [were] afraid, in case the forest guard caught us... He used to call us thieves. Then I would brandish my stick to scare him off... Altogether we would be 60 to 70 women in the forest collecting firewood... To reach Bhadgaon it is about a **kos** and a half...by the time we reached Bhadgaon it was around 11, 12 o'clock... You have to keep avoiding the forest guard... He waited to loot us—to seize our firewood... Then we, the elders, would start brandishing sticks and shouting for help... Then everyone would run helter-skelter, everyone would start running away. Even the forest guard...

No, I was not afraid. Not afraid of anyone. Instead, I used to beat the forest guard...and drive him away... During those days some of us didn't have rice in our house, no salt, so what else could we do but sell firewood for money? ...

Such times are gone. Now what times have come? They used to say in the old days that, some time, even water would catch fire—those times have arrived now. There's no fire below the water now, but just watch, there's the Maoist movement now...

Now, it is frightening even to walk out on your own from here. As soon as night falls, one is afraid to step out of the door... We used to walk around singing the whole night while collecting firewood. Now that sort of life has gone... We are afraid the Maoists might kill us, isn't it?

“We sing Tamang songs”

There were quite a few **jatras**. We could comfortably witness these all night. Now, since the Maoists [have come] it is not the same... [This year] I could not go to make offerings for my mother and father... I was afraid...

There is no question of not singing at **jatras**. Friends are very eager and insist we sing. We sing Tamang songs. Some play the **madal**. I sing songs...many, many. I loved it very much. I still sing

Tek Lal (M, 67 years), Brahmin

NEPAL 3

We old ones are left to sing. If we old people all die one by one then these **bhajan** and **chudka** will also become extinct from our culture.

now. Some take part in **juwari**, but some women compete among themselves...

The men do not sing. Even when we sing they do not like it and beat us badly. Do not sing, [my husband] says... Maybe it's because he thinks I will elope with another man... Now, will one elope because one sings? ...The husband yells at me even now if he hears me singing...

When I want to talk about the old days, I feel like crying... To eat meat [before], **Dasain** had to come, **Tihar** had to come... Now there are huge harvests of maize, wheat, paddy and mustard. We've got all these things to eat. During those days, there was no chemical fertiliser...[just] animal manure... And...to grind the corn...we used to take four to five days [just to walk to the mill]... There was nothing. These days [children] get to eat **chow chow**, biscuits, sour pickles... Oh yes, and the kids these days have started watching movies... They watch TV and do no work... They have no interest in working in the fields these days... There was no electricity till a couple of years ago. There was no TV either... now this plagues us.

“It's only the Maoists that trouble us”

If we want to enter the forest now there's a fear that the Maoists might kill us. That is what is bad compared to before, little sister, otherwise it is quite good for us. [But] if Maoists come around here the villagers will beat the shit out of them. Over there, they beat them last year, the year before last. They were beaten, whether they were thieves or Maoists. They were beaten till their backs turned blue... I said, “Don't [beat them], please don't.” I felt sorry for them and asked them to stop...

We hadn't even dreamed in our youth that it would be like this. We suffered so much... It's so easy now, so easy. If you have the money, you can buy everything right here in the village. It's only the Maoists and some other things that trouble us; otherwise for people it is far more comfortable than in our day.

Every attempt has been made to gloss all the terms in the testimonies, but finding the meaning for all the words has not always proved possible.

Asaar	Nepali month, mid-June to mid-July
Bahun	Nepali word for Brahmin
bhajans	devotional songs, hymns
Bhote/Bhotini	Nepali term, usually used negatively, to mean people of Tibetan origin such as Tamang
bhote tea	Tibetan tea, churned with butter and salt
Brahmin	the highest Hindu (priestly) caste; also used colloquially to mean a priest
Chettri	the second highest Hindu caste
chow chow	instant (packet) noodles
chudkas	traditional folksongs
Congress dai	Nepali Congress Party (literally, older brother); term of respect for any older male
Danwar	ethnic group similar to the Majhi
Dasain	the main Nepali festival held after the rice harvest around October
Dhami/Jhankri	traditional healer using both spiritual and herbal methods of treatment
Ghewa	funeral rites of Buddhist communities
ghiu	clarified butter
Gurung	major ethnic group, primarily Buddhist
jadibuti	medicinal herbs
janr	white beer made of fermented grain; general term for alcohol
Janryani	drunkards
jatra	pilgrimage or festival
juwari	style of song: men and women compete with each other, composing lyrics as they go along
Kami	blacksmiths (occupational caste)
karkalo ko jhol	soup made from <i>karkalo</i> , a vegetable
Kasai	butchers (occupational caste)
kharani	ash
khoya	milk reduced by boiling to a soft solid to make sweets
kos	distance measurement, equivalent to 3.2 km
lakh	one hundred thousand
lama	Buddhist priest; some Tamangs use Lama as a surname

Maagh	Nepali month, mid-January to mid-February
madal	Nepali drum, played with the fingers
Magar	an ethnic community found predominantly in western and central Nepal
Maiti Nepal	Nepali NGO working on the issue of trafficking and providing shelter and support for women who return from India's brothels
Majhi	an ethnic group, often river-based
mana	weight measurement: 1 <i>mana</i> is 10 handfuls, approx 400 grams
Mansuli rice	local variety of rice, medium quality
mohr	unit of currency: 1 <i>mohr</i> = 50 <i>paisa</i>
Newar	one of Nepal's major ethnic groups, mostly Hindu and concentrated in the Kathmandu valley
paisa	money; unit of currency: 100 <i>paisa</i> = 1 rupee
pathi	weight measurement, approx 3.2 kg; 1 <i>pathi</i> is equivalent to 8 <i>manas</i>
puja	act of prayer; ritual may include making offerings
rakshi	distilled spirit made from grain; term for alcohol
Sherpa	an ethnic group similar to the Tamang; Buddhist
sotar	grass/leaves etc for animal bedding which, combined with manure, makes good compost
Tamang	ethnic group believed to be of Tibetan ancestry; they are Lama Buddhists, with their own language and culture
Tihar	Hindu festival of lights, which takes place in October/November; also known as Diwali
tika	decorative mark made on forehead as a blessing
VDC	Village Development Committee

BOTANICAL GLOSSARY

banmara	literally, "forest killer"; exotic weed, limited medicinal use; toxic to cattle when eaten
chiraita	medicinal herb: juice taken to alleviate fever, and in the treatment of diabetes and hepatitis
rayoko saag	broad-leaf spinach
sallo	<i>chir</i> pine (<i>pinus roxburghii</i>)
tulsi	Indian basil; important symbol in Hindu religious tradition
utish	alder tree, used for firewood and to stabilise soil and prevent landslides (<i>alnus nepalensis</i>)

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