

The London School of Economics and Political Science

*Gender, Institutions & Development in Natural  
Resource Governance: A Study of Community Forestry  
in Nepal*

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## Declaration

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## Abstract

Community forestry in the middle hills of Nepal has been undergoing unprecedented changes in recent years. Community forestry was first introduced in 1978 to address forest degradation through partnership between local people and the government to manage community forests. Development practitioners and policy makers are recently and increasingly concerned with gender and social equity issues in community forestry. Furthermore, a myriad of external actors are involved directly in community forestry at the local level. Academic research on community forestry in Nepal, however, has not adequately studied the interrelationships between gender relations, local institutions of community forestry governance, and external intervention.

In light of the above, my research examines and explicates gender relations in two field sites in the middle hills; the interrelationship between gender relations and the formation, functioning and change in institutions; and analyzes the interface between forest officials and local users. My research findings posit that institutions are 'embedded' in existing gender relations. Intra and extra-household relations define the terms under which men and women enter, interact and influence institutions. Parallel social institutions are drawn upon to mediate the governance of resources, which in turn are influenced by existing 'distribution of power' amongst the genders, and field level extension agent's dual relationship with the organizations they represent and the local users. My research draws from and engages with the debates and understandings in the scholarships on gender and environment; gender analysis of intra/extra household; and local institutions of natural resource governance. I use a combination of qualitative research methods and engage with questions of reflexivity and positionality in the research process. The findings of my research serve to inform theoretical debates on gender and natural resource governance as well as national level policy changes in Nepal.

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## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
A & G	Agrawal & Gibson's Framework for Institutional Analysis
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CFUGS	Community Forest Users Group
CPN-M	Community Party Nepal-Maoist
CPR	Common Property Resource
DANIDA	Danish Development Agency
DFID	U.K. Department for International Development
DFO	District Forest Office
DFO-K	District Forest Office, Kavre District
DFO-KI	District Forest Office, Kaski District
DDC	District Development Committee
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forestry User Groups
FINIDA	Finish Development Agency
GAD	Gender And Development
GED	Gender, Environment and Development
GEWG	Gender, Equity Working Group
GSELG	Gender, Social Equity Learning Group
GPSE	Gender, Poverty and Social Equity
HA	Hectare
IoF	Institute of Forestry
LFP	Livelihoods Forest Program
NACRMP	Nepal Australia Community Resource Management Program
NARMSAP	Nepal Resource Management Sector Program
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NHE	New Household Economics
NRG	Natural Resource Governance
NSCFP	Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project
VDC	Village Development Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Porgram
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WED	Women, Environment and Development

## ~ Chapter One ~

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Community forestry in the middle hills of Nepal has been undergoing unprecedented changes in recent years. Community forestry was first introduced in 1978 with the objectives of sustainable management of forests and participation of local people in the management of community forests. The major concern informing community forestry policies and practices was that the forests in the Middle Hills of the country were rapidly and extensively deforesting. The nationalization of forests, or state monopoly over the management of forests, was exacerbating the degradation. In this respect, the general idea behind community forestry was a partnership between the government and local communities. Under this partnership, the local people accepted the responsibility for the protection, management and sustainable utilization of their community forests. The government became extension agents, providing advice and support to the local communities (Gilmour and Fisher 1991).

The government of Nepal has experimented with two major forms of community forestry: (1) handing over forests to Village Panchayats, and (2) devolving responsibilities of forest management directly to the local users. Since the inception of Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs) as the main mechanism through which all community forestry activities are undertaken, community forestry has been hailed as a development success and Nepal a leader in mobilizing local communities to manage natural resources (Hobley 1996b; Acharya 2002). About 1.1 million ha of forested land (25% of the total) has so far been handed over to 13,000 CFUGs which constitutes 35% of the total population of Nepal (CFD 2004). Studies show that forests have improved in terms of natural regeneration, crown density and growth (Branney and Yadav 1998; Jackson, Tamrakar et al. 1998; Poffenberger 2000; Gautam, Webb et al. 2003; LFP and Inc. 2003). In addition to profiting from increased access to forest products, CFUGs have invested the income generated through the sale of forest products in various development activities such as income generating, investments in human and physical capital and more (Kanel 2004). The consequences of community forestry have also gone beyond the local level and the CFUGs have employed rights-based discourses to demand secure access to forests at the national level (Pokharel, Branney et al. 2007).

After the three decades of experience with community forestry in the middle-hills of Nepal, development practitioners and policy makers working on community forestry are increasingly concerned with wider issues pertaining to the ‘governance’ of community forests such as rights, livelihood, poverty reduction, democracy amongst others. While these efforts are ongoing in community forestry programmes and projects, at the macro level, the national workshop, celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> year of community forestry and officially launching the ‘second generation issues’ in community forestry in 2003, marked ‘sustainable management’, ‘good governance’ and ‘livelihood’ as the three mandates for community forestry. ‘Gender and social equity’ was identified as an overarching theme in community forestry within these mandates (Kanel and Kandel 2003; Kanel 2004; Kanel and Kandel 2004). Since the workshop, consolidated efforts at the national level have been underway amongst the various actors involved in community forestry to formulate and integrate gender and social equity policy in the forestry sector.

Along with the branching out of community forestry into broader development issues, the government’s roles and responsibilities in the forestry have been ‘spanning out’ and ‘fanning out’. On the one hand, the donors who had historically played a crucial role in introducing and supporting community forestry in the country are no longer working exclusively with the Government (Department of Forestry). Most have been delegating responsibilities to facilitate user groups at the local level to various non-governmental and community-based organizations. On the other hand, the Department of Forestry is not only decentralizing its roles and responsibilities to its District Forest Offices (Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Graner 1997; Pokharel 1997) but is also sub-contracting many of its local level responsibilities to non-governmental and community based organization. Such inclusion of non-governmental and community-based actors in community forestry has gained increasing momentum because of the ongoing political conflict in Nepal which has left vast majority of the rural areas, where CFUGs are located, out of the reach of the government (Pokharel, Branney et al. 2007).

## **1.2 The State of literature on Gender and Community Forestry in Nepal**

In comparison to the above developments in community forestry policy making arena and practice, the academic literature on gender and community forestry in the middle hills of Nepal is lagging far behind in three important ways.



*First*, there is considerable literature on the implications of community forestry for broader development goals such as poverty reduction and social inclusion by development practitioners and academics working on community forestry related issues (Timisina 2002; Dahal 2003; Neupane 2003; Pokharel and Nurse 2004; Shrestha 2004; Timisina and Ojha 2004; Timisina and Ojha 2004). These studies are often conducted with the aim to influence national level community forestry policies and/or generate greater debates around these policies. It has been variously argued that the poor, women, ethnic minorities and low-castes are being systematically marginalized by community forestry practices at the local level. Hence, the emphasis is on how to re-align community forestry policies so as to address broad-based, national goals of poverty reduction and social inclusion. However, from a gender perspective, there are a number of difficulties in assuming that poverty reduction and social exclusion can adequately address gender-related issues and replace gender analysis (Jackson 1996; Razavi 1997). Furthermore, gender, ethnicity, and caste are analyzed in face value without attending to the complexity and fluidity of these relations in the history of state-society relations in Nepal and in specific historical contexts. In this respect, context-specific studies on how 'caste' and 'ethnicity' in Nepal are constituted and contested, how these relations shape gender relations and in turn community forestry governance at the local level is required.

*Second*, many studies on gender and community forestry begin with the premise that women are the primary collectors of community forests, and that the pre-existing gender inequalities between men and women are replicated in the governance of forests at the local level which in turn, have marginalized women (See: Malla 1992; Chhetri 2001; Roy 2002; Humagain 2004; Shrestha 2004)<sup>1</sup>. Macro-level studies on gender relations also corroborate the argument that gender relations are unequal in Nepal; these inequalities are evident in gender disparities in men and women's human development performance, for example; and gender-based exclusions are rooted in the legal, social and political institutions of Nepal (Acharya and Bennett 1983; Shakti 1995; ADB 1999; UNDP 2004; DFID/WorldBank 2006). At the same time, the plethora of rich, context-specific literature on gender relations in Nepal suggests that women are neither a homogenous category nor are they uniformly marginalized. Instead, women are positioned differently according to the caste, ethnicity, livelihood and the changing socio-political context in which they live (Jones and Jones 1976; Acharya and Bennett 1981; March 1983; Bista 1990; Fricke, Thornton et al. 1990; Gray 1991; Kondos

1991; Thompson 1993; Fricke 1994; Gray 1995; Watkins 1996; Bennett 2002; Luintel 2002; March 2002; Kondos 2004; Rankin 2004). However, the gender and community forestry literature rarely engages with these context-specific analyses of gender relations. And in this regards, systematic analysis of how gender relations are constituted in specific socio-political context and the interrelationship between community forestry processes (formation, functioning, and change) and gender relations at the local level are lagging behind.

*Third*, questions of how community forestry policies, external actors and interventions interact with and influence gender relations and community forestry governance at the local level remains under-investigated.<sup>2</sup> This is important as community forestry has historically included a myriad of actors (state, donors and increasingly CBOs and NGOs) and interventions. Understanding how these actors and interventions interact and influence local level institutions and gender dynamics serves to inform academic debates, and gender and natural resource governance policies.

### **1.3 Research Question, Arguments and Objectives**

In light of the above changes in the community forestry policy making arena and the state of the academic literature on gender and community forestry in the middle hills of Nepal, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the interrelationships between gender relations and local institutions of community forestry governance?*
- 2) How do external actors, in turn, interact and influence institutions and gender dynamics?*

The primary concern of this thesis is to investigate the interrelationships between gender relations and local institutions of community forestry governance. In this respect, my research examines and explicates how gender relations, in the way they are constituted at the local, shape and inform the formation, functioning and change in institutions. And how do these institutional processes in turn, shape gender relations. Because local level institutions of community forestry are often supported by external actors - state, development organizations and increasingly civil society organizations – I also examine how such interventions have in turn, interacted with local level community forestry processes and gender relations. The study of gender relations, local institutions of community forestry governance, and external intervention in the context of community forestry are all researched in the context of Middle Hills in Nepal

My research argues that the institutions governing CFUGs are ‘embedded’ in existing gender relations, intra and extra-household gender relations demarcate the terms under which men and women enter, interact and influence institutions governing CFUGs. Multiple and overlapping institutions influence natural resource governance at the local levels. In other words, parallel social institutions are drawn upon to mediate institutions which in turn are influenced by existing ‘distribution of power’ amongst genders and the field-level forestry staff’s dual relationship between the state (i.e., District Forest Office) and the CFUGs.

The objectives of my research are to inform and contribute to the academic and policy literature on gender and community forestry in Nepal as well the broader literature on gender and natural resource governance. The research also seeks to inform the on-going attempts to incorporate and address gender and social equity issues in community forestry in Nepal.

## **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

In order to argue the above and address my research questions, my thesis is divided into eight chapters. The following is an overview of the structure of the thesis, my major arguments in each of the chapters, and how these in turn, answer and contribute to the research questions and objectives.

### Chapter Two: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Chapter two discusses the major theoretical understandings and debates in the broader literature on gender and natural resource governance that this study engages with, draws from and builds on. In particular, I focus on three major strands of literature: gender and environment, gender and intra/extra household analysis; and local institutions of natural resource governance.

- Gender and environment literature encapsulates debates on why gender relations matter for natural resource governance. On one hand, WED/Ecofeminists argue women have a special relationship with nature and special interest in sustainable management of natural resources. On the other hand, Gender, Environment and Development Scholars argue gender relations need to be contextualized and gender politics in natural resource governance needs to be attended to.

- The literature on gender and household incorporates considerable debates on how to conceptualize gender relations at the household level. The view of the household as a 'unitary model' have been largely rejected for ignoring gender inequalities at the intra-household level and disregarding how household relations are informed and shaped by the extra-household domain. However, debates still remain with regards to how to conceptualize intra-household relations as 'site of conflict' and/or balance between 'cooperation and conflict'. These understandings and debates have in turn, percolated to number of gender issues such as gender division of labor, intra-household allocation of resources and more.
- Theoretical debates on 'local institutions' are primarily concerned with issues surrounding collective governance of natural resources at the local level. Institutions are understood as rules and norms that govern access to resources. There are two distinct approaches and normative commitments within this literature. The 'Common Property Resource' literature focuses on sustainable management of natural resources and argues that rational individuals can govern resources collectively if the property structures and incentives are right. In contrast, what I would call the 'political and embedded approach' to institutions focuses on understanding the 'politics' of natural resource governance and how institutions are embedded in prevailing societal relations from a broad development perspective.

I critically examine these three strands of literature in the chapter and provide rationale for situating my thesis in a particular debate, and/or building on various approaches. I locate my research within the Gender, Environment and Development (GED) scholarship with its emphasis on: understanding how gender relations are constituted in specific historical contexts and how these relations, in turn, shapes men and women's entry, voice and influence on the governance of natural resources at the local level. Drawing from the gender and intra/extra-household literature, I point to the importance of understanding household and extra-household analysis; to conceptualize the household as a site of 'cooperation and conflict'; and of explicating and analyzing gender relations through various socio-cultural practices (such as marriage practices, gender division of labor, intra-household allocation of resources) and the ideas, values and representations they embody. Finally, 'local institutions' of natural resource governance is important to understand and analyze for they constitute the rules and norms that govern access to natural resources. I point to the importance of building on Arun Agrawal and Clark Gibson's (1999) framework for institutional analysis to

understand gendered politics in the formation, functioning and change in institutions. The framework also allows for analysis of the 'interface point' between external agents and local users to understand the role of external actors and policies in institutional processes and gender dynamics.

### Chapter Three: Research methods and Reflections on Methodology & Context

Given the above conceptual framework, in this chapter I discuss the methodological framework I employed to examine my research questions. The chapter outlines the combination of qualitative research methods I employed at various levels – local, district, and national- to conduct my analysis of: (a) gender relations in two field sites (Gharmi and Bhatpole); (b) gender analysis of community forestry institutions; (c) interface between extension agents and local users in translating these policies into practice. Because my research is concerned with questions of power and politics in gender relations and local institutions, engaging with questions of 'reflexivity' and 'positionality' were crucial in both conducting the research as well as analyzing the empirical data I collected. The chapter engages with these issues in greater detail and also includes my reflections on conducting research in the context of the ongoing conflict in Nepal.

### Chapter Four: History of Forestry Policies in the Middle Hills of Nepal

This chapter discusses the evolution of forestry policies in the middle hills of Nepal which sets the stage for discussions on the recent focus on gender and social equity policies in community forestry, and the national level context for my empirical research on gender and institutions of community forestry governance in the two empirical studies (Bhatpole and Gharmi). I argue that international discourses on natural resource governance together with the politico-economic landscape of Nepal have historically played a crucial role in shaping forestry policies in the middle hills. I discuss how the current focus on gender and social equity in community forestry policies must be understood within the larger context of the evolution of forestry policies. I highlight the role of international discourses on 'governance' and 'mainstreaming of gender', on the one hand, the political developments in the country and the ongoing efforts at more inclusive nation-building, on the other hand, that underpin the ongoing attempts to formulate gender and social equity policy in community forestry.

Chapters Five - Eight: Gender & Institutions in Gharmi and Bhatpole

My empirical research is premised on two research sites - Tamangs in Bhatpole and the Biswa-Karmas in Gharmi. The Tamangs are the largest ethnic minorities whereas the 'Biswa-Karmas' are low-castes/Dalits. (Refer to Appendix 1 for Maps of Bhatpole and Gharmi).

Chapter Five and Seven examines and explicates how gender relations are constituted, contested and re-constituted in Bhatpole and Gharmi. I argue in Bhatpole (Chapter Five), gender relations between men and women were not inherently unequal as much as inequalities emanated from gender biases in the markets for Tamang labor. These inequalities in turn, percolated to the intra-household level and created inequalities between men and women. Far from being passive victims of gender inequalities, women have also collaborated with one another to mitigate and re-define gender relations. In Gharmi (Chapter Seven), in contrast, I argue gender relations were constituted by the interplay between socio-cultural practices, caste and the changing context of male out-migration. Socio-cultural practices, in interaction with caste and male out-migration (seasonal), created unequal relations between men and women. Women also reproduced these inequalities in overt and covert ways. The changing context of male out-migration have, however, altered these gendered dynamics and created new forms of autonomy for women with male migrants abroad. These chapters point to how caste, ethnicity, life-cycle processes, and opportunities and constraints beyond the household cross cut with gender relations and situate women in multiple and dynamic ways. These chapters contribute to the objective of the thesis by examining how intra and extra-household gender relations are constituted in Bhatpole and Gharmi.

In Chapter Six and Eight, I discuss how these gender relations have informed and shaped the formation, functioning and change in local institutions of natural resource governance in Bhatpole and Gharmi. In Chapter Six, I demonstrate that Tamang women of Bhatpole were at the forefront of promoting and supporting community forestry in the village and formulating informal institutions to collectively govern resources. I argue these gender dynamics in community forestry governance needs to be understood in the context of gender egalitarian practices and norms that enable women considerable autonomy in their lives; material inequalities between men and women and its implications for access to forest resources; and women's collective agency in mitigating and re-defining gender inequalities. In Chapter Seven, I demonstrate that the history of community forestry was simultaneously a struggle against caste-based discrimination with senior and powerful *Biswa-Karma* (low-caste

men) men at the forefront of politicizing and maintaining the struggle. When community forestry was handed over to the low-castes, the forests came to symbolize and legitimize village-based authority and influence. Institutional processes were therefore, monopolized by senior men and largely excluded women. In this respect, these two chapters serve to explicate my research concerns on the interrelationship between gender relations and local institutions. The chapters argue and demonstrate that prevailing gender relations demarcate men and women's entry, interaction and influence in institutional processes.

Furthermore, these chapters also demonstrate how external actors have interacted and influenced the institutional processes. In Chapter Six on gender and institutions in Bhatpole, I demonstrate that the District Forest Office – Kavre (DFO-K) had not prioritized Bhatpole, and the 'interface' between forest officials and local users were 'disembedded' and 'autonomous'. Consequently, the DFO-K formulated a set of formal institutions that were largely disjointed from the informal ones women had collectively formulated. I demonstrated how these disjunctures carried on in institutional functioning, and even when the DFO-K had introduced policies to include gender issues in its support to CFUGs. In comparison, in Chapter 8 on gender and institutions in Gharmi, I demonstrate the District Forest Office – Kaski (DFO-KI) had a clear mandate to handover forests to the local users who were residing closest to the forests and were 'embedded' in the caste-based politics in the village. Consequently, they arbitrated the conflict over community forestry and handed over the community forests to the low-castes. In institutional change, I demonstrate that Federation of Community Forestry User Groups (FECOFUN), sub-contracted by the DFO-KI to facilitate the users of Gharmi, had a policy to prioritize gender and social equity issues in the CFUGs it facilitated. Furthermore, the FECOFUN extension agents were 'embedded' in the gendered context in Gharmi and strategically negotiated with the powerful, senior men to initiate gender inclusive changes in institutions of community forestry. In both cases, I discuss how these external interventions were in turn, re-negotiated at the local level and re-shaped by prevailing gender relations. In this respect, the above discussions highlight how multiple and overlapping institutions influence natural resource governance at the local levels. In other words, parallel social institutions are drawn upon to mediate institutions which in turn are influenced by existing 'distribution of power' amongst genders and the field-level agent's dual relationship between the organizations they represent (i.e., District Forest Offices and FECOFUN) and the CFUGs.

## Chapter Nine: Conclusion, Informing Theory and Policy

The conclusion of the thesis re-collects how my research findings in the two empirical studies serve to address the research questions and objectives of this study. The chapter discusses how my empirical findings can inform the academic debates, theoretical literature on gender and natural resource governance. The chapter also reserves considerable space to discuss how my research findings can inform the ongoing attempts to formulate gender and social equity policy in community forestry in Nepal.



## ~ Chapter Two ~

### 2 Literature Review & Conceptual Framework: Gender and Institutions of Natural Resource Governance

The evolution of development theory and practice provides a rich scholarship on how to govern natural resources. In the 1970s and 1980s, the focus on natural resources was primarily concerned with participation and sustainable management of the environment. But recently and increasingly, informed and influenced by the growing body of development research and practice, multitude of development concerns such as social exclusion, decentralization, public-private partnerships, aid politics amongst others have also percolated to the study of natural resource governance. Similarly, gender related concerns are occupying an equally prominent space within this burgeoning literature.

In light of the above, my research examines and explicates the politics of community forestry governance at the local level from a gender perspective. It examines how and why gender relations in specific historical contexts matter for the governance of community forestry at the local level. Because ‘community forestry’ in Nepal is fundamentally about partnership between the state, development organizations and local users in the governance of forests, my research also considers how these extra-local actors influence the gender dynamics in the governance of community forestry. The conceptual framework for conducting my research draws from and builds on the following three strands of literature: gender and environment; local institutions of natural resource governance; and gender and intra/extra-household analysis.

First, the gender and environment literature is dominated by three main approaches: Women, Environment and Development (WED) and Ecofeminism, on the one hand, and Gender, Environment and Development (GED), on the other hand. WED & Ecofeminism were the first to highlight that gender issues matter for natural resource governance. However, they assumed that women have a special relationship with the environment and a special interest in and ability to govern natural resources. Such assumptions have been questioned and problematized by the Gender, Environment and Development literature which points to understanding ‘men’ and ‘women’ and the relations between the two in specific contexts; how gender relations in turn shape and influence men and women’s interests in natural

resource governance; and the gender politics in natural resource governance at the local level. Furthermore, the GED approach also suggests analyzing policies and intervention in natural resource governance and how these in turn influence gender dynamics at the local level.

Second, gender relations can be understood as relations between men and women that are shaped by socio-cultural practices, ideas and representations in specific contexts. Household is widely understood as a primary site for gender analysis. The theoretical debates within the gender and development literature are concerned with how to conceptualize the household. While some view the household as a site of altruism, others call for conceptualizing the household as a site of 'cooperation and conflict' and the linkages between household and extra-household relations for gender analysis.

Third, theoretical debates on 'local institutions' are primarily concerned with issues surrounding collective governance of natural resources at the local level. Institutions are understood as rules and norms that govern access to resources. There are two distinct approaches and normative commitments within this literature. The 'Common Property Resource' literature focuses on sustainable governance of natural resources and argues that rational individuals can govern resources collectively if the property structures and incentives are right. In contrast, what can be called the 'political and embedded institutions' literature focuses on understanding the 'politics' of natural resource governance, how institutions are embedded in prevailing societal relations, and is concerned with broader development outcomes of institutions.

In light of the above, my research examines and explicates how community forestry institutions are formed, function and change from a gender perspective. It examines the interrelationship between gender relations and these institutional processes, and the role of external actors and interventions in these dynamics. In particular, I develop the conceptual framework for this research from the insights in the Gender, Environment and Development literature; gender relations in the household and extra-household level; and draw from and build on Agrawal and Gibsons' (1999) approach to institutional analysis of natural resource governance from a gender perspective. The subsequent sections will discuss the theoretical debates in these three strands of literatures, and how they have informed my research.

This chapter is divided into three major parts. I will begin by discussing the major debates within the gender literature pertaining to environmental issues and discuss the rationale for locating my research within the Gender, Environment and Development literature. This will be followed by various conceptualizations of gender and power that have informed my study, and the importance of understanding household and extra-household relations for gender analysis. Finally, I will discuss the major debates within the common property and institutions literature from a gender perspective, and point to the importance of building on and drawing from Arun Agrawal and Clark Gibson's (1999) framework for institutional analysis to inform my study on gender and institutions of community forestry governance.

## **2.1 Approaches to Understanding Gender issues in Environment:**

The increasing attention to gender issues in natural resource governance can be attributed to the failure of environmental policies and practices in incorporating women and concerns over women's position in the developing countries. The literature on gender and NRG can be broadly divided into three main approaches: Ecofeminism, Women Environment & Development (WED), and Gender Environment and Development (GED). While each approach posits that gender relations matter for the study of natural resource governance, there exists considerable disagreement on conceptualizing 'gender relations' and how gender relations, in turn influence the governance of resources.

In this section, I critically examine the major tenets of each of the three approaches and locate my research within the GED approach. I highlight the similarities in WED and Ecofeminism approaches. Ecofeminism views gender relations and the importance of including women in natural resource governance from a radical and ideological perspective. WED advocates for incorporating women in natural resource governance from a socially constructed approach. Nevertheless, both suggest 'women have a special relationship with the environment' and that women's interests are intertwined with the sustainable management of resources. I argue Ecofeminism/WED provide a simplistic understanding of gender relations, and the ways in which these relations in turn, shape men and women's (conflicting, overlapping and dynamic) interests and involvement in Natural Resource Governance (NRG). In light of this, I locate my research in the GED approach which advocates contextualizing gender relations; how these in turn inform men and women's interests and involvement in natural resource governance; and policies and practices in natural resource governance.

In order to present the above, this section is divided into three main components. I begin by briefly outlining the major tenets of Ecofeminism and WED, and the complementarities that exist between the two approaches. I follow this with a critique of the underlying assumptions of WED and Ecofeminism. I then introduce the GED literature and justify the importance of locating this research on gender and natural resource governance within the GED approach.

### ***2.1.1 Women & Nature: Overview & Complementarities between WED and Ecofeminism***

Ecofeminism is a movement that connects the exploitation of and degradation of the natural world with the subordination and oppression of women and non-western societies. It advocates for a radical development alternative centering on diversity, nurturing, holism and environmental justice (Ortner 1974; Shiva and Bandyopandhyay 1987; Merchant 1989; Shiva 1989; Mies and Shiva 1993). It emerged from western feminist and ecology movements against environmental destruction in the 1970s and 1980s. And it has gained international recognition through vocal voices from the Global South, and particularly those from Vandana Shiva (Bradiotti, E. Charkiwick et al. 1994). The following provides a brief overview of the Ecofeminist literature and the arguments presented by Vandana Shiva in particular.

Ecofeminists generally perceive women share a ‘special relationship’ with the environment, and women’s interests and those of environmental protection are intertwined. However, the basis in which this relationship is justified differs. Some ecofeminists base the relationship in the similarities between nature and women’s biological capacity to bear life (Ortner 1974) while others consider women and nature’s shared exploitation by patriarchal structures of dominance as important (Merchant 1989). Vandana Shiva, an advocate of ecofeminism in the global south, argues that the plight of women and nature in the Third World are comparable.

Drawing from her work in India, Shiva argues that the imposition of western development models, modern science and global forces of capitalist patriarchy have eroded the ‘feminine principle’ in pre-colonial India and exploited both women and nature. Her understanding of the ‘feminine principle’ derives from ‘*prakriti*’ or living force in Hindu philosophy which, she views, governed men’s and women’s relationship with each other and

with nature in pre-colonial India. She also argues women in the Third World are dependent on nature for sustenance of themselves, their families and societies. This has allowed women to possess extensive knowledge about how to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between environment and humans. Hence, the destruction of nature is also destruction of women's sources for 'staying alive'. "Women and nature are intimately related, and their domination and liberation similarly linked. The women's and ecology movements are therefore one, and are primarily counter trends to patriarchal maldevelopment" (Shiva 1989: 67). In a much celebrated work amongst the ecofeminists, Shiva and Mies (1993) point to grass-root struggles throughout the world to demonstrate the interlinkages between women's and ecology movement.

Women, Environment and Development (WED) is a strand of Women in Development (WID) within the broader development theories and practices. WID sought to make women's issues relevant to development by showing positive synergies between investing in women and its benefits for economic development. Its premise was that the 'trickle down' approach to development was only targeting men, often to the detriment of women's position in society (Bradiotti, E. Charkiwick et al. 1994; Razavi and Miller 1995). Liberal feminists such as Ester Boserup (Boserup 1970) legitimized the approach by highlighting the positive correlation between women's status vis-à-vis men and their role in the productive sector<sup>3</sup>. WID is premised on the sexual division of labour and conceptualizes women as 'productive members of society'. Its advocates claim that integrating women into development can enhance the twin goal of efficiency and equity. Investing on women's productive roles within and beyond the household leads to efficient use of scarce resources in development. This in turn will enhance women's status in both domains.

Like WID, WED criticizes natural resource governance policies and practices for ignoring women, is premised on the gender division of labour, and conceptualizes women as having a 'special relationship with natural resources'.

There has been an evolution of WED thought with regards to why it is problematic to ignore women in NRG. In the early 1980s, women were conceptualized as 'victims of environmental degradation'. Images of Third World women's workload increasing as a consequence of environmental degradation were popularized. In the 1990s, attention shifted into viewing women as major 'actors' in environmental protection and rehabilitation, and in

celebrating women's role within the sexual division of labour (Bradiotti, E. Charkiwick et al. 1994).

Subscribers of the WED paradigm view that in most rural areas, the sexual division of labour between men and women are such that women are more dependent on natural resources than men. Women's reproductive and productive role as gatherers of fuelwood for domestic consumption and as subsistence cultivators brings them closer to the environment on a daily basis, whereas men are mainly engaged in cash production for the market. And precisely because of this separation of sexual division of labour, women do not only have a 'special interest' in ensuring the sustainability of the environment, but have also acquired considerable knowledge about the environment. These in turn, have made women crucial actors in natural resource governance (Dankelman and Davidson 1988). As Bradiotti and Charkiwick state (1994: pp.97) for WED, "Women are seen as the answer to environmental crisis; women have the solutions; they are privileged knowers of natural processes". By integrating women into natural resource governance policies and practices, women's requirement for resources can be met. Furthermore, women's knowledge and management abilities can be tapped into for the efficient management of resources.

Despite the above differences in approaches of Ecofeminism and WED, both conceptualize women as having a 'special relationship' with the environment and assume it is in women's interest to manage resource sustainably. In this respect, both portray 'women's interest as intertwined with those of sustainable resource management. Ecofeminism presents an ideological/spiritual basis for maintaining women's inherently close relationship to nature. WED stresses on the socially-constructed nature of women's roles in resource use, but assumes women in their current roles are more equipped and interested in NRG. The fact that Ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva have mobilized support for the WED thinking in NRG (Bradiotti, E. Charkiwick et al. 1994) further reinforces the complementarities between the two approaches.

### ***2.1.2 Limitations of Ecofeminism and WED:***

It is commendable that WED and Ecofeminism were the first to successfully advocate for the inclusion of women in environmental programs and policies (Joekes, Green et al. 1996). WED and Ecofeminism provides the meeting ground between equity and efficiency concerns in development. Ecofeminism serves as the emotive basis for incorporating women

in NRG, while WED appeals to those privileging efficient outcomes of NRG intervention. Because of the entrenched nature of gendered politics in most countries, it has been easier to justify women's inclusion on the basis of increasing 'efficiency' of environmental and development policies (Bradiotti, E. Charkiwick et al. 1994).

Nevertheless, WED and Ecofeminists provide a reductionist approach for understanding and explicating the links between gender and natural resource governance, and may have counterproductive consequences if and when applied to inform gender policy in natural resource governance. By drawing on feminist critiques, I will focus on the following limitations of the WED and Ecofeminist assumptions: historical and material basis for 'women's special relationship with the environment'; gender division of labour; portrayal of 'women' as a homogenous category; implications of WED and Ecofeminism for policy and women's wellbeing.

The argument put forward by Ecofeminists in general and Vandana Shiva in particular that women have a 'special relationship' with nature is questionable from a historical perspective. Bina Agarwal (1997a) problematizes Shiva's assumption that the 'feminine principle' (derived from Hindu philosophy celebrating harmony and non-hierarchy between men, women and nature) was privileged in pre-colonial Indian societies. Agarwal argues pre-colonial societies under Mughal rule, for instance, were highly class-caste-gender stratified. These differences would have impinged on the abilities of different social groups (including women's) ability to gain access to resources. The extent to which Shiva's philosophy of harmony would have guided relations between men and women or relations between people and nature is problematic. It is highly unlikely that a multitude of ethnic and religious groupings, with several coexisting and conflicting discourses that impinge on gender relations, uniformly followed a Hindu philosophy.

Both WED and Ecofeminism employ a simplistic understanding of 'gender division' of labour to support their argument that 'women have a special relationship with nature'. The focus is on women's current work and responsibilities, usually taking these as starting point without subjugating further inquiry. This provides a very rigid and static way of conceptualizing gender division of labour. Women's labour often exist in dynamic interaction with men's labour in both productive and reproductive domains (Leach 1992; Zwartveen 1997). And by invisibilizing men, WED and Ecofeminism fail to understand the realities of

women in the ground and how gender division of labor are in turn subject to negotiation and change (Cleaver 1998). Moreover, even when there is a strict division of labour between men and women, gender division of labour also refers to norms, values, and symbols attached to types of work in both the domestic and public sphere. As such, these can play a role in either maintaining unequal relations between men and women and/or restricting women's access to alternative opportunities (Joeke, Green et al. 1996). As Meera Nanda aptly points out "...romanticizing women's invisible work, 'in partnership with nature', [these discourses] help prevent a critical analysis of the repressive social structures that make women responsible for their work" (Jewitt 2000: pp.980). Instead of basing development policies and projects to understand why women in particular contexts are more likely to get involved in certain environmental protection activities, these discourses simply assume that women are involved because they have a "special relationship" with the environment. They therefore take a band-aid approach to fitting women within existing structures without challenging the structures of gender inequality.

WED and Ecofeminism assume 'women' by virtue of their sex are a homogeneous group, and women's environmental interests are common and synonymous with environmental protection. However, socially grounded scholarship on gender relations in developing countries have demonstrated that women, like men, are everywhere stratified by caste, class, ethnicity, life-cycle processes and other axis of differences (Cornwall 2003). Similarly, women's relationship with the environment is mediated by their livelihoods, life-cycle processes, and the contexts in which environmental relationship are nested (Jackson 1993a; Jackson 1993b). For instance, Crow and Sultana, in their analysis of gender and access to water in Bangladesh, demonstrate how men and women's access to and security over water in Bangladesh are defined by ownership of land, market access, access to common property, and state-backed provision (Crow and Sultana 2002). Along similar lines, feminist scholarship on gender and property rights, for instance, suggest that women can be perpetrators of environmental degradation if they do not have secure property rights and the associated incentives to invest in land (Agarwal 1994a; Agarwal 1994b; Meinzen-Dick, Brown et al. 1997). Instead of assuming that 'commonalities' exist amongst women, and in relation to environment, a more fruitful inquiry would be to examine the historical and socio-political context through which women come together as a group to protect and manage the environment (Leach 2007).



Furthermore, WED/Ecofeminists assume women's role within the sexual division of labor have allowed women to accumulate special knowledge of the environment. This knowledge, in turn, can be harnessed to help towards sustainable governance of resources. However, I argue such a deterministic link between gender division of labor, knowledge, and environmental governance is questionable and ignores the gender politics in accumulating and articulating environmental knowledge (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter et al. 1996). For instance, Jewitt's empirical study in Jharkhand, India finds that many facets of gender divisions of labour (such as those confining women to domestic chores and preventing women from owning land) coupled with socio-cultural restrictions on women's mobility (such as the practice of purdah and other gender norms restricting women's access to public domains) prevented women from gaining, using and voicing environmental knowledge (Jewitt 2000).

Along similar lines and on the politics of natural resource governance at the local level, Jackson (1993b) and Agarwal (2001) suggests that the 'use' of natural resources' is often fundamentally different from the 'governance' of resources. Women may use and depend on natural resources, but this does not necessarily translate into women having voice and influence on the decisions related to the governance of these resources. As I will point out in Section 2.3, the plethora of scholarship on institutions and politics of natural resource governance at the local level suggests existing distribution of power between men and women defines women's entry, voice, and influence in the governance of resources.

WED/Ecofeminist discourses have informed and influenced policies and projects pertaining to natural resource governance both at the national and international levels. For instance, Green and Baden (1995) demonstrate how the WED thinking has influenced World Bank and UNCED's policies towards integrating 'women' into water resource governance. Locke (1999) finds that Joint Forest Management policies in India seek to include women in forest governance because of the nature of women's work. Nevertheless, Melissa Leach (2007) surveys the evolution of natural resource governance policies and finds that recently and increasingly Ecofeminist and WED 'fables' that once dominated the rationale for including women are being questioned and abandoned in favor of more relational and rights-based approaches. But these shifts in policy levels may not have percolated to practice, in natural resource governance programs and projects. Similarly, I will discuss in Chapter 3 how WED and Ecofeminist discourses have also informed gender policies and practice in the context of community forestry in Nepal.

Empirical studies have shown that outcomes of operationalizing WED and Ecofeminist assumption in NRG have not only fallen short of expectations, but they have also been counterproductive for women. Some of the problems encountered in implementing WED/Ecofeminism included: women were added into NRG projects and policies without any significant changes in women's position in the household and the community (Leach 1992; Regmi and Fawcett 1999); women's work burden increased without women gaining significant control over the governance of natural resources (Mearns 1995); a focus on women's only projects have been counterproductive as it disregarded social hierarchy among women (Joeke, Green et al. 1996).

### ***2.1.3 Gender, Environment and Development: An Alternative Approach***

The Gender, Environment and Development (GED), a strand of Gender and Development (GAD)<sup>4</sup>, is vast and incorporates various forms of feminist thoughts. 'Feminist environmentalists', most notably Bina Agarwal, focus on the "...lived material relationship with nature and their specific forms of interaction with and dependence on natural resources" (Agarwal 1997a: 190). For instance, Agarwal (2001) provides a 'descriptive analytical' framework to understand and explicate the intra and extra-household level gendered constraints poor women in South Asia face in participating in community level resource management organizations.

Ethnographic research instead suggests women and men interact within specific gender relations and processes concerning the use of resources. Instead of finding commonalities between women, Jackson (1993a; 1993b) emphasizes understanding women's relation to the environment as variable and complex, mediated by a number of contextual factors and changes such as differences in livelihood system, class and life-cycle processes, gendered subjectivities, structure of property rights and incentives amongst others. For instance, Melissa Leach suggests gender and environment linkages amongst the Mende-speaking people of Gola, Sierra Leone existed in the historical context of divisions and relations of labor and land amidst changing rural economy in Gola (Leach 1992; Leach 1995).

On a different note, 'feminist political ecologist' emphasize the significance of gendered knowledge, and the link between cultural and resource use practices (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter et al. 1996). For instance, Sarah Jewitt (2000) analyzes marriage practice and intra-household relations in Jharkand and examines how these impinge on men and women's

abilities to accumulate and vocalize agro-ecological knowledge. Still others like Andrea Nightingale's (2003) study on community forestry in Western Nepal have focused on nature-society relations and the gendered politics in land use and their ecological effects.

While the above mentioned scholars focus on gender and environment issues at the local level, others take a more development policy and interventionist perspectives. Green and Badden (1995), emphasize the importance of unpacking gendered assumptions in policies and projects for governing environmental resources at the macro level. For instance, Meinzen-Dick, Brown et al. (1997) question assumptions behind 'community' in community-based resource governance in South Asia and highlight the lack of attention to gender in such approaches. Even when gender issues are addressed, Catherine Locke (1999) examines Joint Forest Management policies in India from a gender perspective, and discovers much of the assumptions are couched in ecofeminist and WED discourses. On a different note all together, Cecile Jackson (1997; 1998) suggests that environmental policies cannot be conceptualized as a linear process and that the gendered outcomes of these policies depend much upon the interactions and relationships between field workers and the local people at the interface point.

Notwithstanding differences in nature and scale of analysis, there are also underlying commonalities in the above discussed approaches. The primary concern for all these scholars is with women and environment. But unlike Ecofeminism and WED, the focus is on 'gender' analysis grounded in the social context of 'gender relations' for environmental research and policy-making (Leach et al. 1998). Gender relations can understood as the relations of power between women and men which are revealed in a range of practices, ideas and representations (Agarwal 1994a). There is widespread agreement within the GED scholarship that gender relations at the intra and extra-household levels are historically and contextually variable and socially and politically complex (Agrawal 2005). Everywhere, gender is cross cut by other social relations such as class, caste, ethnicity, and life-cycle processes (Cornwall 2003; Momsen 2005). As such gender relations need to be understood within specific societies and through social-political processes and not apriori on gender alone.

Instead of assuming a deterministic link between women and environment, the GED scholars seek to insert material, political-economic, and cultural processes into their analysis of gender and environment (Agrawal 2005). GED does not assume that women, by virtue of

their sex, have a distinct interest in NRG. The emphasis is on understanding how gender relations are constituted and contested in specific historical contexts, and how these relations in turn translate into men and women's differential and overlapping perceptions, interests, voice and influence in the governance of resources.

In this respect, the GED scholarship departs from and provides a more critical alternative to the WED and Ecofeminism discourses in significant ways. In particular, the GED scholarship has informed this thesis on gender and community forestry in Nepal in the following ways: (1) the importance of understanding 'men' and 'women' and the relations between the two at the household and extra-household levels and in specific historical contexts; (2) how these gender relations in turn shape and influence men and women's incentives, participation and stake in natural resource governance; (3) the gender politics in natural resource governance at the local level and macro-levels.

Notwithstanding these commendable contributions of the GED research on problematizing and moving beyond WED and Ecofeminism, the focus of GED scholarship has been on the implications of processes and outcomes of environmental governance for gender relations. As Arun Agrawal (2005) points out, feminist environmentalists have inadequately studied how participation in environmental governance also shapes gender and environmental subjectivities. His study on forest governance in Kumaon, India found that men and women's participation in forest regulation shaped their perceptions, attitudes and practice towards forests. Agrawal's argument is reflected by Anne Marie Goetz in the broader gender and development literature. Goetz argues that men and women's participation at the household and extra-household level (such as community forestry) are conditioned by pre-existing gender relations. But institutions at the household and extra-household levels also shape gender subjectivities. Along similar lines, my research considers how gender relations influence men and women involvement in community forestry, and in turn, how formal and informal institutions of community forestry also re-shape gendered experiences with forest governance.

## **2.2 Conceptualizing Gender Relations & Gender Analysis of Intra and Extra-Household Levels**

Gender relations, for the purposes of this thesis, are understood to be relations of power between women and men, which are revealed in a range of practices, ideas and

representations. As such, 'power' is the key to understanding how gender relations are constituted, contested and reconstituted in societies. This section focuses on conceptualizing gender relations at the household and extra-household levels which are widely recognized as the primary sites for gender analysis.

I will begin by discussing the major conceptualizations of power that has informed this thesis. I argue that instead of privileging one approach of power against another, a multi-dimensional understanding of power needs to be celebrated. Power exhibits in conflict, consensus, and resistance and agency. Furthermore, I argue 'gender' cross cuts with other social relations such that men and women are positioned in multiple ways in any given context.

I identify and critically discuss the main approaches to household analysis (unitary models to households as a site of cooperation and conflict). I will argue that intra-household relations need to be understood as a site of 'cooperation and conflict', on the one hand. On the other hand, households are rarely bounded entities and the ways in which household relations are embedded in and informed through broader relations in the community and market needs to be understood and analyzed. Finally, I will discuss the importance of focusing on a number of socio-cultural practices - gender division of labor, marriage practices, and allocation of resources in particular - within and beyond the household to understand and analyze gender relations in specific historical contexts.

### ***2.2.1 Conceptualizing Power & Gender:***

'Power' remains a highly elusive and contested term to define within the gender and development literature in particular and in social and political theories in general. Instead of pinning down a precise definition for 'power', I provide a brief overview of some of the major conceptualizations of power that have informed gender and development scholars as well as my understanding and analysis of gender and power in my empirical research (Bhatpole and Gharmi).

There are three important schools of thought on power: structuralist, post-structuralist and those who call for a meeting ground between the two. Furthermore, within and between these divisions, a whole host of theoretical underpinnings are situated. When applied to gender and development, some scholars view women's lower status in many developing

countries can be explained in terms of 'false consciousness'; others call for examining the hidden dimensions of power and resistance amongst women; and still others point to the diffused ways in which power is exercised. I argue that 'power' needs to be understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that exhibits itself differently from one context to another.

- ***Power as Structure & Ideology:***

Steven Lukes (1974) provides one of the best accounts of the structural approaches to power in spite of being written over three decades ago. Gender and development scholars have been both influenced by and criticized Lukes in a number of ways.

Lukes identifies three distinctive conceptualizations of power. While the first two are drawn from the work of Dahl (1957) and Bachrach and Baratz (1962), the third is primarily Lukes' contribution to the study of power.

In the 'one-dimensional view' Lukes draws on the work of pluralists, such as Dahl (1957), who are concerned with observable behavior, primarily within the decision making processes. In this perspective, the person who prevails in the 'decision making process' is the one assumed to have most power. Direct conflict in preferences that are assumed to be consciously made is seen to be the best test of ability to affect outcomes. Lukes describes this as one-dimensional since direct conflict, whereby all parties come to the decision making arena, fully conscious of their own preferences and interests, is seen to be the only dynamic of power.

The two-dimensional view refers to the work of Bachrach and Baratz (1962) which calls for analyzing power through decisions and non-decisions. Non-decision is: "a decision that results in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge or interests of the decision making". This adds to the first dimension (pluralist view of power) by recognizing that power can also be exercised by constraining the scope of issues that comes to the decision making process in the first place. These 'issues' are in turn, ones that "involve[e] a genuine challenge to the resources of power or authority of those who currently dominate the process by which policy outputs in the system are determined" (Lukes 2005: pp.47-48). Such control over what is decisionable is maintained through the creation and enforcement of certain social norms. At the same time, in the 'two dimensional view of power', non-decisions are themselves seen as observable and as empirically measurable non-events. In this respect, power is only

recognized to be operating if there is a grievance between two actors or groups of actors. The stress, therefore, is still on observable conflict.

In the 'third dimension of power', Steven Lukes (2005) argues that the structural and ideological dimensions of power also need to be attended to along with observable conflict. In other words, power is exercised not merely by direct conflict between the powerful and the powerless, but also by social structures and the biases they embody to "...mobiliz[e], recreat[e] and reinforce[e] in ways that are neither consciously chosen nor the intended result of particular individual's choices" (Lukes 2005: pp. 41). He points to the importance of deconstructing the 'hidden politics' behind socially structured and culturally patterned behavior of groups that are reflected through these structures. Instead of focusing on conscious acts of the dominant to marginalize the less powerful, 'power over' the marginalized is exercised by preventing political issues from surfacing. Along with these structural dimensions, Lukes also embraces the idea that the marginalized have internalized their oppression. To put it differently, there is an objective, identifiable 'real interests', but the marginalized often internalize values and aspirations that are contrary to their real interests.

*Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?*

*(Lukes 2005: pp.27)*

The importance of Lukes' approach is that he highlights the multi-dimensionality (conflict and consensus) and ideological basis of power more appropriately than the former approaches alone allow for. In my empirical chapter on gender relations in Gharmi, I argue gender inequalities are maintained by how powerful senior men's interest prevail in the decision making process, and how certain 'key' issues related to women's involvement in community forestry, for example, are suppressed. Following Lukes', gendered power also operates through 'consensus' and at an 'ideological level' and are embedded in marriage practices, gender division of labor prescribing 'appropriate' roles and responsibilities to men and women etc.

Amartya Sen's (1990a) is perhaps the best known scholars who has focused on gender issues and has based his understanding of gender inequalities on Lukes' 'false consciousness'.

Sen argues women tend to be more 'altruistic' than men towards their family and particularly their children. But perceiving their personal interest as intertwined with those of their family may not necessarily be positive for the objective well-being of women. In this respect, following Lukes, he distinguishes between 'subjective' and 'objective' well being and suggests that one of the ways in which gender inequalities are sustained are through 'false consciousness' on the part of women. However, it is problematic to embrace (on philosophical and methodological grounds), as Haugaard (2002) puts it aptly, a conception of power that lends itself to conspiracy theories where large sections of the population believe a false truth which is in the interest of the powerful/dominant.

Nevertheless, Lukes understanding of power, and especially that of 'false or manipulated consensus', remains hugely contested and problematic within the gender and development scholarship. Notable gender and development scholars agree that 'ideological' and 'consensual' dimensions of power relations are important to understand and embrace. For instance, Bina Agarwal (1997b) highlights the importance of examining social norms and social perceptions (gender ideologies) for understanding how gender inequalities are constituted in societies. Both Naila Kabeer (1994) and Anne-Marie Goetz (1997) argue in favor of unpacking the ideological biases that maintain gender inequalities in both public and private institutions. However, these scholars strongly disagree with the idea that women do not know what their interests are. They suggest women are often forced to cooperate for various reasons such as when the rules of the game are loaded against them (Kandiyoti 1988), they lack of fall back options and face material constraints. For instance, Agarwal contends that:

*The overt appearance of compliance ("cast our eyes down") need not mean that women lack a correct perception of their best interests; rather it can reflect a survival strategy stemming from the constraints on their ability to act overtly in pursuit of those interests...Compliance need not imply complicity.*

*(Agarwal 1997b: p.24-25)*

Instead of conceptualizing power on the basis of 'false' and 'true' consciousness and/or on the dichotomy between the 'powerful' and the 'powerless', certain gender and development scholars have rightly proposed the importance of Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualization of 'doxa' for understanding the ideological dimension of power relations. 'Doxa' are the fundamental, taken-for granted, self-evident, common assumptions that inform an agent's actions and thoughts. Bourdieu suggests that these assumptions of social life can



actually be exploitative and help sustain systems of inequalities (Bourdieu 1977). At the same time, following Bourdieu, Agarwal (1997b) and Kabeer (1999) also argue that 'doxa' is not immutable. Contrast to 'doxa' is a 'field of opinion, of that which is explicitly questioned', 'the locus of confrontation of competing discourses' (Agarwal 1997b: p.15). In other words, while 'doxa' can constrain human action, individuals can also challenge the arbitrariness of its foundations and push 'doxa'.

As Kabeer notes, the benefit of employing 'doxa' as a theoretical lens to study gender and power is that it shifts attention from the dichotomy between false and authentic consciousness, and simultaneously recognizes the constraints that individuals face. And in pointing to the potential shifts from doxa to 'locus of competing discourses', a highly dynamic conceptualization of power is presented. This is in sharp contrast to the static notion of power and power relations presented by the other theories.

*Bourdieu suggests that as long as the subjective assessments are largely congruent with the objective possibilities available, the world of doxa remains intact. The passage from 'doxa' to discourse, a more critical consciousness, only becomes possible when competing ways of 'being and doing' become available as material and cultural possibilities, so 'common sense' propositions of culture begin to lose their 'naturalized character', revealing the arbitrariness of the given social order. The availability of alternatives at the discursive level, of being able to imagine at least the possibility of having chosen differently, is thus crucial to the emergence of critical consciousness, the process by which people move from a position of questioning acceptance of the social order to a more critical perspective.*

*(Kabeer 1999: p.441)*

In my study, I argue women of Gharmi and Bhatpole are purposeful actors who are constrained by structures of varying flexibility. But there are certain facets of gender relations, such as the ambivalent treatment of menstrual blood in the case of Gharmi (see section 7.4) that are taken for granted, not questioned, and serve to reinforce gender inequalities.

- ***Power as Agency and Resistance:***

Alternative to the above structural approaches to understanding 'power', James Scott (Scott 1976; Scott 1985; Scott 1990) has famously argued that 'domination' should not be looked upon as the only exercise of power. Power is also exercised through resistance. He therefore places individual 'agents' at the centre of his analysis, and examines ordinary forms of resistance, their symbolic and ideological underpinnings. In his influential book, *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott (1985) defines resistance as: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false

compliance, pilfering etc. Scott further distinguishes between ‘public transcript’ (open, public interactions between the powerful and powerless) and ‘hidden transcript’ (backstage critique of power holders) in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Scott 1990). In order to understand social systems of power relations, Scott argues it important to transcend complicity in the public arena, unpack hidden transcripts, and examine how and in what ways unequal relations are challenged and resisted.

Scott’s contribution to the study of power, and of conceptualizing the ‘powerless’ as possessing ‘power’ has received widespread applause within the political science and anthropology literature. Inspired by Scott, my research demonstrates the importance of viewing women of Gharmi and of Bhatpole as ‘actors’ with ‘agency’ (or the capacity to act independently and to make their own free choices), and unpacking their strategies and resistance in every-day life.

Notwithstanding these contributions, Scott’s work suffers from two central problems. First, the ethnographic on gender relations in Nepal suggests that women do not exhibit their agency by ‘resisting’ against the dominant but also by ‘conforming’ to gender inequalities and/or ‘finding room to maneuver; within existing inequalities (Cameron 1998; Bennett 2002). Similarly, in my empirical sections, I will discuss the ways which the low-caste/Dalit women of Gharmi were implicated in the reproduction of gender inequalities, and Tamang women collectively strategized to reduce their dependence on men whilst remaining within marital relations.

Furthermore, amongst those who more explicitly criticize Scott, Gupta (1992) warns us that focusing on and romanticizing resistance may be counterproductive and risk justifying oppression. Hayes et al.’s (1991) argue Scott assumes the dominant are only able to exercise coercive power and material constraints on the subordinated. The ruling elites are unable to penetrate the spheres of culture and ideology of the subordinated. Such an analysis does not consider how relations of power condition resistance itself. In the gender and development literature, for instance, Bina Agarwal (2001) recognizes the importance of women’s resistance in challenging structures of gender inequality (see her discussion on resistance against institutions of community forestry, for instance) but nevertheless also questions the effectiveness of ‘everyday’ resistance to be powerful tool for bringing about fundamental changes in power relations. Similarly, Cecile Jackson (1993b) in her discussion of the

‘Chipko’ movement in India argues women’s resistance against logging were often driven by and subscribed to the gender relations within the context in which women were resisting. Together, these authors suggest that the complexity and contradictory realities of everyday resistance. Although conflicts may be present in any given hegemony, these acts are often influenced by, exist within or subscribe to the logic of larger relations of power. Similarly in my analysis of gender relations in Gharmi (Chapter 7), I discuss how women’s covert resistance and strategies to maneuver around existing relations helped reinforce gender inequalities.

- ***Power as Decentered and Difference:***

Post-structural approaches to understanding power as promoted amongst others by Michael Foucault (1980) have gained considerable prominence within the gender and development literature. Foucault calls attention to examining the decentered and highly diffused nature of power relations. This is in sharp contrast to structuralist approaches to understanding power relations, through the oppressed/oppressor dichotomy. Rather than assuming that power is something that someone possesses while others merely submit to, Foucault suggests that power must be understood as circulating and operating through net-like organization in which individuals act, simultaneously undergoing and exercising power.

Foucault discusses the ‘diffused’ and ‘decentered’ nature of power relations through the politics behind knowledge and discourses. Structuralist see the relationship between power and knowledge as negative a one whereby power distorts knowledge (Haugaard 2002). For Foucault, in comparison, power and knowledge are essentially dependent upon one another:

*Basically in any given society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated or implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.*

*(Foucault 1980: pp. 93)*

Truth is therefore not seen as something beyond this world only reached by those able to liberate themselves from the world but as constructed within societies. Different societies have different ‘regimes of truth’ or ‘politics of truth’ which in turn, are discourses accepted as the truth.

Post-structuralism has profoundly influenced many feminists working on development issues. Amongst the more notable studies is Mohanty's (1988) use of discourse analysis to show how Third World women have been represented in the western feminist literature - as an undifferentiated, homogenous 'other'. While activists and feminist anthropologists have long been acknowledging difference, as Parpart (1993) notes, post-structuralism has popularized the focus on difference in contemporary gender and development literature. Consequently, feminist politics is increasingly viewed as plural, anti-essentialist, complex and multi-layered.

Gender and development scholars widely advocate the importance of focusing on the multiple ways in which women are situated in societies and the ways in which gender cross cuts with other social relations (Kandiyoti 1988; Leach 1992; Agarwal 1994a; Leach 1995; Razavi and Miller 1995; Goetz 1997; Kabeer 1997; Agarwal 1997a; Agarwal 1997b; Reeves and Baden 2000; Cornwall 2003). In other words, instead of essentializing gender relations, they point to the importance of disaggregating the category of 'men' and 'women', and examining the multiple ways in which gender relations are constituted and contested in specific contexts. Similarly, in discussions on gender relations in Gharmi and in Bhatpole, I will highlight the multiple, conflicting and overlapping ways in which women are positioned in these societies.

- ***Multi-Dimensional Approach to Understanding Power Relations:***

Notwithstanding the above mentioned benefits and influences of post-structuralism on the study of gender and development, Nussbaum (1999) and Harstock (1990) warn us post-structural overemphasis on the minuscule and multitudinous elements of power can shift attention away from recognizing the overarching structures of power and how relations of dominance and exploitation are systematically sustained in societies. Some post-structural feminists and Parpart (1993) in particular have recognized these limitations and recommended that structural and post-structural approaches complement one another.

*I am not suggesting that we abandon the materialist socialist-feminist concern with gender and class, but rather that we add to it a [post-structural] feminist analysis of discourse, knowledge/power relations and difference.*

*(Parpart 1993: pp.451)*

The definition of gender employed in this study adheres to the spirit of the quote above. Gender essentially describes relations of power between men and women where neither gender is all too powerful nor all too powerless but where the balance of power is against

women. Inspired by the post-structuralist approach, I identify the importance of disaggregating the category of 'women' and focusing on differences related to: caste, household attributes, life-cycle processes, ethnicity, and specific contexts as to situate men and women in my 'field' studies. I discuss how women are 'social actors' constrained by social structures in various ways and focus on the differences in experiences hierarchies within the women of Bhatpole and of Gharmi. Nevertheless, I argue gender relations in both Gharmi and Bhatpole are unequal albeit these inequalities manifest themselves in distinct ways in the two researched communities.

### ***2.2.2 Households as a Site of Altruism:***

The earliest approaches to household analysis viewed household as unit and where altruism prevails in decision making and resource allocation processes. Within the disciple of Economics, the notable economist Gary Becker (1976; 1980) introduced and popularized New Household Economics (NHE) and with it the assumption of the 'unitary model of the household'. The NHE was the first time neo-classical economics laid the foundation for understanding intra-household dynamics and extending economic analysis to non-market activities - the production of goods and services within the household. Although this subsection focuses on NHE in particular, it is important to note that the view of the households as a unit where altruism prevailed was also subscribed by others. Folbre (1986) demonstrates how Marxism assumed harmony and equality characterized relations in the household and depicted intra-household relations as a: "...miniature utopian socialist society, untroubled by internal conflict" (Folbre 1986: pp.6). Similarly, Moore (1988) demonstrates the earliest approaches to studying intra-household relations in the anthropological literature also harbored similar assumptions to that of Marxism and NHE.

Central assumptions of the NHE's 'unitary model' are that the household is a welfare maximizing unit in both production and distribution. In other words, a single welfare function represents household preferences. Further, all household resources (capital, labor, land and non-labor earnings) are pooled and household expenditure is made out of pooled income. On the one hand, in production, it is assumed each household member specializes in his/her comparative advantage. In other words, each member specializes in those activities that give him/her the highest returns. To overcome the problem of aggregating utility functions (i.e. ensuring that the household functions as a unit), it is assumed that household distribution is made on the principles of 'altruism' (Willis 1973) and/or by the 'benevolent dictator', on the

other hand. In the latter case, the 'benevolent dictator' represents the tastes and preferences of all household members and ensures pareto-efficient distribution of resources. In this way, the problem of distinct and often conflicting welfare functions of individual members within the household is addressed (Becker 1976; Becker 1980; Evans 1991; Kabeer 1994; Katz 1997)<sup>5</sup>.

The above assumptions of the 'unitary model' is widely questioned and refuted in the gender and development literature. Amartya Sen has famously argued that 100 million women of all ages were 'missing' because of excess female mortality in developing countries that were in turn, rooted in gender inequalities at the household level. Neo-classical economics' tendencies to either ignore the household or assume altruism prevails in household relations provides grim hope for understanding and challenging gender inequalities that systematically discriminate against women (Sen 1989; Sen 1990a; Sen 1990b). Similarly, Nancy Folbre's cross-country study provides substantial evidence of intra-household distributional inequities along gender lines (Folbre 1986; Folbre 1986). In light of these criticisms, as Chant points out, the contemporary literature on gender and the household has "...discredited the idea that households are unitary entities operating on altruistic principles and replaced this with the notion that they are arenas of competing claims, rights, power, interests and resources" (Chant 2003: pp.19).

Gender theorists have also criticized the unitary model's portrayal of the household as a monolithic, clearly bounded and unchanging unit. Instead, the focus has to be on the linkages between intra and extra-household levels for the "...content and boundaries are determined by wider social and political relations in which it is embedded" (Kabeer 1994: p.114). This is particularly supported by the rich, empirical studies conducted on households in Sub-Saharan Africa (Whitehead 1981; Guyer and Peters 1987; Leach 1991).

In light of the above criticisms, Kabeer (1994) calls for a 'dual specification of the household' which analyzes both the internal structures of rules and regulations of the household and also market and non-market institutions which jointly constitute the external environment in which households reproduce and transform themselves.

### ***2.2.3 Cooperation and Conflict: Gender & Intra/Extra-household***

Most of the alternative approaches to intra and extra-household gender analysis are characterized by bargaining models (Moore 1994). Amongst these approaches, Amartya Sen

(1990a) provides an interesting and useful understanding of the household as a site of 'cooperation and conflict' where gender relations are contested and reproduced. Sen argues individuals bargain with one another with varying levels of power, which in turn are determined by gender relations and roles. Sen's notable contributions to the study of gender and intra-household relations are the following: (1) a person's fall-back option and their vulnerabilities if cooperation breaks down; (2) individual's 'perceived interest'; and (3) a person's perceived contribution to household welfare.

With regards to 'fall back option', Sen argues "the bargaining problem arises from the existence of many choosable collusive arrangements—each such arrangements being better for both persons than the break down position" (Sen 1990a: p.12). He further suggests the higher the threat point or fall back option, the higher his/her ability to choose not to cooperate should outcomes of cooperation be unsatisfactory. Both the fall back option and possibility to cease cooperation are in turn, determined by gender ideologies—perceptions of interest and contribution—which systematically disadvantage against women. I have already pointed to Sen's understanding of 'perceptions of interests' as 'objective' and 'subjective' well-being, and his view that women internalize their oppression (See 2.2.1). According to Sen, 'perceived contributions' refers to the role of perceptions (as opposed to actual contributions) on weighting women's productive and reproductive contributions to the household. The division of labor between the sexes is such that women bear the brunt of 'domestic labor' while men assume the role of the 'bread winner'. The biases in 'perceived contributions' therefore, refer to the invisibilization of women's contributions to the household whilst overvaluation of men's. These perception biases are unfavorable to women "...both in terms of distancing perceived interests from well-being and recording productive contributions inadequately" (Sen 1990a: p.10).

Through evidence from various 'time allocation' studies in developing countries, Sen points out that women's work has been limited to the domestic sector. While this is significant in contributing to the household welfare, it reduces the 'visibility' of women's contribution. Such confinement, he argues, is a result of numerous perceptions about women's lack of abilities, education and opportunities for human enhancement. Sen employs insights from contrasting feminist theorists to defend his argument. For instance, he draws on Ester Boserup's (1970), a liberal feminist, classic study on *Women's role in Economic Development* to argue that there exists a positive relationship between women's role in the productive

sector and their bargaining power at the household-level. At the same time, by building on Maria Mies', a Marxist feminist, work on *The Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market* (Mies 1982), Sen contends the 'form' of employment in the productive sector is integral for women to gain recognition for their work both within (increase bargaining power) and outside the household (bargain for a just wage, working conditions etc. vis-à-vis employers).

Sen's argument is/has both inspired and been problematized by gender and development scholars. For instance, drawing on Sen's work, Bina Agarwal emphasizes the importance of 'fall-back option' and gender asymmetries for bargaining power as part of her proposed 'analytical and descriptive model' for gender analysis within and beyond the household. Nevertheless, Sen's understandings of intra-household relations need to be re-visited along the following lines: conceptualization of power relations, emphasis on productive economy, and restrictive understanding of intra-household relations. I have already pointed, in Section 2.2.1, one of the central limitations of Sen's understanding of 'power' is 'perceived interest' which imbues Lukes' conceptualization of 'third dimension of power' and of 'false consciousness'.

- ***Sen's Emphasis on Productive Economy:***

Sen suggests women's greater role in the productive sector will increase women's 'visible' contribution to the household and in doing so enhance their bargaining power. Many feminists have pointed to the difficulties of employing a strict dichotomy between productive and reproductive sector. Women's work in developing countries are often fluid, encompassing both productive and reproductive domains within and beyond the household.

Furthermore, Sen does not adequately consider the interlocking gender asymmetries in the household and market. To illustrate, an increasingly important feature of rural livelihoods is migration (Ashley and Maxwell 2001). But male migrants tend to out-number female ones in most developing countries because, as Chant (1998) argues, the gendered constraints emanating from within and outside of the migrant originating groups. Gender ideologies (that restrict women's mobility) along with gender division of labor (that prevent women from acquiring the skills needed for migration and confining women's roles and responsibilities to the domestic sphere) are the major constraints emanating from within the group. In contrast, external market structure that systematically favors male labor as opposed to female ones



together with gender differences in networks to facilitate the migration process are two of the important constraints imposed from outside. Along similar lines, Kabeer's (1997) study on women garment factory workers in Bangladesh is particularly illustrative of the difficulties in making causal linkages between 'visible' contribution to the household employment and gender relations, as Amartya Sen does. Her study reveals that the women involved in the garment factory often made a 'visible' contribution and questioned the traditional role of men as the 'breadwinner' of the HH. While many women reported improvement in their 'bargaining' powers at home, others reported increased domestic violence as triggered by men's insecurities with having lost their former status and authority.

Sen only focuses on women's employment in the productive economy and implications for women's status at the intra-household level. However, there are multiple ways in which gender relations influence individual's fall-back option and bargaining power at the household level. Expanding on Sen, Bina Agarwal (1997b) argues that the following impinge on women's bargaining power within and outside the household in context of rural South Asia: employment outside the household; ownership of and control over assets and particularly land; access to communal resources such as village commons and forests; access to traditional support system such as patronage, kinship and caste grouping; and access to external systems such as state and NGOs. Furthermore, she argues that these factors, in turn, are constituted and contested in interaction with extra-household levels - community, market and state. Using access and control over land, as an example, she argues women's ability to successfully claim a share of parental property is likely to depend upon women's bargaining power at the community (social legitimacy of women's claims to land, access to economic and social resources) and state-level (legal literacy, existing inheritance law, access to government officials)<sup>6</sup> (Agarwal 1994a; Agarwal 1994b; Agarwal 1997b).

- ***Understanding of Intra-Household Relations:***

Sen's view of intra-household relations and gender disparities suggests resources are pooled and decisions are made by the head of the household. This is in line with the 'corporate' model, broadly characteristic of household relations in South Asia (Kandiyoti 1988; Kabeer 1994). However, the plethora of ethnographic literature on Africa (Whitehead 1981; Kandiyoti 1988; Moore 1988; Evans 1991; Kabeer 1994), for instance, points to the limitations of the corporate model for explaining intra-household relations over time and space.

Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) in a landmark essay on *Bargaining with Patriarchy* goes a step further and argues it is important to consider the distinct set of ‘rules of the game’ and corresponding constraints that women face in different forms of ‘patriarchy’. But it is equally important to combine this with analysis of strategies that women adopt to maximize security and optimize life options. Kandiyoti acknowledges that ‘patriarchy’, loosely used to define male dominance, is a much contested term within feminist literature. She qualifies her understanding of ‘patriarchy’ by drawing on literature in intra-household relations in different contexts.

Kandiyoti revisits the conceptual frameworks of gender and power she had used to understand ‘patriarchal bargain’ in her later work (Kandiyoti 1998). She questions the ways in which she borrowed understanding of ‘power’ and ‘contestation’, typically used to inform ‘class’ analysis, to conceptualize gender and power. She does not propose an alternative for understanding gender dimensions of power and instead argues: “...the messiness of social reality has always exceeded the explanatory power of our conceptual frameworks and that this is all the more so in the area of gender” (Kandiyoti 1998: pp.147). Kandiyoti’s important insights has also inspired my understanding of ‘power’, and is reflected in the importance I have placed on ‘multiple’ dimensions of power relations to understand gender and power in the previous section.

Nevertheless, Kandiyoti’s earlier argument for focusing on ‘rules of the game’ in different forms of ‘patriarchy’, corresponding sets of gendered constraints women face, and ways women bargain still holds considerable currency. In my research, I allude to the distinct forms of ‘patriarchy’ in Bhatpole and Gharimi, specific constraints women face, and strategies women adopt. I discuss the latter with regards to varying ways women of Bhatpole and Gharimi draw on gendered resources and symbols, within and outside of the household, to bargain and enhance their respective positions.

- ***Moving Beyond Bargaining Models:***

Notwithstanding their contributions, the emphasis placed by Sen and the bargaining models in general is on ‘division’ and ‘inequality’ at the household and extra-household level is limited. As Cecile Jackson (2002; Jackson 2007) points out, the bargaining models assume households are composed entirely of separate individuals with opposing gender interests and

in which intra-household relations legitimize women's exploitation. Such a view drifts attention away from the importance many women in developing countries context place on 'cooperating' or staying within marriages. Cooperation brings with it various, direct and indirect, benefits such as material; social legitimacy and recognition (i.e. perceptions of married and unmarried women); and scope for agency and 'conjugal creativity' within and in relation to extra-household changes.

At the same time, as Jackson clarifies, the point of highlighting 'cooperation' is not to replace one myth of the 'divided' household with another of 'cooperative' household. Instead, it is integral to understand and appreciate the balance between 'cooperation' and 'conflict' and between 'shared' and 'separate' interests for gender analysis<sup>7</sup>. Such a conceptualization of the household - as 'shared' and 'separate' interests - have also informed my analysis of gender relations in Gharmi and Bhatpole as I will discuss in greater detail in the empirical chapters and will re-visit in the conclusion (Chapter Nine).

#### ***2.2.4 Cooperation and Conflict as Rooted in Socio-cultural practices:***

In order to understand intra and extra-household relations, sources of conflict and cooperation between men and women, it is important to examine socio-cultural practices such as gender division of labor within and beyond the household, marriage practices, and intra-household allocation of resources. Various scholars demonstrate how these socio-cultural practices shape and influence gender differences in the bargaining power at the intra and extra-household levels. For example, in her seminal research on gender and land rights in South Asia, Bina Agarwal (1994a; 1994b) demonstrates how interlocking relations of marriage practices and intra-household allocation of resources impinge on women's access and control over land. Watkins (1996) and Cameron (1998), through their study of women belonging to low-caste and ethnic minority communities in Nepal, argue that women are situated in multiple, contradictory and dynamic ways. It is therefore, pertinent to understand and analyze various dimensions of socio-cultural practices, how these in turn, embody and impinge on gender differences, complementarities and bargaining power at the household and extra-household levels.

Informed through the above insights from the gender and development literature, my analysis of gender relations at the household and extra-household level examines various socio-cultural practices, shared and separate interests within them, and the gender norms and

ideologies they embody. In particular, my focus will be on: (1) organization of the household, (2) gender division of labor within and beyond the household, (3) marriage practices and transactions, and (4) intra-household allocation of resources. These relations have in turn, occupied considerable attention of gender and development scholars. It is beyond the space of this thesis to explore each of these facets in detail. Nonetheless, I discuss the major reasons why each of these socio-cultural practices and the debates surrounding them are important for a holistic and well grounded study on gender analysis.

- ***Organization of the household and Beyond:***

Most gender and development scholars would agree that households are important for feminist analysis because they organize a large part of women's domestic/reproductive labor. As a result, both the composition and the organization of the households have a direct impact on women's abilities to gain access to resources, labor and income. However, there exist little agreement with regards to the nature and function of the household. The NHE literature and Sen's model of the household assumes that the household is a unit of production, reproduction and socialization, and the households are organized through a male household head. However, ethnographic research has pointed to the considerable cross-cultural variations in household form, the changes that households undergo in light of life-stages and macro socio-economic changes, and strategies adopted by members. Furthermore, studies have also demonstrated the linkages between household and extra-household relations (See: Guyer and Peters 1987; Kandiyoti 1988; Roberts 1991; Chant 1998; Chant 2003). Given these complexities, most gender and development scholars would agree the organization of the intra and extra-household levels need to be contextualized in specific historical contexts.

- ***Gender Division of Labor within and beyond the Household:***

Gender division of labor refers to the work that men and women do, the conditions under which the work is performed, and social value of the work within a given social context (Moore 1988). Gender division of labor have often divided into 'productive' and 'reproductive' domains, women's work as confined to the reproductive and non-paid domain (Boserup 1970; Maguire 1984; Mackintosh 1988; Sen 1990a). This body of literature has pointed to the importance of understanding gender disparities in the allocation of work (time), and the inter-linkages between women's work in different domains.

Nevertheless, such a strict dichotomy between productive and reproductive labor has been questioned on a number of grounds. First, men and women's work differs considerably from one context to another (Whitehead 1981; Roberts 1988; Cameron 1998). The fact that most women and men diversify their livelihood and depend on a variety of sources of income within and outside the household questions the assumption that women are confined to the 'reproductive' domain. Second, men and women's work can be both distinct and overlapping (Whitehead 1981; Kabeer 1994; Warner, Al-Hassan et al. 1997; Pearson and Jackson 1998). For instance, Kabeer (1994) makes a distinction between 'sex-segregated' and 'sex-sequential' practices of agricultural production and varying ways in which women's labor are valued in different societies. Third, the gendered values and norms at the extra-household level such as those embedded in markets also impinge on allocation of labor and gender relations at the household level (Agarwal 1997b; Chant 1998). Contemporary scholarship therefore suggest instead of universalizing men and women's labor and pre-determining men and women's status in society, the emphasis should be on the following: analysis of gender division of labor, the values and norms embedded in them in specific contexts, the gender-specific opportunities and constraints that exist for labor, and the gender relations in the command and control over labor.

- ***Intra-Household Allocation of Resources: Income and Land***

Gender differences in voice, access and influence over the allocation of income at the household level are widely perceived as integral for gender analysis. For instance, many gender and development scholars have argued making a 'visible' contribution (income) to the household strengthens women's bargaining power in the household. There is considerable debate, however, on the various ways in which intra-household resources are allocated. NHE and some of its critiques (including Sen) assume that household resources are pooled and re-allocated by the household head. Such a 'cooperative' model has been criticized within the discipline of economics (Folbre 1994; Lundberg and Pollack 1994; Nelson 1994; Katz 1997; Quisumbing and Maluccio 2000; Moe 2003; Quisumbing 2003) as well as by ethnographic research. For instance, 'non-cooperating models' are premised on the rejection that household resources are pooled, and therefore, model household behavior around each member operating sub-economics as well as controlling his/her income (Lundberg and Pollack 1994). Similarly, context specific research also points to variations in household allocation of income (Whitehead 1981; Goetz and Gupta 1996; Kabeer 1997).

Bina Agarwal (1994a; 1994b; 1997b; 2003) has been at the forefront in highlighting the importance of 'land' for gender-based analysis allocation of resources at the household and extra-household levels. Agarwal contends 'land' is the most important resource in rural South Asia but argues that the distribution land is biased against women. Recently and increasingly, critiques of Agarwal point out that many rural HHs have diversified their livelihood and women's bargaining power is no longer solely dependent on land (Razavi 2003). Women themselves resist against gaining access to land because of the multiple and conflicting positions of women in the household and beyond; men and women's overlapping interests with regards to land; and women's private interests in maintaining and creatively maneuvering around unequal distribution of land (Jackson 2002; Rao 2005).

- ***Marriage Practices & Transactions:***

Analysis of marriage practices continues to occupy a prominent space within gender and development literature. Much of the focus on marriage practices in the gender related, ethnographic literature in Nepal focuses on socio-cultural practices, the gender ideologies they embody, and the choices men and women face in entering, voicing and exiting conjugal relations (Jones and Jones 1976; Acharya and Bennett 1981; Schuler 1981; Allen 1982; Holmberg 1989; Kondos 1991; Niraula and Morgan 1996; Watkins 1996; Bennett 2002; Luintel 2002; March 2002; Kondos 2004). Naila Kabeer defines choices as the possibility of alternatives and the ability to have chosen otherwise. In particular, she views marriage-related choices as 'strategic life choices' that are critical for people to live the life they want.

There also exists a rich scholarship on the symbolic and material transactions involved in marriage practices in South Asia. In particular, Goody and Tambiah (1973), Ursula Sharma (1986; 2004), Bina Agarawal (1994a), Mary Cameron (1998) amongst others have debated considerably on the relationship between marriage and property from a gender perspective. Some of the facets they have explored include types of property that men and women inherit in marriage, the gender differences in access and control over property, and how these transactions and property relations have been shifting in light of broader socio-economic changes (Gellner 1991; Rankin 2004).

The above discussions on gender relations at the household level and beyond have informed my research in the following three main ways. First, households need to be understood as a site of both cooperation and conflict between multiply situated actors.

Second, intra and extra-household relations need to be attended to in analyzing gender relations. Third, gender relations manifest through various, interlocking socio-cultural practices and the ideas, values and representations they embody.

### 2.3 Gender, Institutions and External Intervention

The scholarship on Gender, Environment and Development (GED), Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) and Local Institutions of natural resource governance constitute three strands of research within the broader scholarship on natural resource governance. There exist complementarities within them as all three are concerned with access and use of common resources. However, they serve as distinct and conflicting approaches for understanding these issues. The CBNRM literature champions the role of ‘community’ in natural resource governance. The gender and NRG literature is concerned with issues of knowledge, social movements, participation and community governance of resources and others. The literature on local institutions and NRG proposes an alternative to the CBNRM but rarely engages with gender related issues<sup>8</sup> explicitly.

The scope of the current section is however to focus on the local institutions literature with the aim of bridging the theoretical gap in the gender and institutions scholarships. CBNRM will not be explicitly incorporated for three important reasons: (1) forceful criticisms of the CBNRM literature already exists elsewhere (See in particular: Agrawal and Gibson 1999); (2) recent concerns on natural resource governance policy-making and academia are dominated by ‘how to get institutions right’ and not on getting ‘community right’<sup>9</sup>; (3) literature on local institutions and GED have emerged as important ways of studying natural resource governance at the local level but internal dialogue between the two remains limited.

In light of the above, I will begin this section by first analyzing the two competing approaches<sup>10</sup> - *common property resource governance* and *political embedded approach* - to institutional analysis from a gender perspective. My emphasis will be on assessing the extent to which these approaches allow for gender analysis of local institutions and can be employed as a theoretical framework for examining my research concerns. My study examines and explicates the interrelationship between gender relations and the formation, functioning and change in local institutions of community forestry. Because these institutions are often supported by extra-local development intervention in community forestry, I also examine how

such interventions have influenced and interacted with institutional processes and gender relations.

The definition of institutions is as contested as approaches to institutional analysis. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, I understand ‘institutions’ as formal and informal rules and norms governing access to the commons by describing and prescribing individual behavior in the commons.

I will argue that the CPR literature is not only ‘gender blind’ but provides an inadequate framework through which gender issues can be examined. These inadequacies are rooted in the approach’s instrumental understanding of social relations; narrow focus on efficiency in resource management; reductionist view of individuals’ interest and action in the commons; and problematic understandings of external intervention in institutions and commons. Instead, I locate my literature within the ‘political and embedded’ approach to institutional analysis which is concerned with politics of natural resource governance and how institutions can be responsive to broader development concerns such as poverty reduction, gender, democracy amongst others. In particular, I draw from and build on Arun Agrawal and Clark Gibson’s (1999) approach to institutional analysis from a gender perspective. I combine the strengths of the Agrawal and Gibson’s approach with insights from Frances Cleaver’s (2000; 2002) conception of ‘institutional bricolage’; and Long and Long’s (1992) understanding of ‘interface point’.

In light of the above, this section will begin by discussing the CPR literature, its major theoretical underpinnings, and the incompatibilities between the CPR and GED literature. This will be followed by discussion on the ‘embedded-political’ approach to institutional analysis, the rationale for building on Agarwal and Gibson’s (1999) framework, the limitations of the framework for my study on gender and institutions, and how I propose to overcome these limitations for the purposes of this thesis.

**2.3.1 Common Property Resource: Overview of theoretical Premise & Incompatibilities from a Gender Perspective**

The scholarship on ‘Common Property Resource’ refers to a vast body of literature that is premised on the rejection of Garrett Hardin’s (1968) pessimism towards individual’s abilities to manage resources collectively. Hardin famously argued that in the absence of



central government control and/or privatization, rational individuals would exploit the commons and the action of individuals in the commons would inevitably lead to the ‘tragedy of the commons’.

Since then notable scholars such as Elinor Ostrom (Ostrom 1990; Ostrom 1999), Robert Wade (1988), D. Bromley (1989; Bromley, Feeny et al. 1992) along with others, through in-depth case studies and historical material, have questioned Hardin’s assumption that all ‘commons’ are necessarily ‘open access’. Instead these studies point out that in areas where ‘common property regimes’ exist, individuals are collectively protecting and deriving benefits from the commons. The primary contention of this scholarship is institutional arrangements or rules of the game can positively influence resource use, access and conservation. Institutions are therefore variously defined as rules of the game that govern the ways in which individuals relate to one another and to the commons. (McCay and Jentoff 1998; McCay 2002; Johnson 2004).

Scholars have employed varying theoretical and explanatory models such as rational choice, game theory, organizational theory etc. to understand how property relations matter for people’s use and governance of resources. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that much of the literature rests on the following assumptions about: individuals, institutions, role of external agents in institutional processes, and social relations.

First, individuals are assumed to be ‘rational, self-interest maximizing agents’. In other words, ‘individuals compare the benefits and costs of actions prior to adopting strategies for action’ (Ostrom 1990: pp.243). Such an economic rationality of individuals forms the central premise for understanding individual action in the commons.

Second, rational self-interest maximizers create institutions to reduce uncertainty, resolve assurance dilemma etc. all with the intention of minimizing the cost of collective action and maximizing benefits in resource gains. Institutions in turn, regulate access to and use of common pool resource and thereby overcome individual’s incentive to free-ride (McKean 1986; Wade 1988; Gibss and Bromley 1989; Ostrom 1990; Mearns 1995; Baland and Platteau 1996; Ostrom 1999; McKean 2000). In this respect, there is a dynamic relationship between individuals and institutions. While rational individuals create institutions, institutions also mediate the relationship between individuals and resources.

Third, the role of external agents (such as the state) in collective action in the CPR literature has been revised over the years. In the early 1990s, the 'rolling back of the state' was strongly advocated (Ostrom 1990; McKean 1992). For instance, as McKean points (1992: pp.252-253)out: The role of the state should be limited to providing "clear, specific and exclusive rights" because "...well organized communities of co-owners are capable of protecting and managing their property quite well". But increasingly, theorists focus on how resource management outcomes can be enhanced by exploiting the comparative advantage of the state and those of local agents and/or how state can provide the policy environment for individuals to manage resources collectively (Baland and Platteau 1996; Lam 1996; Ostrom 1996; Lam 2001).

In spite of recent and increasing emphasis on 'brining the state back in' the CPR literature, the view that the responsibility for resource governance should be entrusted to individuals<sup>11</sup> have remained intact. The assumption is that if rational individuals are allowed to manage resources the outcome will be most efficient governance of resources. Further, it will be in the best interest of individuals to ensure the sustainable utilization and conservation of resources. The 'real tragedy of commons' occurs when local institutions established to manage resources breaks down (Uphoff 1998).

In light of these assumptions, the main question that interests CPR theorists is: under what conditions will rational individuals manage resources. CPR theorists are concerned with both issues surrounding institutional design and resource efficiency and increasingly questions of if and how social relations impinge on efficient allocation of resources.

A vast amount of work within the CPR literature has been concerned with 'institutional design' and 'how to get institutions right' to efficiently manage resources at the local level. There has been considerable debate about whether or not a 'grand theory' on collective action can be developed. On the one hand, scholars have focused on identifying key variables that can enhance or detract from the capabilities of individuals to solve problems. Such works have resulted in identifying a set of attributes commonly found in long-enduring institutions (Wade 1988; Bromley and Cernea 1989; Ostrom 1990; Bromley, Feeny et al. 1992; McKean 2000)<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, others question the extent to which current scholarship on the commons can be developed into a grand theory on collective action<sup>13</sup> (Agarwal 2001). Still

others maintain that there are certain pre-requisites of institutional arrangements that are essential for any given local governance of resource to be successful(Gibson, John T. Williams et al. 2005).<sup>14</sup>

Most CPR theorists agree social relations matters for collective action. There exists little consensus, however, on how to go about conceptualizing the impact of social relations on institutional efficiency. The debates surrounding group characteristics and resource efficiency serve as an illustration of these disagreements.

Researchers have focused on the extent to which the degree of social homogeneity and/or heterogeneity within groups involved in resource governance matters for efficient allocation of resources. It is argued social homogeneity (in the form of common social, cultural and economic characteristics) lead to sustainable resource governance outcomes. Social homogeneity can also help individuals draw upon and create social capital in pursuit of optimal resource use. The more homogeneous the users, the more likely they are to share norms. Shared norms can alter the benefit cost calculus of individuals and alter economic rationality. When norms such as ‘it is right to abide by the rules of collective action’ are present in a society, individuals are subject to considerable social censure for taking an action considered to be wrong by others (Ostrom 1990). Similarly, it is argued competition among socially differentiated resource users often gives rise to conflict and break down of collective action endeavors (Quiggin 1993). Studies that argue differences in income result in differential interests in forest products corroborate the positive relationship between social homogeneity and institutional efficiency (see for instance, Kant 2000 and Cooke 2000).

In comparison, others view group homogeneity is not a pre-requisite for successful collective action (See: McKean 1992; Molinas 1998; Agrawal 2001), and point to the potential benefits of social stratification or unequal distribution of wealth and power for efficient institutions. The possible organizational and economic benefits arising from inequitable resource distribution of power in the commons can be demonstrated by the quotation below:

*“...the weighty presence and enthusiasm of wealthier families may be valuable reinforcement for the common property system, and may also guarantee that the institutional arrangement in question has powerful advocates within the community rather than a coalition of powerful opponents both inside and outside the community”.*

*(McKean 1992: pp.207)*

Recently and increasingly, numerous authors have argued this entire debate is false because it is premised on the assumption that a direct causal relationship can be established between homogeneity/heterogeneity and efficient allocation of resources. Homogeneity on some dimensions often coincides with heterogeneity on others (Agrawal and Yadama 1997; Varughese and Ostrom 2001; Poteete and Ostrom 2004: pp.45). It is difficult to predict, before hand, what aspects of people's complementarities and/or differences may affect the establishment of efficient institutions to govern resources. The impact of group characteristics on collective action is often contextually driven. And further, what is important is not a given heterogeneity/homogeneity on collective action. Rather, the extent to which particular aspects of heterogeneity/homogeneity in a given context can be taken into account and addressed by the institutions created to manage resources. And hence, it is argued:

*The design of institutions that help a group distribute the benefits and costs of their efforts in a way that is perceived to be legitimate, effective and fair to that group is more important than the particular attributes of the group itself.*

*(Poteete and Ostrom 2004: pp.454)*

### 2.3.2 CPR literature through a Gender Lens

I argue the above tenets of the CPR literature not only fail to provide a theoretical framework for gendered analysis of institutions but are also contrary to the normative commitment of the GED literature.

The Gender, Environment and Development (GED) literature and the CPR literature employ contrasting ways of framing the questions of the commons. The concerns over privatization and nationalization in the CPR literature vis-à-vis the GED one serves as a good illustration. On the one hand, CPR assesses theories and policies of privatization and nationalization in relation to efficient and sustainable conservation of resources (Ostrom 1990; Uphoff 1998). On the other hand, GED scholars are primarily concerned with the implications of privatization and nationalization for gendered conflicts over control and access to resources (Agarwal 1997a; Deere and Magdalena 1998).

It could be argued that gender related concerns are beyond the scope of the CPR literature. The CPR focuses solely on issues of efficiency and sustainable conservation of resources<sup>15</sup> in natural resource governance. But, I would argue that the assumptions and debates surrounding the CPR literature provide a reductionist and an incompatible basis

through which gender related issues can be analyzed. In particular, its understanding of individual rationality, instrumental employment of social relations in institutional analysis, normative tensions in the two literatures, and the view of external agents in institutional analysis serve to reinforce my argument.

- ***Individual rationality:***

The CPR literature theorists assume that the cost-benefit calculus of individual rationality determines whether or not individuals will manage resources collectively. Social relations are included to the extent that they impinge on the cost and benefit calculation of individual rationality, both in formulating institutions and also in deciding to abide by institutional arrangements. In contrast, for some gender theorists the constitution of gender relations in many societies is such that women's cost-benefit calculus is intertwined with the needs and priorities of their family. In many instances, women are willing to forgo their personal benefits for the needs of the family (Sen 1990a; Folbre 1994; Kabeer 1994). Others, however, argue that women are 'purposeful agents constrained by social structures of varying flexibility'. Women's 'altruistic' acts often disguise their material (Agarwal 1997a) and private interests (Jackson 1998). Such a debate, between women as inherently 'altruistic' vs. women as 'agents', is ongoing within the gender literature. Nevertheless, the gender literature maintains that gender relations inform and shape individual rationality, and may result in fundamental differences in the cost-benefit calculus of men and women.

With regards to gender and natural resource governance, the gender literature suggests that the costs and benefits of participating in collective action are shaped by existing gender relations. In societies where women are systematically marginalized over men, the gender division of labour is such that women are primary users of natural resources. Women often bear the brunt of domestic and productive workloads (Moser 1989; Zwartveen 1997). Although it may be in women's gendered interests to participate in the formulation of local institutions established to manage common resources, the opportunity costs involved in attending meetings, participating in maintenance and enforcement of resources etc. are often higher for women than for men (Zwartveen and Neupane 1996; Meinzen-Dick and Zwartveen 1998; Meinzen-Dick and Zwartveen 2001).

Similarly, politically aware research on the commons suggest there is often a 'symbolic' dimension behind men and women's incentives to be involved in collective action, and point

to the importance of moving beyond the mere focus on economic rationality harbored by CPR theorists (Johnson 2000; Mosse 1997). Such a symbolic dimension has an added bearing on the individual calculus when analyzed from a gender perspective. For instance, studies from South Asia show that the decision making processes over natural resources are often considered public affairs that not only impinge on the individuals concerned, but also on the entire locality (village and/or community). Decision to participate in collective action is more than maximizing benefits from resources. Men, in particular, may derive prestige from participating in public affairs and assuming decision-making roles. Further, gendered ideologies, about appropriate roles and spaces for men and women, may increase women's costs of getting involved in the governance of resources (Sarin 1995; Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen 1998; Agarwal 2001; Sarin 2001).

- ***Formulation of Institutions & Role of Social Relations:***

The CPR literature assumes that institutions are formulated for the purpose of maximizing economic benefits and minimizing costs of collective action. In contrast, the gender literature suggests institutions encode the gendered politics involved in institutional formation. The extent to which men and women can translate their interest into purposeful action in the commons is crucially dependent on their relative positioning in the household and the community (Agarwal 1997b).

The debates surrounding institutional design are rarely cognizant of underlying conflicts in resource governance. Institutional arrangements are examined to the extent that they impact on resource efficiency and sustainable conservation of resources. But the normative tension between the CPR and GED literature is fundamentally about differential priorities—over efficiency and sustainable conservation vis-à-vis gender equality in access and control over resources. These tensions are also reflected in the debates surrounding homogeneity and heterogeneity within the GED vis-à-vis the CPR literature.

The argument within the CPR literature that the degree of homogeneity positively impacts on collective action is strongly questioned from a gender perspective. To begin with, the notion of 'homogeneity' is itself problematic from a gendered lens. Socially constructed differences between men and women, as evident in many ideologies and practices, imply gender remains a key source of difference in any given society. The concept of homogeneity is also problematic given gender cross cuts with other social relations such as class, caste and

ethnicity. Women are far from being a homogeneous group (with common interests and shared interests). Instead of assuming that men and women have common interests, because they live in close proximity to each other, share common norms and others, the GED literature would suggest examining the underlying factors that lead to common interests, if any. Further, the literature also suggests that homogeneity from outside could very well conceal gendered politics over whose concerns are prioritized. Such critical analyses is lacking considerably in the CPR literature.

The argument presented by some CPR theorists that heterogeneity is desirable for collective action would assume that institutional arrangements that prosper from producing and reproducing unequal gendered relations are more favorable. This would not only defeat the purposes feminist research and advocacy on gender disparities in natural resource governance, but would also prioritize resource conservation over broader goals of gender and social inclusion.

The CPR theorists who attempt to reconcile the differences between these two debates are more aware of the politics behind resource governance. Instead of assuming there is a direct linkage between homogeneity/heterogeneity and resource governance, the theorists argues for a context specific analysis of what types of homogeneity and heterogeneity affects collective action and the extent to which such issues are addressed in institutional design. Efficiency and equity outcomes can be reconciled as long as members perceive institutions as 'legitimate', 'fair' and 'effective'. While the latter stance is more likely to take into account 'gender' dimensions than the former two, it nevertheless risks assuming gendered interests, claims and politics can be unproblematically addressed in institutional design. Furthermore, scholars examining the gendered politics in natural resource governance would point to the multiple and often conflicting discourses of 'fairness' and 'legitimacy' along gender lines in the governance of resources.

Even when institutions established to manage natural resources were considered 'unfair' and 'illegitimate' in Madhu Sarin's (1995; Sarin 2001) study of Joint Forest Management in India, gender inequitable institutions prevailed. Sarin finds rules to manage the local forests were dominated by men's interests in timber and systematically marginalized women's interests in fuel wood and fodder. Although women constantly protested against these rules, the male dominated committees imposed strict monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, at

both the community-level and the household-level, to force women to comply by the existing rules.

Research suggests the extent to which women's claims is perceived as 'legitimate' may depend on the degree of congruence with those of powerful. For instance, Cleaver's study of institutions established to manage water in Nkayi, Kenya finds that women's interests were incorporated in the institutional processes because both men and women prioritized the need for domestic water (Cleaver 1998; Cleaver 2000). Others argue that the extent to which women's interests can be incorporated depends not merely on the 'goodwill' of men, but on women's relative bargaining power at the household and beyond (Meinzen-Dick, Brown et al. 1997; Agarwal 1997b; Agarwal 1997c; Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen 1998; Agarwal 2001; Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen 2001).

- ***Role of External Agents:***

I argue that the debates surrounding the role of non-local agents such as the state in the CPR literature are also problematic from a gender perspective in three important ways. First, most institutions are created and sustained not only through the actions of 'rational individuals' in the commons but also substantial external intervention (McCay 2002; Mosse 1997). For instance, Arun Agrawal (2005) argues that the institutions for regulating use and access to the forests in his study on Kumaon, India were created by changes in technologies of the government, and corresponding shifts from centralization to decentralization of forest governance. Second, by advocating the 'rolling back' the state, the possibilities of local women demanding external intervention, and the positive role that external agents may play in fostering equitable institutions are ignored (Agarwal 2001). Finally, by narrowly prescribing responsibilities for external agents (such as by capitalizing on comparative advantage and building synergies between the state and local users), the ways in which external agents are inevitably implicated in the 'politics of the local' are discounted (Agrawal and Gibson 1999).

### ***2.3.3 'Political and Embedded' Approach: Drawing from and Building on Agrawal & Gibson's Framework for Institutional Analysis***

The studies within the 'political and embedded approach' institutional analysis focus on sustainable governance of resources along with broader concerns on governance of resources. Most are premised on the view that societies are stratified, institutions are 'embedded' in



prevailing societal relations, and therefore institutions mirror and reproduce existing inequalities. For instance, studies on the relationship between CPR and poverty in India and West Africa demonstrates that the poor and women are disproportionately dependent on CPR, and vulnerable to state intervention and commoditization in the commons (Jodha 1992; Beck and Nesmith 2001). Similarly, ethnographic research focuses on how institutions are embedded in existing societal inequalities which in turn define differential rights and obligations to common resources (Peters 1994; Cleaver and Elson 1995; Mearns 1995; Mosse 1995; Adams, Elizabeth et al. 1997; Leach, Mearns et al. 1997; Cleaver 1998; Leach, Mearns et al. 1999; Johnson 2000; Campbell, Mandonio et al. 2001; McCay 2002; Johnson 2004; Mosse 1997). Others focus on how societal relations shape individual's 'motivations' to participate in collective action in the commons (Cleaver 2000; Klooster 2000; Klooster 2000; Cleaver 2002). Nevertheless, an overarching theme within the literature is how to build institutions that are both responsive to and inclusive of the multiple actors and interests in the commons.

Much of this literature draws on larger social and political theories (such as Bourdieu's 'symbolic capital', Giddens' 'structuration', James C. Scott's 'moral economy' and others) to study context specific questions, changes and events to describe and analyze institutions. While the literature and theoretical approaches provide for rich, context specific understandings and explanations of institutional processes, I wish to draw from build on Arun Agrawal and Clark Gibson's (1999) framework for institutional analysis from a gender perspective.

I will demonstrate Agrawal and Gibson's framework for institutional analysis can be applied usefully to conduct an analysis of institutional process (formation, functioning and change) from a gender perspective. Nevertheless, the framework needs to be broadened and revised for the purposes of this study on gender politics in community forestry in Nepal. The framework focuses on politics in institutional processes more generally, and needs to consider how gender relations at the intra and extra-household level interact and influence institutions. The scope of the framework is not to analyze environmental policies at the macro level, and to consider how these policies inevitably shape external intervention, relationship between local and external agents, and the outcome of policies. In light of these limitations, I complement Agrawal and Gibson's proposed framework for institutional analysis with insights from approach to policy analysis by GED scholars, Frances Cleaver's 'institutional bricolage'

(Cleaver 2000: pp.380), Leach, Mearns et al. (1997; 1999) view of multiple and overlapping institutions, and Long and Long's (1992; Long and Vallareal 1994) focus on 'interface point' at the local level.

- ***Overview of Agrawal and Gibson's Framework for Institutional Analysis***

Agrawal and Gibson (1999) developed their framework for institutional analysis as an alternative to community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) literature which, as they point out, had dominated environment and development practice. Their approach emphasizes the politics of the local in determining access and governance of resources, and stands in sharp contrast to the mythical conceptions of 'community' (as small spatial unit, homogenous groups and shared culture) characterizing the CBNRM literature. Their framework is not an explicit criticism of the CPR literature, and in fact, both Agrawal and Gibson have, separately, contributed to the CPR literature in important ways (Agrawal and Yadama 1997; Agrawal 2000; Gibson, McKean et al. 2000; Agrawal 2001; Gibson, John T. Williams et al. 2005). Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate below, their framework departs from the CPR literature, and provides a much more nuanced, politically aware approach to examining and explicating gendered politics in institutions and natural resource governance. It is worth noting that this framework has largely been sidelined in view of Arun Agrawal's (2005) recent, much celebrated work on 'Environmentality'. In Chapter 9, I will assess Agrawal's (2005) contributions to the scholarship on environmental governance and this thesis in particular. At the same time, I will point to the benefits of drawing from and building on Agrawal and Gibson's framework for the purposes of this thesis.

The major tenets of Agrawal and Gibson's framework are the actors, interactions and politics involved in analysis of institutional processes (formation, functioning and change). Agrawal and Gibson start by pointing out that multiple actors with multiple interests (overlapping and/or conflicting) are involved in institutional processes at local and extra-local levels. These actors in turn interact with each other through the processes of formulating and implementing of rules along with resolving of conflicts that arise in the interpretation of these rules. Actors bargain and negotiate amongst each other so as to ensure his/her interests are incorporated in these institutional arrangements. But these processes of institutional *formation* and relative bargaining/negotiation power of individuals are a reflection of and defined by existing distribution of power and structure of incentives.

While actors create institutions, institutions *function* to structure both the actions of these actors in relation to resource use and interactions with one another. Institutions are ‘provisional’ and dynamic processes that constantly evolve and *change*. “Once formed, institutions exercise effects that are independent of the forces that constituted them” (Agrawal and Gibson 1999: pp.637) and/or are subject to change through internal negotiations and external changes. With regards to institutional changes through external forces, the framework highlights the importance of understanding the role of the state and/or development organizations in influencing institutional change through policies and interventions.

- ***Drawing on Agrawal and Gibson’s Framework from a Gender Perspective:***

Agrawal and Gibson’s proposed framework can be employed usefully to understand and analyze gender politics in the formation, functioning and change in formal and informal institutions established to govern natural resources. The framework can also provide important insights on how external intervention influence and are shaped by institutions and gender relations. Formal institutions can be understood as rules for natural resource governance that are introduced by extra-local actors (such as the state and NGOs) whereas informal ones are social norms that are drawn upon in the process of resource governance. One could argue focusing on formation, functioning and change is a linear view of institutional evolution. However, in Nepal, as in many other countries where decentralized systems of governance have been introduced by extra-local actors, a discernible pattern of institutional evolution exists.

*In institutional formation*, Agrawal and Gibson argue most common resources are managed by **multiple actors**, by groups divided along multiple axes, among them ethnicity, gender, religion, wealth and caste, and other poles of identity. Local users are divided into subgroups, and within each subgroup into individuals with varying **interests** and preferences. This stands in sharp contrast to CPR literature and its assumption that ‘rational individuals’ create institutions to maximize benefits. Agrawal and Gibson’s focus on actors and interactions can better take into account feminists’ argument that men and women have diverging and converging interests in natural resource use and governance (Rocheleau 1995; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter et al. 1996; Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997; Agrawal and Gibson 1999). Agrawal & Gibson’s emphasis on deconstructing actors into subgroups and individuals can further capture the nuances of gendered relations and the view of ‘women’ as a heterogeneous group with varying experiences and interests.

According to Agrawal & Gibson, institutions are humanly devised rules, generated through the following three processes - "...individuals negotiate the use, governance, conservation of resources. And they try to resolve disputes that arise in the processes of implementation" (Agrawal and Gibson 1999: pp.637), and are subject to **existing distribution of power and structure of incentives**. This is in sharp contrast to the CPR view that institutions are created for the purposes of minimizing costs and maximizing benefits. In comparison, gender and development scholars would agree political processes underlying institutional formation are defined by gender relations and corresponding structure of incentives between men and women in specific contexts.

Research on gender and natural resource governance issues in South Asia have variously concluded that rules governing the commons often exclude women and disregard women's livelihood requirements (Agarwal 1997a; Agarwal 1997c; Agarwal 2001; Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen 2001; Sarin 2001; Nightingale 2002). Bina Agarwal (2001) suggests such exclusion reflects women's low bargaining power vis-à-vis men in negotiating for their interests in the community based organizations. Women's low bargaining power in turn, arises from inequalities in men and women's personal and household endowments. Furthermore, research also suggests structure of incentives facing men and women influence women's relative dependence on the environment together with women's influence on institutional processes. For instance, studies on gender and CPR in Zimbabwe suggest gendered ideologies functioned to prioritize men's right to the use of CPR over women's. Hence, the incentive structure was such that men had a greater stake in ensuring the continual availability of and access to CPR resources than women did (Jackson 1993b).

*In institutional functioning*, Agrawal and Gibson argue institutions are 'provisional rules' structuring individual behavior by shaping stability in expectations and consistency in actions. But once formed, institutions *exercise effects that are independent of forces that constituted them*. In other words, institutions are molded and re-shaped by dynamic processes of interactions and social processes in the local arena. Along similar lines, an important theme within the gender and property rights literature has been on how rules surrounding property rights are constructed and evolve in relation to changes in gender relations. Most notably, Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997) argue in many parts of Africa, property rights are gender exclusive and women lack formal titles. But within such unequal institutional structures,

'micro-frontier spaces' have evolved where women exercise considerable voice and influence on the use and control over certain plants and animals, within public spaces or in the private property of others. These rights are recognized on the basis of locally defined relationships (such as reciprocity), but often exist because of women's bargaining strategies to tap into products relegated by men.

Agrawal and Gibson argue *institutional change* can be internally or externally induced. Given there are multiple actors with multiple interests involved in institutional processes, institutional arrangements, at any given time, can never encapsulate all these interests, and will be subject to constant contestation and negotiation. Institutions can change internally by strategic actors bypassing existing institutions to create new ones and/or through constant challenges to institutional form by the action of actors.

The GED scholarship would also support the argument that institutions change through the actions of 'strategic actors'. For instance, and continuing on with the above example, Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997) argue that the women are often granted de facto rights to the collection of fuelwood. But in areas that have undergone commercialization of fuelwood, a remapping of the boundaries between gendered terrains occurs. Men as strategic actors bypass women's micro-rights and maintain their privilege in the landscape. With regards to institutional change through constant challenges, I argue must be subjected to more attention, and raises substantive limitations of Agarwal and Gibson's framework for institutional analysis from a gender perspective. But before going into the limitations of their framework, let us visit Agrawal and Gibson's argument about the role of external actors (such as the state and development organizations) in institutional change.

Agrawal and Gibson argue that external or non-local forces (such as policies and practices of the state and NGOs) can trigger institutional changes at the local level. They recommend external actors be cognizant of politics at the local level, and strategically support policies/development intervention to promote 'democratic' and 'accountable' institutions responsive to multiple and conflicting interests.

*...members of these groups should also have opportunities to exercise a right to remove their representatives if the performance of their representatives is unsatisfactory as deemed by those affected by the rules.*

*(Agrawal and Gibson 1999: pp.638).*

At the same time, Agarwal and Gibson also suggest that formulation and implementation of policies/development intervention are not a linear process and that the envisioned outcomes of policies are often re-shaped by the ‘politics of the local’:

*“...external forces, such as new state policies in relation to community-based conservation, can drastically change the shape of existing local institutions...on the other hand, introduced changes will themselves be contested in the local context, and their meanings transformed by the communities whose actions they are supposed to alter”.*

The latter is endorsed by GED feminists such as Cecile Jackson’s (Jackson 1997; Jackson 1998). In her study on the governance of water in Africa, Jackson suggests the formulation and implementation of gender and environment policies cannot be understood as a linear process. Policies are often re-shaped by the interface between local actors and field agents, and the re-interpretation of policies and development intervention by men and women.

As outlined above, Agrawal and Gibson’s framework for institutional analysis can be applied usefully for gender analysis of the formation, functioning and change in institutions. However, the framework needs to be broadened and revised for the present study on gender, institutions and external actors in community forestry. The framework focuses on politics in institutional processes in general and needs to consider the gendered dimensions of institutional processes. The framework makes policy recommendations for creating accountable and democratic institutions. It considers the dynamics between external agents and local actors and possible outcomes for institutional change. The scope of the framework is not however to study the evolution of environmental policies, ‘interface’ between external agents and local users throughout the institutional processes (formation and functioning), and the outcomes of policies and intervention from a gender perspective.

• ***Lack of Embeddendess in Institutional Politics:***

I argue Agrawal and Gibson’s focus on politics of the local in particular and do not attend to the embeddedness of institutions in broader power relations. Their argument that ‘constant challenges’ by actors (irrespective of position in the community and household) can lead to inclusive institutional change exposes the need to make Agrawal & Gibson’s framework more gender aware.

Research on GED variously suggests that women (however marginalized) employ covert and overt strategies to constantly contest against institutional arrangements that do not

incorporate them and their interests. Bina Agarwal's (2001) study of forest governance in India and Nepal revealed widespread evidence of women violating 'unfair' rules of community forests and undermining resource sustainability. Sarin's (1995) research on gender and Joint Forest Management (JFM) in India found women openly protested if and when their gendered interests for firewood and fodder were not addressed by male dominated committees. Similarly, Adams, Elizabeth et al. (1997)'s study of indigenous water governance systems in Kenya pointed out older women molded the meanings of cultural taboos to suit their needs in the face of gender unequal rights to water. All of these studies however, show that women's constant challenges rarely translated into gender inclusive institutional change.

The broader gender and development literature offers differing theoretical insights to explicate why constant challenges (particularly by marginalized women) may not necessarily lead to institutional change. Goetz (1997) argues that because those in power benefit from systems of inequality, institutional reforms seeking to redistribute power relations are met with resistance and opposition. Similarly, Meinzen-Dick and Zwartveen (2001) suggest within highly patriarchal and stratified communities, it is easier for women to get involved in organizations creating new assets (such as through micro-credit initiatives) than those that threaten existing rights of non-members. In such stratified contexts, claiming a right on natural resources and seeking to take an active role in its governance of these resources would entail challenging the status quo—the existing property rights over natural resources (Meinzen-Dick and Zwartveen 2001: pp.72). These acts of resistance by women may, in some instances, be interpreted as part and parcel of the maintenance of systems of domination. They provide spaces in which subordinates may “let off steam” and acquire breathing spaces within existing systems of inequalities (White 1992).

The extent to which one or a combination of these arguments can better explain the persistence of gender unequal institutions, in spite of constant challenges, are subject to empirical inquiry. But a broader implication of these examples and theoretical propositions is that constant change to institutional form will not materialize unless and in the absence of changes in balance of power between the genders.

In other words, institutional processes cannot be understood in a vacuum but rather as embedded in broader and prevailing gender relations.

Agrawal and Gibson provide a commendable framework to understand the role of 'power relations and politics' in institutional processes. For instance, they emphasize the importance of understanding the existence of and interactions between multiple and differently positioned actors, 'existing power relations' and corresponding 'structure of incentives' to analyze institutional processes. Nevertheless, their framework, from a gender perspective, pays inadequate attention to the following, substantive questions: how are power (gender) relations constituted, contested, and re-constituted? And how do these power (gender) relations, in turn, interact with processes involved in the creation, functioning and evolution of institutions?

Gender and development scholars such as Bina Agarwal (2001) argue men and women's entry and influence in institutions of natural resource governance are defined by gender relations at the household and community level. Similarly, the broader gender and development scholarship, on gender dynamics in public and private institutions, suggest the norms and ideologies governing gendered relationships at the household level are 'borrowed' to define the terms and conditions under which men and women enter and partake in public-level institutions.

*Despite the separation of domestic institutions from the public domains of production and exchange, familial norms and values are constantly drawn to construct the terms on which women and men enter, and participate, in public life...Both within and across institutions, gender operates as a pervasive allocation principle, linking...domestic with public domains.*

*(Kabeer 1994: pp.62)*

Public institutions do not just passively mirror gender differences at the household-level, they also produce gender differences through their functioning—their structures and everyday practices. Research demonstrates, in many contexts, public-level institutions reinforce traditional assumptions about women's roles and exacerbate women's lower entitlements and capacities for self-development (Mayoux 1995; Goetz 1997). Goetz has therefore, aptly pointed out institutions are more than 'rules of the game' and must simultaneously be understood as "...historically constructed frameworks for behavioral rules and as generators of experience" (Goetz 1997: pp.6) And "...by setting limits to, or boundaries around, social practice, including thought, institutions shape human experience and personal identity" (Goetz 1997: pp.6).



- ***Re-Visiting the Role of Extra-local Actors in Agrawal and Gibson's Framework***

Agrawal and Gibson's discussion of extra-local actors are limited to policy prescription and role in institutional change<sup>16</sup>. They comment on 'what the policies/intervention should look like', but the scope of the framework is not to study the politics behind formulation of natural resource governance policies at the macro level. GED scholarship suggests macro-level policies inform and influence governance of resources at the local level and must be considered for a well grounded analysis. Even Arun Agrawal (2005), in his recent work on 'environmentality, has emphasized the construction of knowledge behind 'technologies of government' and implications for the governance of resources at the local level. Along somewhat similar lines, GED scholars such as Lcoke (1999) have (See Section 2.1) unpacked the gendered assumptions and the political economic rationale behind macro-level environmental policies.

Ethnographic research on institutions and natural resource governance at the local level highlight the role of development agents throughout the institutional processes (Li 1996; McCay 2002; Mosse 1997). They therefore, point to the inadequacies of Agrawal and Gibson's focus on the implications of external change for institutional change. Mosse's (1997) study of tank irrigation found institutions were introduced and developed by the state. McCay (2002) argues that most local institution of NRG, far from emerging organically, are often created and sustained by external actors such as the state and development organizations. Similarly, in community forestry in Nepal, the field level agents (of the Department of Forestry and development/civil society organizations) are often directly involved in the formation, functioning and change of formal institutions for community forestry. Ironically, in his recent work, Agrawal (2005) criticizes the CPR literature for neglecting the role of the state in establishing and changing institutions established to govern natural resources.

- ***Building on Agarwal and Gibson's Framework for Institutional Analysis:***

In light of the above identified limitations of Agrawal and Gibson's framework, I propose building on the framework in three important ways.

Frances Cleaver's (2000; Cleaver 2002) proposes institutions of natural resource governance needs to be understood in the context of 'institutional bricolage'. Institutional bricolage refers to how "...mechanisms for...resource management are borrowed or

constructed from existing institutions, styles of thinking and sanctioned social relationships” (Cleaver 2000: pp.380). In other words, local institutions of natural resource governance are formed, function and evolve by constantly drawing from these existing patterns of relationships. From a gender perspective, this would suggest that gender differences in power mediate how men and women enter, voice and influence local institutions of NRG. And further, because societies and societal relations are constantly changing, these broader level changes also influence and shape institutions.

In order to understand and explain the interrelationship between gender, institutions and role of external intervention, I draw from the GED scholarship on unpacking policies and gendered assumptions they embody. At the local level, I employ Leach, Mearns et al. (1997; 1999) view that diverse institutions operate simultaneously to mediate human-environment relationships. Local institutions established for the purposes of natural resource governance co-exist and overlap with multiple and parallel institutions. Similarly, in my empirical chapters, I will also discuss how local institutions interact with and are influenced by gender relations, and the ‘interface’ between external agents and local users.

I will employ Long and Long’s (1992; Long and Vallareal 1994) ‘interface point’ provides an insightful avenue to understand and explicate interactions and dynamics between local and extra-local actors. Long and Long argue development agents rarely function as messengers who carry government policy to the local population and local people, in turn, are far from passive beneficiaries of these policies. The outcomes of policies are crucially dependent on the process of development intervention between development agents and local level actors, each with competing and overlapping values, interests and frames of reference. The interactions are characterized by struggle, manipulation, and/or building of new social ties between the two sets of actors and where the expected outcomes of policies and intervention are re-shaped and acquire new meanings. Similarly, the importance of ‘interface point’ has been highlighted in the various, emerging debates on state-society relations in the broader environmental governance literature.

Scholars have variously argued that macro-level environmental policies are often shaped by institutions and power relations at the local level. Scott (1998) and Peluso (1992; 1992), in their classical studies on state-society relations in natural resource governance, allude to the political contestations that take place at the interface point between the state that attempts to

impose its will on society (through 'high modernist' ideologies and/or dual and contradictory roles) and society that rebels. Such a view is problematic for it negates the multitude of power relations within state and society, and presents the state in constant opposition to society. Instead, others call for understanding how both the state and society are re-shaped and transformed in various ways at the 'interface point'. In his most recent work, Arun Agrawal argues the process of government – intimate government - that makes local people feel included and in control of natural resource governance can undertake 'shaping' of subjects, and make people act in the way the state wants regardless of their category (caste, gender etc) (Agrawal 2005). Siviramakrishnam (1999), instead, suggests that both the state and society are transformed at the local level through the processes of 'statemaking'. Along similar lines, Robbins (2000) discusses how the lines between the state and society are blurred as the state agents become involved in the institutions of corruption in his study in Latwara.

In comparison, other scholars take a more development interventionist approach. Some highlight the importance of building 'social capital' between external agents and local users (Pretty and Ward 2001) whereas others call for taking a more politically charged approach. Evans (1996) discusses the importance of the state/external agents being 'embedded' in every day relations and simultaneously 'autonomous' from powerful agents at the local level. Li (1996) and Mosse (1997) would suggest such an approach would allow the external agents to take strategic cues from ongoing forms of negotiations and empower the marginalized. Still others have championed the importance of harnessing democracy and accountability between external agents and local users in natural resource governance (Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Larson 2002; Ribot 2002; Larson 2003; Larson and Ribot 2005; Ribot, Agrawal et al. 2006). By highlighting the empirical findings on the interactions between external agents and institutional processes in two research sites, I re-visit these discussions further in the conclusion to this thesis.

## ~ Chapter Three ~

### 3 Research Methods and Reflections on Methodology

This research primarily focuses on examining and explicating the interrelationship between gender relations and the formation, functioning and change in local institutions of community forestry. Because these institutions are often supported by extra-local development intervention in community forestry, I also examine how such interventions have influenced institutional processes and gender relations. Following from the previous chapter on the theoretical underpinnings that have informed this study, this chapter will focus on the methodological framework employed to examine these research questions. In particular, I will discuss the research design and data collection methods I employed to examine the above research objectives; and the research methodology and epistemology that informed my research process.

This study employed a combination of qualitative methods at various levels—local, district and national—to conduct analysis of: (a) gender relations in two field sites; (b) gender analysis of institutions of community forestry; (c) interface between extension officials and local users in institutional processes. Because this research is concerned with issues of power, politics and inequalities in gender relations and local institutions, engaging with questions of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘positionality’ were crucial in both conducting the research in the ‘field’ as well as analyzing the data I collected. This chapter will engage with these issues in greater detail and will also include my reflections on conducting research in the context of the ongoing civil conflict in Nepal.

#### 3.1 Research Design and Data Collection Methods

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the theoretical premise of the study is that institutional processes are embedded in and borrowed from existing gender relations, on the one hand. On the other hand, institutions of natural resource governance are often supported, sustained and changed by external development interventions which in turn influence gender dynamics in institutions. In light of this, my research has conducted three levels of analysis: (i) gender relations in two research sites, (ii) gender dynamics in local institutions of community forest in the two villages, and (iii) forestry policies in the middle hills, how they were being

translated at the local levels in two research sites and with what implications for gender dynamics in institutions at the local level. This section provides a brief overview of the research methods I employed, the basis for choosing my field sites (Bhatpole and Gharmi), and an overview of the data I collected for my research.

### 3.1.1 Research Methods:

I spent over a year conducting my research in Nepal of which I allocated 8 months for field research in Gharmi and Bhatpole and spent the remaining interviewing government and non-government officials working in community forestry at the local, district and central levels. In order to conduct such a multi-level analysis (local, district and national), I used a combination of qualitative research methods: household structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, key informants, Participatory Rural Appraisal exercises, and participant observation as outlined by the table below.

Figure 1: Outline of the Research Methods

<b>Gender relations in Bhatpole and Gharmi</b>	<b>Local Institutions of Natural Resource Governance (NRG)</b>	<b>Policies &amp; Interface between Forest Extension staff and Local Users</b>
Household (household) structured interviews of 50 households in Gharmi and 50 households in Bhatpole.	Constitutions of Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs) and their operational plans of Bhumi-pujnee-Teesdhunge community forest (Gharmi) and Birawtapakha-Koldanda community forest (Bhatpole)	Review of the major policies and legislations pertaining to the forestry sector in Nepal
Over 200 semi-structured interviews of key informants, and ordinary villagers (both men and women)	Semi-structured interviews of key informants, committee members (past and current), and ordinary users.	Gender policies and operational plans at the Central and district
Thirty focused groups interviews (both men and women, separate and together)	Focused group interviews of users and committee members.	Interviews with 30 government and non-government officials on the evolution of community forestry policies at the national level.
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises such as resource maps, wealth ranking, gender analysis of activity profile, personal and household resources, seasonal activities calendar, social network mapping	Participant observation of everyday life in the village as well as of Community Forestry committee meetings, general assemblies, and other activities.	Interviews of DFO staff (District Forest Officers, Assistant Forest Officers, Regional Directors, forest rangers and guards) in Kavre and Kaski District to examine how these policies have been translated into practice in the districts and field sites studied.

### ***3.1.2 Selection of Field Sites:***

During my first two and a half months in Nepal, I visited approximately 20 Community Forestry Users Group (CFUGs) in both the middle hills of Nepal to understand their internal workings and decide on research sites. These CFUGs covered the following districts: Palpa, Nawalparasi, Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok, and Kaski.

I decided to conduct my research in Gharmi village of Lamachaur Village Development Committees (VDC)<sup>17</sup> in Kaski District (Western Region) and Bhatpole village of Jaisithok VDC in Kavrepalanchok district (Central Region). Refer to the Map in Appendix 1 to see where my research sites are located. Given the nature of my research project, these two areas provide good research sites for the following reasons:

Both Kavre and Kaski districts are located in the middle hills of Nepal. As such, the geographical terrain of the villages, area under forest cover, area under agriculture cover, and type of forest products found are similar. Furthermore, forestry policies of the government and the non-government organizations were also comparable in the two areas<sup>18</sup>. Both the districts and the VDCs have heterogeneous population groups, with concentration of certain population groups in hamlets.

The level of socio-economic development in both the areas is similar in terms of: literacy rates, dependence on subsistence agriculture, and rate of male out-migration, remoteness, and proximity to the nearest urban centers are similar. While Lamachaur borders Pokhara town, Jaisithok is 2 hours drive from Kathmandu city.

Impact of the Maoist insurgency was relatively low in comparison to neighboring VDCs. This means that the flight or death of male members of households caused by the insurgency, which in turn affects gender relations, was relatively absent in these VDCs.

### ***3.1.3 Research Design and Data Collection***

My research focused on (1) gender relations in Bhatpole and Gharmi; (2) gender and local institutions of Community Forestry in Bhatpole and Gharmi; (3) gender policies in community forestry at the national level and their translation into practice in Bhatpole and

Gharmi. In light of this, I will provide an overview of the major facets I examined and the theoretical justifications for doing so below.

• ***Gender Relations amongst the Tamangs and Biswa-Karma of Bhatpole & Gharmi:***

My research focused on gender relations amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole and *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi. The research design I employed for this study drew from the theoretical frameworks on gender and environment, gender relations, and institutions I discussed in Chapter Two. The gender theorists who informed my research argue that household is the primary site for gender relations. But the household is also permeated by broader relations. In light of this, my research focuses on three levels of analysis: VDC, hamlet, and intra-household levels. At the VDC and hamlet level, I examined the historical, political economy of the VDC and the hamlet in order to situate the group and community I was studying within a broader context as well as to discern how these relations played at the household level. At the household level, I followed Cameron's (1998) argument that multiple dimensions of socio-cultural practices need to be examined to position men and women. Inspired by Naila Kabeer (Kabeer 1994; Kabeer 1999; Kabeer and Subrahmanian 2000), I evaluated, compared and contrasted the relative voice and autonomy that men and women enjoyed through these relations and practices.

At the VDC level I examined the following:

- a) Composition of the VDC: I examined the ethnic/caste/class groups that resided in the VDC.
- b) Settlement History: When did each of the above mentioned groups settle in the VDC.
- c) Political economy of the Village: For each of the groups, I examined access and ownership of land, performance in basic human development indicators, livelihood patterns, and participation in mainstream formal and informal political systems.
- d) Inter-caste and Inter-ethnic relations from a historical perspective: Land tenure patterns, patron-client relationships, and also perceptions of groups towards one another.

At the hamlet level (i.e. in Bhatpole and Gharmi) I focused on the following:

- a) Intra-hamlet composition;
- b) Settlement History;
- c) Intra-hamlet relations from a historical perspective;

- d) Major livelihood patterns and differences;
- e) Formal and informal systems of political authority;
- f) Gendered networks.

At the Intra-household level:

- a) Organization of the household, family and community;
- b) Marriage practices: Socio-cultural practices and gendered symbolisms behind them; patterns of residence; men and women's relative autonomy in entering and exiting marriages; fall back options;
- c) Division of labor at the intra-household, village, VDC, and wider levels;
- d) Intra-household Allocation of resources (land, marriage transactions, income earned).

### ***3.1.4 Institutions of Community Forestry:***

The methods I employed for institutional analysis was informed and inspired by Agrawal and Gibson's (1999) framework for understanding politics in local institutions of natural resource governance, and Frances Cleaver's 'institutional bricolage' for conceptualizing how existing gender relations are borrowed in institutional processes (Cleaver 2000; Cleaver 2002). I have operationalized institutions as formal rules (as specified in the Constitution and Operational Plans) as well as informal ones (pre-existing and/or existing parallel to constitution and operational plans). I focused on gender dynamics in the following dimensions of institutional processes and how they interacted with the above outlined gender relations:

- a) History and impetus behind starting community forestry.
- b) The relative dependence on forest products for men and women was examined through the following: Land ownership, Amount of production, Livestock, Main sources of energy, Non-agricultural income, Type & amount of forest products needed, Access to private forests, Requirements met by community forest.
- c) The participation of men and women in the formation of community forest was analyzed through: Composition of CFUGs members/committee members/position holders; participation in crafting Constitution & Operational Plan; representation; General Assembly/Committee meeting attendance/frequency of speaking out/issues raised/decisions reflect issues raised etc.)
- d) CF institutions and users's perceptions of voice and accountability;



- e) The benefits users and committee members derived from participating community forest such as access to forest resources, perceptions of social influence, benefits provided by development organizations, and others.
- f) The users and committee members' level of awareness of 'constitution' (CO) and 'operation plan' (OP), and extent to which they felt the CO and OP were followed closely by the CFUGs.

### **3.1.5 Development Interventions in Institutional Analysis:**

The research is also concerned with examining the role of development intervention in the formulation, functioning and change in institutions. My focus was on 'interface point' between forest officials and local users (Long and Long 1992) understanding of 'interface' between development agents and local people. But this required understanding and situating the interface in the broader context of government and organizational policies and mandates related to community forestry:

- a) Review of major policies, academic literature, and interviews with government and non-governmental officials to decipher the evolution of national level community forestry policies in the middle hills of Nepal;
- b) Interviews of key officials, and analysis of reports, mandates, and audits to examine how these policies were being translated into working procedures and at the District levels in Kaski and Kavre
- c) Pre and post-group formation support activities and interviews to decipher working relationship between and perceptions towards forest officials and local users in Gharmi and Bhatpole.

## **3.2 The Rationale for Employing Post-Positivist & Feminist Research Methodology**

Research methods in social science literature are often divided into quantitative and qualitative research methods, and portrayed as two distinct paradigms. Quantitative methods is based on numerical measurements of specific aspects of phenomena or events whereas qualitative focuses on a small number of cases, uses intensive interviews or makes in-depth analysis of historical methods etc. to explain the social, economic or political phenomena of the group of people or community as a whole (Dahal 2002; Kanbur 2002). I chose to employ primarily qualitative research methods because my research examines the complex interplay between gender relations and institutions for the governance of community forestry in two

communities in rural Nepal for which qualitative research methodology provided a more suitable framework of analysis. Nevertheless, I do not discount the importance and value of quantitative research methods. From a gender perspective, for instance, we would not be able to discern broad patterns in gender disparities if it were not for quantitative studies. Similarly, gender/feminist scholars are conducting interesting and important research by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The division, however, is more epistemological in nature and between the positivist and post-positivists.

Positivists view that reality and truth are out there and these can be reliably measured by different observers with the same results, since the observer (the researcher) and observed (e.g. the environment) are assumed to be independent, and the means used by the observer do not affect the way in which a single reality is grasped, interpreted and measured (Pokharel 1997; Britt 2002). Positivist epistemologies have influenced much of research in development studies and continue to posit as pedagogies for judging what constitutes 'good research'. However, increasing number of scholars suggest that positivism is not only undesirable but is also unethical in conducting research in developing contexts.

There is a growing concern of the limitations of positivist methodologies within the literature on institutions and natural resource governance. Craig Johnson (2004) critically examines the positivist methodological frameworks privileged by the Common Property Resource (CPR) literature that has come to dominate the study of local institutions in natural resource governance. He suggests the CPR literature assumes subjects of the research are 'rational individuals who compare expected benefits and costs of actions prior to adopting strategies for action' and the approach 'empirical investigation of the conditions under which individuals could co-operate to govern the commons'. He argues such assumption and approach suffer from 'poverty of context and history' and are ill-equipped to explicate historically specific questions of how power and politics plays into institutional analysis.

On a broader note, Lyla Mehta (2007) points to the ethical dilemmas of conducting research in development studies that cannot adequately be analyzed by uncritically accepting positivist epistemologies. She argues that the study of development is fundamentally a normative project that focuses on power relations and the excluded groups which render the discipline loaded and contested in comparison to other disciplines. Hence, the research process itself should be concerned with the role of power and politics between the researcher

and the subject of the research, and the dilemmas and contradictions encountered by researchers in conducting research on marginalized and powerless. Along similar lines, feminist researchers have long problematized positivist notions of ‘objectivity’ for ensuring ‘methodological rigor’ in research; argued it is unethical for respondents to be treated as ‘mines to extract data’; power and politics invariably affects the research process; and engaging with issues of positionality and reflexivity in the research process should be the pedagogy for ethical research (Examples include: Harding 1987; Harding 1991; England 1994; Katz 1994; Kobayashi 1994; Staeheli and Lawson 1994; Nightingale 2003; Sultana 2007).

The methodological framework employed in this study is informed by and follows this growing movement against the hegemony of positivism in development studies research. The subsequent discussions will focus on my rationale for employing a combination of qualitative research methods, issues of reflexivity and positionality in the research process, and some reflections on conducting field research in conflict situations.

### ***3.2.1 Choice and Reflections on Research Methods***

Andrea Nightingale (2003) battles with the ethical question of representing those who she has researched. She argues that there is no one truth out there to be uncovered and all knowledge is partial and linked to the contexts in which it is created. She suggests that one way of addressing misrepresentation is to use a combination of research methods and reflect on the limitations of each in practice. In a similar vain, I employed a combination of qualitative research methods to conduct my research because of the inherent ‘partiality’ of knowledge enabled by each method during my field research. Below, I present a discussion on each of the research methods I employed and the reasons why I felt it was important to use a combination of various qualitative research methods.

I began my field research, in both Gharimi and Bhatpole, through ***household structured*** Interviews. The structured interviews incorporated introductory questions such as the name of the respondent, location, size and nature of households. In addition to these, I asked brief questions about issues that I was interested in examining in my research such as ownership of land, age of marriage (to start understanding the gender relations in the village), type of marriages, name and gender of household head, use of forest products, involvement in community forestry etc. (to begin research on institutions of community forestry). My

concern was not necessarily to interview all the households in the community as much as to get a representative sample of the households. I found geographical divisions were important in each village because both the *Tamang* and *Biswa-Karmas* villages were spread out. Hence, I made sure that I covered both the breadth and length of the villages. Furthermore, the questions/issues that I focused on were similar throughout so that differences in responses could be better highlighted. For instance, I found that responses to questions such as ownership of land and division of labor varied depending on gender and age of the interviewees. My approach was nevertheless distinct from the conventional survey methods in a number of ways. I (as the primary researcher) conducted vast majority of the household structured interviews and as much as I was interested in generating data, I was paying close attention to broader issues of who I was interviewing, who did they represent, how I was speaking to them and more. The questions were structured but relatively flexible and open. I did this in order to allow and provide space for respondents to elaborate on certain aspects of the questions.

The household structured interviews were insightful and important for my study. I refer to these interviews throughout my discussions of gender relations and institutional analysis in both Gharmi and Bhatpole. They were also an important way of introducing myself to the people I was researching and building rapport amongst my respondents. Nevertheless, the questions were broad and general, and the data I collected from the interview schedule only gave me a snap shot of the complexities underlying gender relations and institutions in the villages. Furthermore, I did 'pilot testing of the questions' with five interviewees in each village first before I interviewed the remaining interviewees. This was to contextualize the questions and word them in an accessible manner. In spite of this, I found there were considerable differences in the responses to seemingly straightforward questions such as how far is your wife's natal home from the village, when are community forest committee meetings held and more. It was also difficult to discern with such a general questionnaire how interlocking relations of gender, caste, class and ethnicity shaped differences in responses. Such limitations I encountered, however, were not unforeseen and further reinforced my plan to complement the household structured interviews with other research methods.

My research therefore, relied heavily on *interviews*. I conducted over 200 interviews (of variously positioned actors) during the course of my field study in Gharmi and Bhatpole villages on socio-cultural practices, their implications for gender relations, and gender

dynamics in the formation, functioning and change in local institutions of community forest. Interviews generate information about people's perceptions, beliefs, motivations, future plans, private behavior (Saravanavel 1987). My approach in conducting the interviews followed closely what Norman Denzin (1989: pp.105-6) refers to as 'non-schedule standardized' and 'nonstandardized interview'<sup>19</sup>. I began my second round of interviews (after household structured ones) as the 'nonstandardized' ones where I asked general questions about my research topics. This allowed me considerable flexibility to probe various areas and test many of the assumptions/hypothesis I had formulated from the household structured interview data. At the same time, I was also able to decipher facets that required more probing and responses from diverse actors for which I employed non-schedule standardized interviews. For instance, through non-standardized interview, I was able to understand and appreciate the importance of migration on men and women's lives in both Bhatpole and Gharmi. Hence, I conducted non-schedule standardized interviews of men and women to find out about history of migration, push and pull factors that led men and/or women to migrate, and the gendered experiences of those who were left behind. These non-schedule standardized interviews were therefore very specific and focused on particular facets that I wanted to explore.

One of the central contributions of feminist research and epistemology has been to highlight that social science research has often been confined to researching on men, and has been unable to capture the distinctiveness and diversity of women's lives, interests or perceptions (Moore 1988). Many argue that researching on women is a political stance that they are taking in social science research. I have chosen to focus my research on women's lives and how this relates to their involvement in community forestry precisely because of the dearth of well-researched academic literature on the topic in Nepal<sup>20</sup>. Having said that, it is also important to speak with and include men in the research process. After all, 'gender relations' which shape 'women' and 'women's experiences' are inherently about relations between men and women. And by interviewing and focusing solely on women, the nuances of how gender relations are constituted in specific historical contexts will be lost. In this spirit, my research has focused primarily on women, on diversity of women's experiences and perceptions, but has also included men and men's perceptions in the process.

Along with individual interviews, I also conducted approximately 30 *focus group discussions* (20 in Bhatpole and 10 in Gharmi). Focus group discussions are "...simply a discussion, in which a small group of people under the guidance of a facilitator or moderator

talk about topics selected for investigation” (Howard et al. 1989 quoted in Fallon and Brown 2002: pp.196). I was interested in conducting focus group discussions precisely of the interactive dimension of the method (Morgan 1988) and as Hyden and Bulloow (2003: pp.307) put it: “a richer knowledge of the subject being discussed may be achieved as topics and opinions unfold and are negotiated in the focus group discussions”. I found this to be the case in many of the focused group discussions I conducted during my study. For instance, I conducted a focus group discussion with 7 members (3 men and 4 women) on their experiences with migration in Bhatpole. After 45 minutes of informative discussions (on the history and changes in patterns of migration in the village, personal experiences with migration, employment opportunities available, gender differences in migrant networks and more), the participants started discussing and debating on the intra-household level conflicts triggered by male out-migration (refer to Chapter Six).

Furthermore, focus group discussion provided a window to understand gender relations in each field site and to compare and contrast gender relations between the field sites. I found that in the mix-gender focus group discussions I conducted in Gharmi, towards the beginning of my field study, the men (and especially the elderly and powerful ones) did all the talking and the women simply kept quiet. I had to conduct separate interviews with women and with differently positioned women (such as with elderly women, newly married women, women with husbands abroad, women without husbands working abroad) to ensure everyone spoke and interacted with one another in the discussions. In comparison, in Bhatpole, women who had shied away from responding to introductory questions (such as what is your name, age etc.) spoke candidly about various dimensions of their lives and their relations with their husbands in mix-gender focus groups.

I argue such contrasting experiences with mix-gender groups in Bhatpole and Gharmi reflects how existing gender relations were carried into the research process and serves to compare, contrast and inform the varying ways gender relations were constituted in these communities. As one of my informants suggested to me in Gharmi, women’s silence must be understood in the context of men and women’s perceptions of mix-gender ‘focus group discussions’ as ‘public domains’ where men and women have to abide by gender prescribed behavior. In Bhatpole, in comparison, gender relations were much more relaxed between men and women and women did not face the same restrictions in the presence of men as *Biswakarmas* women of Gharmi did. *Tamang* women of Bhatpole viewed and depended on men as

interlocutors between themselves and outsiders (like me) and therefore, majority of the women felt more comfortable speaking and interacting freely in men's presence<sup>21</sup>.

As a part of the focus group discussion, I also conducted several *participatory rural appraisal* (PRA) exercises such as resource maps, wealth ranking, gender analysis of activity profile, personal and household resources, seasonal activities calendar, social network mapping (Maguire 1987; Mikkelsen 1995; Slocum, Wichhart et al. 1995). PRA has created tremendous interest and debate in the academic and policy literature alike. PRA is both readily dismissed by scholars and as it is unquestionably accepted by development practitioners. I would argue that dismissing PRA in totality is misplaced for it is after all a growing family of approaches and methods developed from participatory research, applied anthropology, and field research in farming systems (Chambers 1995; Chambers 1996). The naive assumption that PRA can 'reverse the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched' combined with the uncritical usage of PRA methods in field settings are the major problems with PRA (Mosse 1994; Nelson and Wright 1995; White 1996; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Mosse 2001; Cornwall 2003). I argue selecting certain facets of PRA and employing them creatively and reflexively can be an important and fruitful task for conducting field research in the field of development studies.

Some PRA exercises I attempted to conduct failed miserably in the field. To take a classic example, I was conducted 'wealth ranking exercises' to understand how my interviewees conceptualized 'wealth', and to find out how wealth was distributed within the VDC (Slocum, Wichhart et al. 1995). My attempts to conduct wealth ranking exercises were met with resistance by interviewees in both *Bhatpole* and in *Gharmi*. As I came to find out later through three of my informants (male, mid-20s; female, 19, unmarried; female, early 20s, married, March 2005), men felt participating in these exercises would expose the lack of unity and hierarchy that existed within the *Biswa-Karma* society and thereby tarnish the impressions villagers were trying to maintain to outsiders like myself. In Bhatpole, in comparison, the reluctance was more to do with personal pride. As one of the poorest members of the village stated in his resistance to the wealth ranking exercise I had proposed (October 2004):

*My wife and I work hard and provide for our family. And I am equally wealthy than the wealthier man in the village so why should I say I am not.*

Nevertheless, other exercises yielded better response. For instance, ‘gender analysis of activity profile’ allowed me to map the differences and overlaps in the work that men and women conducted. I was able to ask detailed questions based on the findings of these exercises. I refer to my findings in the discussions on gender relations in both Bhatpole and Gharmi (see Chapter Five and Seven). Similarly, I discovered that my interviewees were more willing and able to visualize responses in certain situations. This was particularly the case with ownership of land. In Gharmi, most households had small plots of land that surrounded each house. Only successful, male migrants were able to accumulate significant quantities of arable land. The richer echelons of the *Biswa-Karmas* community, men and women alike, were reluctant to specify how much they owned. But surprisingly, they felt it was unthreatening to draw where their land was located in reference to their house. This helped me cross-check who owned, how much land and allowed me to better understand distribution of wealth in the community. In Bhatpole, in comparison, women interviewees lacked numerical skills and found it easier to draw and estimate how much land their household owned. For instance, they estimated the amount of irrigated land by telling me how many paddy crops they could plant in their land, how much space they would leave, where their terraced land was located in relation to village landmarks, and others.

I have attempted to incorporate multiple actors and views throughout the research process. Because I was focusing on so many dimensions of gender relations and institutions, I divided my interviews into specific issues such as migration, marriage practices, etc. Furthermore, I interviewed the same interviewees more than once to get their views on different and overlapping issues. But because the field was inherently and inevitably a site of gendered politics (which I will discuss in greater detail in the subsequent sub-section), I also depended on ‘*key informants*’ or ‘informed informants’. Approximately 15 different individuals served as key informants for my study. These informants explained to me of various elements of village life, gender relations, and community forestry. Without their help, I would not have understood the caste and ethnic relations in Gharmi and Bhatpole; pervasiveness of low-castes stealing in high-caste forests in Gharmi; marriage practices and gendered symbolism behind these practices in Bhatpole and Gharmi and many more.

I found selecting informants were in many respects like selecting good friends who I could trust, who were accessible and had my best interest at heart. Nevertheless, I found the best informants were those who: (1) could communicate effectively with me and/or (2) were



reflective and critical of the power relations in the village and yet were not social outcasts. I found the former to be important in *Bhatpole* where socio-cultural practices and language were all new to me, and were not well-documented in the literature on the Tamangs in Nepal. The latter was more pertinent in Gharmi where gender inequalities were more pronounced but less overt to outsiders like me<sup>22</sup>.

While I was staying in the villages, I also spent time *observing* many aspects of village life, how people interacted with one another, and how this in turn related to community forestry and gender relations. I found this helped verify the ‘facts’ I was told in interviews, better understand the level of impression management amongst the respondents, and get first hand experiences of the events my interviewees recalled. For instance, interviewees in Bhatpole gave conflicting responses about when community forest committee meetings were held. Some told me that it was every month and others said as and when needed. By staying in the village and being observant of the community forest related activities taking place, I found out that the meeting was held as and when needed but on a regular basis nevertheless. As I probed deeper, I found that those who told me that meetings were held monthly were trying to convince me that their CFUG followed its Constitution and Operational Plan rigidly. The ‘constitution’ stated that the committee would meet once a month. Hence, they did not want me to think there was a gap between the formal rule and the rule in practice. As I explain in chapter 6, this must be understood in the context of the relationship between the local users and the District Forest Officials and the gaps and tensions between formal and informal institutions that were a part of the history of the community forest in Bhatpole. Moreover, observing meetings, general assembly (GA), marriages and other social gatherings helped me better understand what actually took place (such as the sequence of events, who spoke and who did not, and how people interacted in general etc.).

Participant observation is an important and well developed methodology in the discipline of anthropology and is widely used to do field research by those inspired by anthropological methodologies. I refrained from labeling the method I used as ‘participant observation’ because of the following reasons: it was not a central component of my study; the ways in which I observed cannot measure up to the anthropological understanding of participant observation; there is widespread, uncritical usage of the method in development academia and practice; and I believed what I was observing was not the ‘truth’ but filtered

through my biography and pre-defined understandings. (The latter is a key theme I shall discuss in greater detail subsequently). At the same time, the method I employed cannot merely be labeled as ‘observation’ after all “...as human beings living with others, we cannot be totally impartial and detached observers. We must also take part in many of the events and processes we are observing and trying to comprehend”(Kottak 1994: pp.23). Therefore, I find it is important to qualify my use of ‘participant observation’. By drawing from Binal Agarwal’s (2001) typology of participation, I argue the approach I used was ‘passive-participant observation’ where I was attending meetings and events without speaking up.

### 3.2.2 *Multiple levels of ‘Field’:*

Staeheli and Lawson (1994) argue that the ‘field’ in social science research should not be limited to particular place(s), although being in a place and focusing on context and everyday experience is a crucial element of field work. Focusing narrowly on a place will lead us to ignore the non-local forces that constantly shape and influence local people’s experiences. And, many of these forces operate at multiple levels even as they take on particular forms in specific settings.

During my field research, I found the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole and *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi constantly interacted with and were shaped by forces outside of their respective villages through caste-based political contestations, historical and ongoing patron-client relationships, and labor markets etc. Similarly, in community forestry, external agents such as the District Forest Office and staff (in Kaski and Kavre Districts) and the Federation of Community Forestry User Group (FECOFUN) in Kaski District played key role in institutional processes throughout the history of the community forests. National level policy changes in community forestry, such as the recent and increasing attention to gender and social equity issues, percolated to the district levels and influenced the ways in which external agents intervened in user groups like those in Gharmi and Bhatpole. In this respect, it was important to analyze how these national level processes unfolded and interacted with gender relations and institutions in my research.

Bearing in mind the multiple levels of ‘field’, I conducted interviews of dominant groups - *Jaisi-Bahun*s in Jaisithok VDC and *Poudyals & K.C.s* in Lamachaur VDC to elicit VDC level data on settlement patterns, caste/ethnic relations, labor markets and more. I found the VDC level political economy shaped and informed many dimensions of gender relations

in the village such as the ways in which caste and gender intersected in Gharmi, gender division of labor and intra-household allocation of resources in Bhatpole and more. My findings are discussed in greater detail in the empirical chapters. Similarly, I found migration was an important facet of village life in both Gharmi and Bhatpole, although the history and nature of migration coupled with its implications for gender relations differed significantly between Gharmi and Bhatpole. I drew from the seasonal and Gulf-related migration literature in Nepal to understand changes in migration patterns, and implications for intra-household relations in both Gharmi and Bhatpole.

With regards to community forestry, I traced the history of external intervention in community forestry, how external agents interacted with community forestry user groups, and the implications of such interactions for CF institutions and gender dynamics. Along with field level inquiry, I reviewed existing literature on community forestry and development aid, analyzed the evolution of forestry policies in the Middle hills of Nepal (including recent policies aimed at mainstreaming gender and social equity in community forestry), and interviewed key ‘makers and shakers’ of the policy process at the national and district levels. Such a multi-layered analysis allowed me to better understand the formal and informal working relationship between forest officials and local users, and decipher how national policies were being translated at the local level.

### ***3.2.3 Reflexivity and Positionality in the Research Process:***

Mehta (2007: pp.17) defines ‘reflexivity’ as the: “...conscious attempt to identify how we as researchers influence the research process and how the whole research process is structured around issues of dominance and power, gender, class [and other social divisions]”. Furthermore, Farhana Sultana (2007) suggests, engaging with questions of reflexivity and positionality may not change the inherent and inevitable power relations between the researcher and the researched but acknowledging, engaging, and addressing these issues must be the cornerstone for ethical research in the developing countries contexts.

I have been concerned about my privileged position vis-à-vis the people and issues I researched throughout the course of this research. For instance, by assuming the position of ‘the researcher’, I have been able to choose which communities to conduct my field research in; interpret how gender relations were being constituted in these communities; identify who was marginalized, who was powerful, and how these in turn shaped institutions of community

forest; and acknowledge how my theoretical/normative commitments as well as personal biography have shaped the ‘objectivity’ of the research. In the process of writing this thesis, I have had to pick and choose which quotations I would highlight and which not; and how I would find ‘order’ in the messiness and sheer complexity of my ‘research findings’. As I revise this chapter one last time before submitting my PhD thesis, I have come to terms with the reality that inequalities in power relations between myself and the people I researched were inevitable. But by being conscious of these inequalities, I have been able to better reflect on my position and minimize the possible harm to those I researched, on the one hand. On the other hand, I have also recognized that my research was itself a process of ‘co-production’ whereby the researched, rather than being silent respondents to my questions and inquiry, have re-shaped my research process in multiple ways.

I will first elaborate on how my theoretical/normative commitments as well as personal biography have shaped the research process.

An interview I conducted of a Non Government Organization (NGO) worker promoting gender issues in Community Forestry in Kavre District, and my reflections on the interview, helps illustrate how my theoretical/normative commitments have influenced interpretations of my research findings. In the interview, the NGO worker argued that ‘gender equality’ in the form of equal access to land, capital and labor for men and women was an imposition by the west. He further suggested the ‘Nepali’ way was to harness comparative advantage between men and women. While it is important to contextualize inequalities and not use a blanket approach, my approach to equality is premised on the notion of equal opportunities and capabilities (Sen 1999), on the one hand, and autonomy to choose and determine one’s course in life, on the other hand (Katz 1997; Kabeer 1999; Kabeer and Subrahmanian 2000). I argue the above understandings have shaped my analysis and evaluation of gender relations in Bhatpole and Gharmi. Gender inequalities existed in distinct ways in the two villages. In Gharmi, many dimensions of socio-cultural practices (such as gender division of labor, organization of the household, marriage practices, intra-household allocation etc.) deprived women of equal access to opportunities and capabilities and prevented them from exercising the same level of choices (both strategic and second-order choices) as men had. In contrast, in Bhatpole socio-cultural practices were not inherently unequal as much as inequalities (in the form of access to opportunities and capabilities, and its implications for ability to exercise

choices) were superimposed on *Tamang* women by the gender biases embedded in and emanating from markets for *Tamang* labor.

My ‘biography’ - personal history and identity - has also shaped the research process. Before I began my field work in Nepal, I was told by many in the academic and non-academic circle, in Kathmandu and London alike, my identity and the research topic I chose would help with my field study. After all, I was a Nepali woman studying Nepali women in Nepal. However, during the field study, I was perceived as someone with multiple identities—unmarried, student, studying abroad, middle class family from Kathmandu, *Chettri*, Nepali speaker—which superseded the supposed ‘similarities’ I shared with those I researched. The differences were so startling that the women in the field were virtually inaccessible to me whereas I was able to find more common ground with men during the first stages of my field study. I found it relatively easier to build rapport with *Biswa-Karma* and *Tamang* men because they were more approachable, vocal, and open about issues that affected their lives (such as caste-based politics and experiences with migration). In comparison, most *Biswa-Karma* refused to speak to me women (even if informally) and *Tamang* women would turn the other direction every time they thought I was approaching them to ask questions.

The impressions those I researched had of me were in turn, defined by the gendered context in which I was carrying out my field research. In Gharmi, as I found out later through one of my informants, a community wide meeting was held the day before I was to start my field research. The power brokers of the *Biswa-Karma* society had decided that women would refrain from speaking with me. This was in response to my third visit to the village where I sought permission for conducting my field study and present my research topic — gender issues in community forestry – to a village wide audience. In Bhatpole, in comparison, women had little exposure speaking to outsiders like myself, and feared they would make a mockery out of themselves.

I argue that being cognizant of these issues and impressions were critical for conducting ethical research. My theoretical/normative commitments emerged from the years of studying and being interested in development issues. My research findings further reinforced the importance of these commitments. However, I was conscious of the possibility that these commitments would pre-define and limit what I would observe in the field. This made my case for examining multiple dimensions of socio-cultural practices and gender relations all the

more important. And with respect to my personal biography, I found it was important for me to remain in the village, negotiate my multiple identities, and decipher various ways of negotiating access to women interviewees.

In Gharmi, quite interestingly and perhaps a little unintentionally on my part, residing in the village, discarding the rules of untouchability, and referring to elderly men and women respectfully on a regular basis was sufficient to negotiate with the power brokers in the *Biswa-Karma* society to allow me access to women. As I point on in the chapter 7 on gender relations in Gharmi, much of interactions between the high and low-castes in Gharmi were structured through practices of untouchability. I was appalled to find out that even the external agents who were high-castes and came to the village on a regular basis to champion *Dalit* rights were reluctant to forgo caste-based discriminations. Once I got entry to ‘women’ in Gharmi, the next challenge was to interview variously positioned women. I observed how women interacted with one another, the various axes of differences amongst women, and sought ‘spaces’ where differently positioned women were comfortable interacting with me and with one another. Similarly, in Bhatpole, by staying in the village, making my presence known, finding plural ways of engaging with women, and gaining the trust and confidence of my informants, I was able to gain access to women. With regards to ‘plural ways of engaging’, as I pointed out earlier in the chapter on household structured interviews, many *Tamang* women could not answer seemingly simple questions such as ‘how far is your natal home from *Bhatpole*?’. For instance, six female respondents told me that getting to their natal home varied between a few hours or a few days. But as I probed deeper and got them to explain to me what they meant, I found that they had little conception of hours (only a few had a watch), and they were referring to the time it took them to walk versus to take a bus.

In presenting my research findings and analysis, I have included many exerts/quotations from interviews I conducted and a rough background of whom the quotations came from, where and how. Unless agreed by my informants and interviewees a priori, I have not disclosed the names and identities of those I interviewed. Some of my interviewees, such as Sita Maya Tamang in Bhatpole, wanted me to include their names so their voices could be heard by the policy makers who might read my dissertation.

### ***3.2.4 Role of the Researched in Re-Shaping the Research Process***

I have already touched upon various ways in which men and women in the ‘field’ influenced and shaped my research process. The multiple identities I listed above were how my interviewees viewed me and distinguished themselves from me. My ‘entry’ into the research site was in turn conditioned by these perceptions and differences. Once I gained ‘entry’, I was always overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of the local people, men and women alike in both field sites. Nevertheless, as I pointed out earlier, the identities that I was associated with continued to shape the responses that my interviewees gave and the extent to which I could gain access to certain domains. I pointed out in the beginning of the previous section that interviewees, in both Gharimi and Bhatpole, were concerned with how they portrayed themselves to me and how this in turn translated into contradictions in seemingly straightforward questions, such as timing of committee meetings and more politically laden ones like wealth ranking exercises.

The interviewees, women and men alike, also shaped the research process in various ways. A case in point was the issue of domestic violence in Gharimi. I found through anecdotal stories and rumors that domestic violence (sexual and physical) was pervasive throughout the village. But being an ‘unmarried woman’ at the time I was conducting my field study, ‘private issues’ such as physical and emotional dimensions of conjugal relations were strictly off limits to me. Even my most trusted informants, the married and unmarried women who were otherwise critical about gender distribution of resource in the community, were reluctant to speak with me about ‘private issues’. I have always wondered if such boundaries to what I could access would have changed had I been married at the time of the field work.

Conducting multiple levels of field research also posed significant and distinct sets of challenges. I found many of the interviews with governmental and non-governmental officials were informative, insightful, and critical for defining my research directions. Nevertheless, the politics of field work I encountered in the villages I worked in was reversed when I moved to district and central levels. For instance, senior governmental officials who were the ‘makers and shakers’ of gender policy in community forestry were difficult to gain access to for an independent researcher like myself.

I had to recourse to '*source force*' (the Nepali equivalent of informal networks of influential family members and friends) to get appointments with governmental officials in several occasions. Even after making the appointments, it was not unusual to have to wait hours and sometimes days for the interviews to take place. The interviews were often short and where I learnt nothing beyond the official rhetoric about how community forestry was the most successful program, and that the Department or the Ministry was moving into the second phase where issues of governance and gender would be addressed. Anything that could be interpreted as 'critical' were siphoned off, and my research project was belittled a number of times. In one occasion, I was accused of resembling "westerners who do nothing but criticize the Nepali administration and Nepal".

In comparison to my experiences with senior governmental officials, I found approaching and interviewing non-governmental officials were relatively easier. But it was difficult to get them to speak openly about organizational politics, dispute within organizations and how these in turn were shaping their approach to gender sensitive intervention in community forestry.

The differences in gaining 'entry' into governmental and non-governmental circles can be explained in terms of organizational politics and culture<sup>23</sup>. I argue the ways in which my 'identity' as that of a scholar seeking to critically evaluate community forestry policies and outcomes restricted open interactions with officials at the central levels. In comparison, at the district level, with continued and regular interactions, I was able to overcome deep seated suspicions that I was there merely to criticize. I was better able to foster a cordial relationship that allowed for fair and honest interactions with government officials and FECOFUN staff in Kaski and Kavre districts.

When I set out to conduct my field research, I was interested in exploring the following research question: How do Community Forestry's Policies in the way they are formulated and implemented affect gender relations? And how do existing gender relations in turn shape the ways in which these policies are implemented? In this respect, my research was concerned with the interplay between gender relations, institutions of community forestry and gender policies in community forestry. My interest in the policies sprung from both the dearth of literature on gender policies in natural resource governance as well as the recent attempts to mainstream gender and social equity in community forestry in Nepal. I was particularly



inspired by post-structuralist approaches to policy analysis, emphasizing analysis of forms of agency, dispute within organizations, and complexities of discourses and of actor-networks<sup>24</sup>. Methodologically speaking, such a theoretical framework would have required gaining entry into these organizations and ‘spaces’ where policies are discussed, debated and decided on; and working closely with and gaining trust of the ‘makers and shakers’ of the policy process. However, I had to improvise on these research objectives because of the difficulties I confronted accessing these organizations, on the one hand, and the challenges posed by Maoist movement and civil conflict in Nepal, on the other hand.

### ***3.2.5 Conducting Research in a Conflict Situation: Challenges & Strategies***

Feminist scholars have argued that researchers conducting field research must embrace the contradictions, complexities and dynamism of the field, and adopt a flexible research methodology that allows the researcher to be open to the challenges of field work and maneuver around unexpected circumstances (Opie 1992; Stanley and Wise 1993; Katz 1994). While this is the case in general, I argue the importance of constant improvisation takes an added dimension when conducting field research in conflict settings. Let me begin by providing a brief overview of the political situation in Nepal between 2004 when I started my field study and 2006 when I completed it, before I discuss how the conflict influenced my research process and how I in turn, maneuvered around these circumstances.

In May 2004 when I started my field study, the parliament had been dissolved, King had assumed semi-authoritative role, the King had instituted a hand-picked government, mobilized the army against the Maoist movement. In addition, the Maoist conflict in the rural areas was at its pinnacle since it was launched in 1996. In Kathmandu, there were violent eruptions of protests by the mainstream political parties demanding reinstatement of the parliament which often brought the city and the major highways leaving the city to a complete shutdown. In the rural areas, the Maoist party further intensified the conflict by declaring parallel governments and calling for an all out war with the state. The Maoist party in turn had shifting and unpredictable policy towards allowing academic scholars and development community at large access to rural areas<sup>25</sup>. The district of Kaski and Kavre were one of the most affected areas. In 2006, when I returned to Nepal to conduct the interviews for the community forest policy segment of my research, the mainstream political parties, facilitated by the Indian government, had reached an agreement with the Maoist party on holding election for the constituent assembly to re-write the constitution of the country. On reaching

this agreement, they directed their combined force towards the King to re-instate the parliament who continued to adamantly oppose. The outcome was the entire country spiraled into violence and chaos, and Kathmandu (the main area for conducting the policy research) was put under curfew<sup>26</sup>.

I had to constantly strategize throughout my research process to overcome these challenges. To start with, I had to choose field sites that were not directly affected by the Maoist movement. This was for personal safety reasons as well as to avoid working in areas where the conflict was changing gender dynamics and community forest institutions<sup>27</sup>. Nevertheless, during the research process, I learnt that because both Gharmi and Bhatpole were populated by low-castes and ethnic minorities, the Maoists had established parallel governments in VDCs surrounding the villages, Kavre and Kaski districts in general were one of the more conflict affected districts in the country, and Maoist rallies and other recruitment activities were commonplace. This meant apart from the logistical concerns of working around blockades and curfews, I also had to negotiate with multiple actors to gain access to the field during the course of my research. For instance, my informants would give me regular information about Maoist activities in the village (such as Maoist party gatherings) and I would schedule my field trips accordingly. In spite of these efforts, I met members of the Maoist militia in Kavre district on my way to Bhatpole. The government official (forest officer) who had accompanied me to the field abandoned me at the first sight of the militia. I listened without a word (as a demonstration of my political neutrality) to their views on how development activities and studies in rural Nepal were different forms of imperialism and colonialism after which I was allowed me access into the village. I learnt through these experiences that conducting field research in a conflict situation requires high level of sensitivity and seeming to maintain political neutrality at all times.

The political instabilities in Nepal at the time of the field study invariably affected governmental and non-governmental functions with regards to community forestry. At the central level, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, the inter-governmental initiative that had been established to mainstream gender and social equity policies in community forestry were unable to fulfill their stated goals. The frequent curfews and blockades meant many of the meetings and discussions could not be held as scheduled. Furthermore, one of the largest donors and key player in pushing for gender and social equity policy in community forest, NARMSAP (the DANIDA-funded community forestry project), had suspended its support to

Nepal in 2005 when the King assumed absolute executive power. These developments adversely affected my ability to carry out a comprehensive analysis of gender and social equity policy in community forest and diminished my scope for carrying out my research as originally envisioned. Nevertheless, I managed to work around these difficulties by interviewing many of the individuals involved and gathering reports and minutes of discussions on mainstreaming gender and social equity policy in community forest. And in Chapter Four, I will discuss the evolution of community forestry policies in the middle hills of Nepal and the ongoing inter-governmental initiative to mainstream gender and social equity at the central level. In Chapter Nine, I will discuss how my research findings at the local level could help inform and generate wider debate and discussion on these ongoing initiatives.

## ~ Chapter Four ~

### 4 Evolution of Gender in Community Forestry Policies in the Mid-Hills of Nepal

In 2003, a National Workshop on community forestry was held to celebrate the 25th year of community forestry in Nepal, and officially launch the beginning of '*Second Generation Issues*' in community forestry. In the opening speech of the workshop, Keshav Kanel, the Director of the Department of Forestry, pointed out that one of the impetus for the launch stemmed from Nepal Government's commitment to address gender and social equity<sup>28</sup> issues in community forestry. The three broad mandates identified in the '*Second Generation Issues*' in community forest were the following: (1) '*Sustainable Forest Management*', (2) '*Livelihoods*' and (3) '*Good Governance*'. Moreover, gender and social equity issues were recognized as an overarching theme in the '*second generation issues*' in community forestry (Kanel and Kandel 2003; Kanel 2004; Kanel and Kandel 2004). Since the workshop, consolidated efforts have been underway amongst the major actors involved in community forestry (government, donors and INGOs) to formulate and mainstream gender and social equity policies in community forestry.

This chapter traces the history of forestry in the middle hills of Nepal through the following historical junctures: pre-nationalization, nationalization of forests, introduction of community forestry through the Panchayat system, user group oriented community forestry, and the recent attempts to incorporate gender and social equity in community forestry. These national level developments have shaped and guided development intervention in community forestry at the local levels. In this respect, this chapter serves the overall research aim of this thesis by providing a historical understanding of community forestry in the middle hills of Nepal, and the impetus behind the current attempts to formulate and implement gender and social equity policies in community forestry.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. First, I provide an overview of the major policies in the forestry sector leading up to the current form of 'user-oriented' community forestry. I attribute the evolution of forestry policies in the middle hills of Nepal to that the interplay between the changes in international level discourses as well as political landscape at the national level in Nepal. Second, I argue that the ongoing attempts to formulate gender

and social equity in community forestry policies must also be situated within the historical evolution of community forestry in the country.

#### **4.1 Community Forestry Policies in a Historical Perspective:**

This section traces the formulation of major forestry policies in the middle hills of Nepal from nationalization of forests to the current framework of ‘user-oriented’ community forestry. By examining the evolution of these policies, this section argues that CF policies have historically been framed in the context of changing international-level discourses on forestry together with the shifts in the national-level political landscape in Nepal.<sup>29</sup>

##### ***4.1.1 Nationalization of Forests: Pre-Community Forestry (Pre-1977)***

The nationalization of forests in the 1950s/60s in Nepal was the first time the State made a concerted effort to formulate and implement a national policy in the forestry sector. The Private Forests Nationalization Act of 1957 and the Birta Abolition Act of 1959 were the two main national policies on forestry enacted by the State (Talbot and Khadka 1994). The aim of these policies was to centralize and establish state monopoly over forests. The official rhetoric behind these nationalization policies was to “...regulat[e] access to and use of the forests in an attempt to regularize the flow and control of forests” (Hobley 1996b: pp.69). Before discussing nationalization of forests, it is important to first understand how they came to exist. This requires briefly probing into the history of modern Nepal, the evolution of state building and its implication for forest resources, on the one hand. On the other hand, it is important to understand how the international level discourses on state control over forest resources influenced and legitimized the nationalization of forests in Nepal.

- ***Forests Under the Shah Dynasty & the Rana Oligarchy (1768-1951)***

The boundaries of Nepal, until the mid-eighteenth century, were divided into small principalities (Stiller 1995; Whelpton 2005) that were unified by Prithivi Narayan Shah and his supporters. The prominent Nepali economic historian Mahesh Chandra Regmi (1971) argues that the Shah dynasty centralized power and distributed land to formulate and strengthen political patronage. Land tenure systems such as *Birtha*, *Jagir*, *Talukdar*, and *Kipat* are examples of land distribution systems created to foster political patronage. ‘Birtha’ was the primary form of land grants given to the nobility as well as the civil and military employees as their emoluments for services rendered to the State. For instance, under the *Birtha* system, land grants were made by the state to individuals on a tax free and heritable

basis (Regmi 1988). The *Brahmins*, *Chettri* and *Thakuri* formed the dominant beneficiaries of the above policy as these groups were favored for political reasons by the Shah Dynasty. Other groups such as *Gurungs*, *Magars*, *Limbus* and *Tamangs* suffered gradual depletion of or encroachment on their lands (Regmi 1971; Regmi 1978). Furthermore, the diverse ethnic population of the country was incorporated into a holistic framework of national caste hierarchy, which was in turn codified and legally enforced by the central government under the 'Mulki Ain'. The 'Mulki Ain' placed the ruling elites at the apex caste hierarchy and restricted any form of inter-caste intermingling such as through marriage and commensuality. These measures were aimed at ensuring political power did not go outside the hands of the ruling elite (Hofer 2004).

In spite of centralization of power, the period between 1768 – 1951 was marked by political contestations within the governing elites. In 1846, Jung Bahadur Rana (belonging to one of the governing elites), orchestrated a royal massacre (commonly referred to as '*Kot Parba*'<sup>30</sup> in Nepal) and usurped power. He then relegated the palace and successive Kings as mere figureheads and established a 'Rana Oligarchy' of hereditary Prime-Ministerial Rule that governed Nepal till 1951. The Rana oligarchy continued and intensified the tradition of employing land as a form of political patronage as well as for personal enrichment. Regmi (1978) points out that by 1950, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all forest and cultivated lands were under '*Birth*' and '*Jagir*' and 75% of which was kept by the Ranas and distributed to their cronies.

Furthermore, the land tenure systems under the Shah Dynasty and Rana oligarchy covered both agricultural and forest land. There was no central policy governing forest management, and access to forests by local users was defined variously by state favored landed aristocracy<sup>31</sup>. There is little written literature on pre-Rana Oligarchy indigenous forms of forest management and/or how access to forests was influenced by these varying property rights. In comparison, during and post-Rana regime, scholars have documented various forms of indigenous forest management that either existed parallel to (Campbell 1978; Messerschmidt 1984) or were eradicated by the state structured land tenure (Furer-Haimendorf 1984). For instance, during Rana Oligarchy the local population, in certain places, could bargain with their land owners to get access to forest products. Landed aristocracy employed *Talukdars* (local tax collectors) to collect the land tax from the local community members living on the land (Hobley 1996b). Mahat (1985) suggests *Talukdars* were also responsible for controlling access to and distribution of forest products.

- ***Forests Under the Panchayat System (1951-1987)***

The economic, political and military support of the British Empire in India sustained the Rana Oligarchy in Nepal. Hence, the demise of the Rana Oligarchy are attributed to the end of the British Empire in India coupled with the support and sympathy pro-democracy movement of Nepal received from the post independence government in India. On February 7, 1951 the Rana regime officially came to an end with the 'Delhi Compromise'. It was agreed between the King and all political parties that had hitherto been underground, a new democratic constitution would be drafted through the constituent assembly and democracy would be established (Kumar 1967).

But, what ensued was a short period of democratic experiment marred with political instability. In 1960, King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah assumed executive authority through a *palace coup*, established a partyless *Panchayat* system, and banned all political parties. The Panchayat system in Nepal was a pyramidal structure progressing from village-level assemblies to a Rastriya Panchayat (or national level parliament). The system enshrined the absolute power of the monarchy and kept the King as head of state with sole authority over all government institutions. "The justification for the Panchayat system, touted as a partyless democracy, was made on the grounds that the country was not ready for multiparty politics and that the new system was suited to the "climate and soil" of the country" (Thapa and Sijapati 2003; pp.18; Whelpton 2005).

The nationalization of forests in 1957 and 1959 were introduced during the short experiment with 'democracy' as a part of a larger attempt at land reform and its equitable re-distribution. Unlike the brief democratic period, the King, under the Panchayat system, continued to support nationalization of forests to undermine the stronghold of the Rana oligarchy (Mahat 1985; Joshi 1989)<sup>32</sup>. The Department of Forestry (DoF) was also established during this period to police and regulate licenses to forest resources.

At the local level, the implications of nationalization remains disputed. The conventional view, subscribed to by donors and some academics, posits the nationalization of the forests led to the closure of lands and forests which in turn, sparked widespread illegal felling by villagers who felt alienated by these policies (FAO and Bank 1979; Bajracharya 1983; Bajracharya 1983). Others point out that these policies were employed without

accompanying administrative structure needed to enforce the policy. The state rarely had the capacity to monitor and enforce nationalization policies in much of the country, and the local people remained unaware of official closure of commons (Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Gronow 1995). The seminal research conducted by Mahat (1985) points to how nationalization policies were selectively enforced by the state to repress political contenders such as land-based movements launched by the landless.

However, there is little contention that nationalization policies centralized authority within the Forest Department and institutionalized the responsibilities of the foresters as that of 'policing' the forests. These in turn were backed with subsequent policies such as the Forest Act 1961 which forbid local people to enter the forests and procure forest products (HMG/N 1961). The 1967 Forest Preservation Act (HMG/N 1967) criminalized the removal of forest products, and even allowed the District Forest Officers to shoot wrongdoers who in any way threatened the life or health of forest officials. As Britt argues these acts "...offers insights into the negative, even hostile relationship between the forest Department personnel and the local people at the time" (Britt 2002).

Such forms of dictatorial forest management regime was in turn, 'borrowed' from the model of centralized and state-controlled forest management ascribed by the Dehradun School of Forestry in India (See for further discussion: Joshi 1989; Hobley 1996b; Pokharel 1997). In this respect, the larger discourses about how forests should be managed played a key role in shaping the relationships between state and society with regards to forest governance.

#### ***4.1.2 Introduction of Community Forestry: Discourses, Policies in the Panchayat Era (1977-1989)***

Community forestry can be understood as partnership in managing forests between the government and local people. Under this partnership, the local people accept the responsibility for the protection, management and sustainable utilization of their community forests. The government become extension agents, providing advice and support to the local communities (Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Springate-Baginski, Blaikie et al. 2000).

Nepal began experimenting with 'Community Forestry' since the 1970s with the dual aims of addressing forest degradation and meeting people's basic needs for forest products. The 'Ninth Forestry Conference' (1975) recognized rapid deforestation in the Middle hills as a



pressing development challenge in Nepal, criticized nationalization of forests for failing to manage forests effectively and exacerbating deforestation, and proposed a partnership between forest officials and local people to manage forests. This set in motion a series of policy changes paving the way to the introduction of community forestry in the country (Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Malla 1992; Pokharel 1997; Britt 2002).

This section will discuss the increasing role of donors and international discourses in informing and promoting 'community forestry' policies. In tracing the evolution of community forestry, I will situate my analysis within the broader political developments and changes in Nepal which were critical in re-shaping community forestry policies.

- ***Foreign Aid & Donor-led Discourses***

After the demise of the Rana Oligarchy in 1960, Nepal opened up its doors to donors, scholars and visitors – the outside world (Sharma 2004)<sup>33</sup>. This period marked unprecedented increases in foreign aid and donor support in Nepal's development planning and execution. And foreign aid since then has transformed from merely 'assisting' the country to being critical for its survival (Mihaly 2002).

The contribution of foreign aid to the national budget in Nepal serves to highlight the contribution of donors. Donors pushed for Nepal to plan, develop and execute its five year development plans since the 1960s. Foreign aid underwrote Nepal's entire budget in the First Five Year Plan<sup>34</sup>. At the time community forestry was introduced in Nepal, in the Sixth Five-year Plan (1980-85), foreign aid covered 61% of the budget (Britt 2002).

The contribution of the donors to the national development expenditure has been particularly concentrated in the forestry sector (Tinker 1994; Kumar 2002). Kumar (2002) demonstrates 90% of the overall budget of the forestry sector had been financed by external aid since the 1970s. Chapagain et al. (1999) shows that over ten major donors were involved in Community Forestry since the 1980s (such as World Bank (IDA), DANIDA, UK, USAID, AUSAID, SDC, GTZ, CIDA, ADB, and FINNIDA) and many other I/NGOs.

Such massive contributions to the forestry sector extended to donors considerable voice in the national forestry policy making process and arena. There exists widespread agreement that donors were critical in Nepal experimenting with and adopting the concept of community

forestry (Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Hobley 1996b; Pokharel 1997). For instance, the total cost for the formulation of a 'Master Plan' for the Forestry Sector (the major policy framework for the Community Forestry sector) was funded by FINIDA, ABD, UNDP and USAID (HMG/N 1988).

Intra and inter-organizational politics of donors aside, there was consensus amongst the donors that Community Forestry approach to forest management would address the ongoing 'environmental degradation' in the middle hills, meet the 'basic needs' of local people, and involve local people in the process of forest management. These objectives in turn was spawned out of international and national level 'environmental doomsday theories', on the one hand, and the penetration of populist ideologies in development thought and practice (Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Hobley 1996b; Pokharel 1997).

The 1970s marked the proliferation of various environmental doomsday theories such as the Limits to Growth report, soil erosion, desertification, deforestation, and more (Leach and Fairhead 2000; Forsyth 2003). The rise and prominence of these theories and their implications for policies was particularly evident in the case of forestry policies in Nepal. Ecklom's (1975) influential study of the 'imminent environmental crisis' in Nepal, as reflected by Ecklom's quotation below, helped shape donor support in the country as well as in the forestry sector since the mid 1970s.

*Population growth ... is forcing farmers onto ever steeper slopes, slopes unfit for sustained farming even with the astonishingly elaborate terracing practiced there. Meanwhile, villagers must roam further and further from their homes to gather fodder and firewood, thus surrounding most villages with a widening circle of denuded hillsides. Ground-holding trees are disappearing fast among the geologically young, jagged foothills of the Himalaya, which are among the most easily erodable anywhere. Landslides that destroy lives, homes and crops occur more and more frequently throughout the Nepalese hills.*

Since then, a number of scholars such as Thompson, Warburton et al. (1986), Ives and Messerli (1989), Griffin (1988), Hobley (1996b), Metz (1991) amongst others have questioned the basis for Ecklom's assumptions as reflected in the quotation below:

*Not only the causes of Himalayan deforestation is more complex, involving government policies dating from 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as the subsistence activities of mountain farmers, but the effects of deforestation on soil erosion and flooding are probably less severe than earlier accounts.*

*(Metz 1991: p.805)*

Furthermore, aerial surveys for demarcating government forest areas remain inconclusive with regards to the scale and nature of deforestation (Hobley 1996b). In spite of these ‘uncertainties’ surrounding the nature and scale of deforestation, ‘Theory of Himalayan Degradation’, as it became known, formed a core basis for donor support since the mid 1970s (Hobley 1996b). For instance, the World Bank, a leading donor in the forestry sector in the 1980s, in an influential report on the state of the forestry sector in the Nepal, projected complete deforestation in the Hills by 1993 and the Tarai by 2003 (WorldBank 1978).

Development practice was also undergoing considerable paradigm shifts, from top-down development to participatory approaches to development (See: Hobley 1996b; Pokharel 1997)<sup>35</sup>. In the forestry sector, nationalization policies were criticized for centralizing forest management policies and excluding local users. Encouraging local users to participate in forest management was viewed as the way forward. In this respect, community forestry was introduced in Nepal to decentralize forest management responsibilities to the local people, and re-define the role of the government from ‘policing’ to ‘facilitating’ the local people in the management of forests. A recent report by the World Bank traces the history of community forestry, the evolution of development ideologies that shaped it, and states:

*In the late 1970s and 1980s, participation had become the favored approach for all rural development. Multilateral and bilateral donors, including the World Bank, was willing to provide the needed budgetary resources in support of a program of people's participation in forestry.*

*(Kumar 2002: p.8)*

The international development community therefore viewed community forestry as a way of marrying both environmental and social objectives. This also formed the basis for the forestry sector plan in the Seventh Year Development Plan (1985-1990) as well in the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (HMG/N 1988). The following quotation from the Main Report of the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (HMG/N 1988: p.115-117) reflects how environmental doomsday and populist discourses informed community forestry policies in Nepal:

*[The Master Plan]...decries the rapid destruction of forests (at annual rate which is more than twice the rate of reforestation) and the prospect that Nepal's forests will disappear in twenty to twenty-five years. It also recognizes the dilemma, that an environmental balance must be maintained, which basic needs for forest products met...country-wide programs should be carried out through the people...the district forest officers [cast] aside their police roles in favor of supporting local people.*

From a gender perspective, the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector (HMG/N 1988) is the first time that gender issues were identified in the forestry sector. However, gender was viewed as ‘women’s issues’ and confined to a mere mention in the report. As the quotation below demonstrates, ‘women’s issues’ was not only couched in simplistic understanding of gender division of labor propagated by Ecofeminism and WED (Refer to Chapter 2), but also ‘populist’ and ‘environmental doomsday’ discourses characterizing the period:

*Since the main collectors and users of forest produce are women, the forestry sector could lend credibility to the programmes involving women and family planning, by emphasizing women’s role in forestry and extension.*

*(HMG/N 1988: p.118)*

In other words, women (as the main collectors and users) were viewed as implicated in the degradation of forests. It was assumed that by including women in the forestry sector, problems of overpopulation (one of the major reasons for environmental degradation) will be addressed. But the plan failed to reflect and address the complexities of gender issues (Interview with Kedar Poudyal, Gender Focal Person of the MFSC, April 2006), as will be discussed in the empirical chapters on Gharmi and Bhatpole in forest governance.

- ***Community Forestry Under Panchayat System of Governance***

In the initial phases of community forestry, national forests were handed over to the local panchayats, as *Panchayat Forest* or *Panchayat Protected Forest*. The *Panchayat* system in Nepal was a pyramidal structure progressing from village-level assemblies to a *Rastriya Panchayat* (or national level parliament). The system enshrined absolute power of the monarchy and kept the King as head of the state with sole authority over all government institutions. According to the Forest Act 1978 (HMG/N 1978), a village panchayat could have up to 125 HA of degraded forest designated as *Panchayat Forest* for plantation and protection. Similarly up to 500 HA of existing forested area could be designated as *Panchayat Protected Forest*. An arrangement had to be made between the District Forest Office and the *Panchayat* to plant and protect the area. The District Forest Office had to supply seedlings for planting and fencing materials and the *Panchayat* supply the voluntary labor for the work. The benefits were to be shared between the *Panchayat* and the District Forest Office in a 1:3 ratio (Pokharel 1997).

The government’s decision to devolve responsibilities to the local *Panchayats* instead of local users in the initial phases of community forestry was and continues to be widely criticized by academics and practitioners. For instance, in her analysis of the historical

evolution of Community Forestry policies in Nepal, Britt (2002) calls these initial experiments as the 'naïve' phases. Furthermore, I was also informed of internal disagreement within the Department of Forestry to devolve forest responsibilities to the local *Panchayats* instead of directly to the users (Personal communication with three senior members of the District Forest Office who were present and/or involved throughout the community forest process, July 2003).

By mid-1980s, many reports evaluating the performance of the forestry sector showed that the condition of forests handed over to the local *Panchayats* had not improved. Such failures were attributed to the inappropriateness of the *Panchayat* administrative unit to be responsible for forest governance. The *Panchayats* excluded those who lived outside the *Panchayat* administrative unit; the *Panchayats* were too large an administrative body to adequately oversee community forests; and the Department of Forestry had not devolved adequate decision-making powers to the *Panchayats* (Cited in: Chapagain, Khanel et al. 1999). Similarly, my research findings on the Koldanda *Panchayat* Forest in Bhatpole also suggests that the forests were ill-managed by the *Panchayats* with little input from the local users (Tamangs) who were meant to be the main beneficiaries of the forest (Refer to Chapter 6).

The Master Plan of the Forestry Sector (HMG/N 1988) also stated that its recommendation to devolve responsibilities to 'users' and not 'Panchayats' emerged from the failure of *Panchayats* to govern community forest. However, it was not until the re-instatement of democracy in 1990 (and the end of the Panchayat era) that legislations to hand over community forest to 'users' was finally applied in practice. The quotation below, from a leading forester in the Department of Forestry involved in formulating and implementing community forestry, demonstrates the rationale to transfer usufruct rights to '*Panchayats*'. This must be understood in light of forestry policies, which were re-shaped by the broader political system of governance in the country:

*We wanted to devolve the forests at the local level, but we could not bypass the Panchayat system...and had to work with what we had.*

*(Amrit Lal Joshi, personal interview July 2003).*

#### 4.1.3 *User-Oriented Community Forestry: Democracy & Shift from Supervising Subjects to Facilitating Citizens (1990-2003)*

The first amendment to the Master Plan on Forestry Sector in 1990 (HMG/N 1990) more explicitly stated that the forests should be handed over to ‘user groups’ and not to *Panchayats*; that all the benefits from the forest should remain with the local user group; the process of community forest handover should be expedited; and that the women and the poor should be involved in the management of the forests. These amendments were also translated into the Forestry Act 1993, Forest Regulation 1995<sup>36</sup> (HMG/N 1995), and subsequent guidelines for the implementation of community forestry at the local level (such as the community forest Guidelines 1993, 1995, and 2002 as well as the Handbook for Community Forestry 1997).

The Forest Act 1993 “...provided the legal measures for protecting forests by involving the local people in the conservation and development of forest resources” (Chapagain, Khanel et al. 1999: pp.30). The Act accorded community forestry the highest priority in the forestry sector, legally recognized users as ‘autonomous and corporate institutions with perpetual succession’, and with the right to sell and acquire forest products. The Community Forestry Guidelines (CPFD 1995; CPFD 2002) and the Handbook for Community Forestry (CPFD 1997) instructed forest officials to ‘facilitate’ users in the formation and post-formation support given to Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), which also included supporting women and the poor.

I found a plethora of academic and policy literature on how broader political developments in the country shaped the formulation of forestry policies<sup>37</sup>. However, there were little discussions on how the shift from *Panchayat* to multi-party system of governance influenced and shaped the above mentioned changes in community forestry policies. Given the move from *Panchayat* managed to user-oriented Community Forestry policies coincided with the advent of democracy in 1990, it could not have been the case that these changes were the natural progression of national forest policies. I argue the re-instatement of democracy, the broader changes and contradictions in political discourses, were critical in re-defining and re-orienting national forestry policies in general, and provided the rationale for including women and the poor in particular. But before going into this, let me provide a brief overview of the impetus behind the shift from party less *Panchayat* system to multi-party democracy in the

country as these political developments I argue were critical in shaping national forestry policies.

- ***The Establishment of Democracy in Nepal (1990)***

By 1990 the '*Janandolan*' (or People's Movement for democracy) against the increasingly unpopular *Panchayat* system had swelled to unprecedented levels with massive participation of people mobilized by the major political parties such as the National Congress Party and the National Communist Party. On May 12, 1991, through the general election to the 'House of Representative', Girja Prasad Koirala (leader of the Congress Party which had won 110 seats out of 205) was elected as the first prime minister of a democratically elected government (Thapa and Sijapati 2003). The new constitution that provided the foundation for democratic governance in the country explicitly denounced discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, and ethnicity. The advent of democracy in Nepal led to unprecedented economic and political freedom (Mahat 2005). Civic organizations, previously repressed under the *Panchayat* regime, emerged and thrived under democracy. However, democracy also brought in considerable instability, an outcome of political bickering and in-fighting between the major political parties. In the midst of these instabilities, reformative agendas aimed at addressing gender and social exclusion that the political parties had promised to promote and that were guaranteed by the new constitution were largely sidelined (Brown 1996; Thapa and Sijapati 2003; DFID/WorldBank 2006).

- ***Implications of Democracy for Community Forestry and Gender Policies***

The *Panchayat* system of governance was replaced with multi-party democracy. An alternative administrative structure with 14 Zones, 75 Districts with each District divided into municipalities and Village Development Committees were established. But more importantly and in the spirit of democratic decentralization, policies such as Forestry Act 1993 and Forest Regulation 1995 (HMG/N 1995) were implemented. These officially recognized users, granted users rights to develop a constitution and operational plan, retain the benefits it derived in the process of management, and in effect altered the role of forest officials from 'supervising' subjects to 'facilitating' citizens. I argue such changes would have been unlikely under the previous *Panchayat* system of governance because of its political and ideological contradictions with democratic and decentralized forms of governance.

During this period, a series of policies were implemented to address gender inequalities in community forestry. The first amendment to the Master Plan on Forestry Sector in 1990 (HMG/N 1990) highlights the inclusion of women and the poor in the forestry sector. The rationale for including women was based on the continued view that women were the primary collectors of firewood and therefore, and had a greater stake in securing forest products. Furthermore, the Guidelines for Community Forest Program (CPFD 1995) and the revised guideline (CPFD 2002) for forest officials working with the users at the local level added the importance of including women from a rights-based perspective:

*Women often have a key role in forest product collection and utilization. Therefore, women's participation and interests must be considered equal to, if not greater than, those of men in forest management and forest product utilization, and institutional development activities of CFUG.*

*(CPFD 1995: pp.8)*

The Community Forest Guidelines (2002) also includes instructions for forest officials to ensure that 'women' and the 'poor' participate in community forestry. It states that 'women and 'poor' must be present throughout the Community Forest handover process and that at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of Community Forest committee was reserved for women and poor users.

I argue the above approaches to gender issues in community forestry policies both followed and went beyond the Master Plan of the Forestry Sector (HMG/N 1988) where gender issues were first mentioned. The rationale for including 'women' in Community Forest remained couched in 'Ecofeminist' and 'Women, Environment and Development' discourses (Refer to Chapter 2). However, as highlighted by the quotation from the 'Guidelines for Community Forest Program' (CPFD 1995), women's inclusion in community forestry was also justified in 'rights-based terms'. The latter, I argue needs to be understood in the context of Nepal's broader democratic movement and establishment.

The political parties involved in the democratic movement, pre 1990, against the Panchayat system, mobilized the nation by advocating for individual rights to participate in political governance through direct elections of representatives. Therefore establishment of democracy in the country in 1990, in direct contrast to the *Panchayat* system, was founded on and popularized the concept of individual rights. Rights-based approaches had powerful impacts on national thought and orientations to development (including in community forest) (Mahat 2005). This is reflected in the changes in discourses in the national development plans post-1990 where development is increasingly viewed in rights-based terms. In this regard and



in the context of community forest, because women were viewed as more dependent on forest resources, women's rights to participate in the governance of community forest were prioritized and championed.

But in spite of these progressive political developments, the early years of democracy did little to further the actual rights of diverse groups within the country in practice. For instance, while women's equal rights as citizens were recognized, the state continued to legally discriminate against women when it came to inheriting property, passing on citizenship etc. (Malla 2004; Malla and Shrestha 2005). Similarly, the state was reluctant to admit and address historical exclusion against ethnic minorities and low-castes. The Seventh National Development Plan (1987 – 1991) referred to ethnic minorities and low-castes as the 'poor', and it was not until the Eight National Development Plan (1992 – 1997) that ethnic minorities and low-castes were explicitly named. In this respect, the nominal focus on how to include women and reference to the rest as the 'poor' in community forest policies needs to be situated within these broader political contradictions in the early years of democracy (DFID/WorldBank 2006).

## **4.2 Gender in Community Forestry Policies**

*History matters...not just because we can learn from the past, but because the present and the future are connected to the past and the continuity of society's institutions. Today's and tomorrow's choices are shaped by the past. And the past can only be made intelligible.*  
(Douglass North 1990)

In comparison to the nominal attention paid to gender issues in forestry policies and practice, as mentioned in 4.1.3, there have been lately increasing attention on formulating and promoting 'gender and social equity' policy in the forestry sector in general and in community forestry in particular. These ongoing policy formulation have emphasized promoting 'gender and social equity' in community forest user groups at the local level and ensuring the major actors advocating and driving these changes are themselves gender and social equity sensitive.

I argue that the focus on gender and social equity in community forestry must be understood in the context of how community forestry policies have historically evolved in the country (as discussed in Section 4.1). As such, this section argues these policies have been influenced by the changing interests and approaches amongst the donors from 'management'

to the ‘governance’ of forests, on the one hand, and the growing concerns over gender and social exclusion in Nepali society more broadly, on the other hand. Hence, I argue that the development of these ‘gender and social equity’ policies will depend much upon the unfolding of broader political processes in the country and in re-defining state-society relations from thereof.

#### ***4.2.1 Major Developments in and rationale for Gender & Social Equity community forest Policies:***

The national workshop celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> year of community forestry and officially launching the ‘second generation issues’ in community forestry in 2003 marked ‘gender and social equity’ as an overarching theme in community forestry. Since 2003, two platforms have been created for learning and integrating gender and social equity in the forestry sector and particularly in community forest. The Ministry of Forestry and Social Conservation (MFSC) has established the ‘Gender and Equity Working Group’ (GEWG) with the objective to organize forestry sector discussions on a MFSC Gender Strategy.

The ‘Gender and Social Equity Learning Group’ (GSELG) is an initiative established jointly by Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to promote the sharing and learning from experiences of integrating gender and social equity in the broader NRG sector in Nepal. The major differences between the groups is two-fold: (1) GEWG focuses explicitly on the ‘forestry sector’ whereas GSELG on the NRG sector more broadly<sup>38</sup>; (2) GEWG is a state-led initiative (i.e. is headed by the MFSC) where as GSELG is a donor-led initiative. Apart from these differences, the two groups have been collaborating to formulate a ‘gender and social equity policy’ under the Master Plan II for the Forestry Sector to be released in 2020.

The objectives of the collaboration between the two groups are to:

- (a) Formulate a common set of indicators to be employed by all the actors involved in promoting and supporting gender and social equity in community forest;
- (b) Monitor the performance of implementing gender and social equity through these indicators; and
- (c) Formulate a gender and social equity policy in the forestry sector, the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector II to be released in 2020, through lessons learnt in implementation and monitoring (GSWG 2004).

The following will elaborate on each of these rationales for collaboration.

Through interviews I carried out with 10 members involved in the GSELG and GSEWG at both national and regional levels, I found the rationale behind (a) was to ensure that the multiple actors involved in community forestry—the Department of Forestry, bi-lateral donors, and the many I/NGOs—formulated a common set of indicators. Vast majority of the actors involved in community forestry are promoting ‘gender and social equity’ organizational policy, but there were considerable differences in approaches. For instance, Koirala and Gurung (2004), in working paper published through the GSELG, found fourteen bi-lateral donors and I/NGOs were operationalizing and implementing gender and social equity in natural resource governance policies and programmes, but there were significant variations in approaches from one organization to another. My research on development intervention in Gharmpi and Bhatpole points to similar findings.

In addition, points (b) and (c) are meant to be innovative ways of formulating gender and community forest policy. ‘Monitoring’ is conceptualized as a process of learning that can feed into policy making arena at the national level (Koirala and Gurung 2004). Community forestry policies have historically been formulated at the national level, with little input from the lessons and practices at the implementation level. For instance, Britt (2002) discusses how foresters such as N.K. Shrestha were implementing ‘user-oriented’ community forestry in pilot areas when the concept of community forest first started out in the country. However, such practices were largely ignored at the national level when the ‘community’ in community forestry was operationalized as the Village *Panchayats* as opposed to ‘users’. Hence, the proposed approach to formulate a national level ‘gender and social equity’ policy in the forestry sector is expected to provide a ‘bottom-up’ and ‘participatory’ means of policy formulation that is informed of lessons learnt at the local level.

In June 2004, the GSELG and GEWG jointly organized a workshop called “Sharing and Learning Workshop on Gender, Poverty and Social Equity Monitoring”. The outcome of the workshop was the joint identification of a set of common indicators for monitoring Gender, Poverty and Social Equity (GPSE) in four change areas, as shown on the table below. As I write this dissertation, the MFSC, donors and I/NGOs working in the forestry sector are each formulating gender and social equity policies along the ‘change areas’ and ‘indicators’ outlined in the table below (GPSE 2004; GPSE 2005).

As reflected in the ‘change areas’ and specific ‘indicators’ in Figure 2 below, the approach is fundamentally two-fold:

- (i) Addressing gender and social equity in community forestry user groups at the local level; and
- (ii) Ensuring the many organizations working in the forestry sector are themselves gender and equity sensitive.

Furthermore, as suggested by Figure 2 below, the emphasis is on promoting ‘voice’ and ‘accountability’ so that both the decision-makers of CFUGs and the organizations facilitating CFUGs are answerable and responsive to low-castes, ethnic minorities and women. I will re-visit these issues as per my research findings in Chapter 9.

Figure 2: Gender and Social Equity Change Areas and Indicators

Change Areas	Indicators
<b>Equitable Access to Resources and Benefits from Forestry Sector</b>  <i>Means of addressing imbalances and barriers for access of the most disadvantaged. This includes measures to increase access to forest resources, timber, training, employment, income, other livelihood.</i>	% of NRM groups reporting significant reduction in the number of hours collecting grass, fuelwood, and fodder by a significant number of women and children in their areas.
	% of women and men from poor, dalit, and disadvantaged caste, ethnic, Muslim households (as against their proportion in the NRM group population) benefiting from income generation, Non-Timber Forest Products, literacy classes, Improved Cooking Stoves, drinking water, toilet, schools and other services.
	% of NRM groups practicing pro poor initiatives such as subsidy for forest products, for access to land and water, investment of funds, income generation, infrastructure especially to address the need of poor and excluded members.
<b>Equitable Governance</b>  <i>Refers to fair and balanced participation in decision making at all levels in the forestry sector by all individuals and groups irrespective of their gender, class, caste and ethnicity</i>	% of women and men from poor, Dalit and disadvantaged caste, ethnic, Muslim households (as against their proportion in the NRM group population) reporting increase in self-confidence and decrease in gender and caste discrimination.
	% of decisions in NRM group Executive Committee and Assemblies significantly responding to issues of women and men from poor, Dalit and disadvantaged caste, ethnic, Muslim households about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NRM group fund management,</li> <li>• Use of forest products,</li> <li>• Selection of species for plantation,</li> <li>• Training and other relevant activities,</li> <li>• Specific gender/caste/ethnicity based discriminatory practices.</li> </ul> % of NRM groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With up-to-date documentation and complete record keeping,</li> <li>• Hold of minimum executive meetings and assemblies per year with participation of more than 50% of women and men from poor, Dalit and disadvantaged caste, ethnic, Muslim HHs (as against their proportion in the NRM group)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practicing public audit of their performance, accounts, gender and caste/ethnic based inclusion efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>Equity Sensitive Organizational Development and Planning</b>  <i>Equity sensitive human resource development and management and equity sensitive planning, monitoring and evaluation.</i>	% of women, poor, Dalit and disadvantaged caste, ethnic Muslim staff in administrative and managerial positions in NRM.
	% of relevant organizations in NRM sector with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A minimum of facilities for gender specific needs (maternity leave, paternity leave, and flexible timing for breast-feeding)</li> <li>At least on staff with an ability to do gender and social inclusion analysis and mainstreaming.</li> </ul>
	% of budget allocated and spent n GPSE activities (programme implementation, capacity building and others) of relevant organizations in NRM sector.
<b>Equity Sensitive Policy and Strategy</b>  <i>This includes national level policy framework as well as local level policy framework such as community forestry operational plans.</i>	% of NRM group Operational Plans and Constitution with clearly defined policy and implementation strategy for affirmative action for women and men from poor, Dalit and disadvantaged caste, ethnic, Muslim households (as against their proportion in the population in the target area specifically for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representation in general assembly, executive committee, and key positions (chair, secretary, treasurer);</li> <li>IGA related fund mobilization</li> <li>User charges</li> <li>Employment of poor, Dalit and disadvantaged caste, ethnic, Muslim HHs as staff.</li> </ul>
	% of NRM institutions (MFSC, programmes, direct agencies and civil society) with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GPSE sensitive policy and strategy</li> <li>Inclusion of GPSE indicators in their M &amp; E system</li> <li>Conducting gender and social equity budgeting in budget process (revenue collection as well as expenditure analysis)</li> </ul>
	% of NRM institutions with a clear provision for and practice of involving women and men from poor, Dalit and disadvantaged caste, ethnic, Muslim households in the policy and strategy formulation process.

(Source: GPSE 2005)

The two-pronged approach to integrating gender and social equity issues in natural resource governance policy were impacting on organizations and interventions in community forestry at the time of my field research. For example, the Ministry of Forestry and Soil Conservation (MFSC) conducted an internal study in 2003 to assess MFSC's 'gender and social equity sensitivity'. The study concluded the MFSC (each of the four Departments within the MFSC which includes the Department of Forestry) had inadequate representation of women, ethnic minorities and low-castes. Only 3% of the total MFSC staff was women, with merely 2% female staff (120 women out of 6670 total staff) for Department of Forestry. 69% of the total staff in the Ministry and 58% of those in the Department of Forestry was

‘Brahmin/Chettri’ (high castes and privileged ethnic groups). Male, Brahmin/Chettri staff also held the most coveted and senior level positions (gazette) within the MFSC and the Department of Forestry. Furthermore, the forestry policies, organization procedures, monitoring and evaluation systems amongst others within the Ministry were far from being gender and social equity sensitive (MFSC 2003).

In light of the findings of the study, the Ministry of Forestry and Social Conservation has formulated a Gender and Social Equity Vision for 2020 as follows (MFSC 2003):

*The Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation is a gender and social equity sensitive and socially inclusive organization practicing good governance to ensure equitable access to and decision making power over forest resources and benefits of all forestry sector stakeholders.*

The MFSC also appointed ‘focal persons’ throughout the Ministry, including in the Department of Forestry, to promote and monitor the implementation of gender and social equity policies (Kedar Poudyal, personal communication MSFC; May 2004). Various donors as well as INGOs working in the forestry sector have also followed suit (Bharat Pokharel, personal communication, SDC, April 2006).

I argue that these ongoing attempts to formulate and implement gender and social equity sensitive policies must be situated in the context of how community forestry has historically evolved in Nepal. In the subsequent section, I point to the role of international policy discourses and national political developments in informing and shaping these ongoing initiatives in the community forestry sector.

#### ***4.2.2 Shifts in International & National Policy Discourses:***

At the international level, discourses in the policy and academic NRG arena have shifted considerably from ‘eco-doom’ and ‘populist’ theories to issues surrounding ‘good governance’, ‘entitlements’, ‘Millennium Development Goals’, and ‘gender’ amongst others. Similarly, Melissa Leach (2007) examines recent donor and INGO publications on NRG issues and finds that ecofeminist and WED discourses that were so readily accepted by the donors and policy makers have been largely abandoned and substituted with more relational and rights-based terms.

Furthermore, since the UN Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, development practitioners and have been prioritizing ‘gender mainstreaming’ as the mechanisms for transforming development organizations into gender sensitive ones and incorporating gender issues in projects and programmes (MacDonald, E. et al. 1997; Razavi 1997; Miller and Razavi 1998; Wallace 1998; Moser and Moser 2005). In the United Nations Conference of Women in Nairobi, 1995, ‘Gender Mainstreaming’ was been defined by the UN Economic and Social Council (UN 1997) as follows:

*Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programming in all areas at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally.*

These international level initiatives have also informed bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors and I/NGOs working in and around community forestry issues in Nepal. Donors and I/NGOs remain key players, in spite of key players having phased out or currently phasing out. In 2005, the NARCLMP (AusAID sponsored community forest program and focusing on Kavre and Sindhupalchok districts) phased out while NARMSAP (DANIDA sponsored program, operating in 30 districts in the country was suspended. Other donors, such as the NSCFP, are following suit.

In a recent publication, the Nepal-Swiss Community Forestry Program<sup>39</sup> states that its goals have shifted from ‘forestry conservation’ to the promotion of governance and human resource development in the last and current phase of the project (NSCFP 2006). Similarly, and perhaps more noticeably, other donors such as AusAID, DFID and DANIDA changed the names of their programmes to reflect shifts in their focus. For instance, AusAID had transformed from Nepal-Australia Community Forestry Project to Nepal-Australia Community Resource Management Project to reflect changes in its focus from ‘forest’ to ‘resources’ during its final phase. ‘Resources’ is concerned with not just the management of community forests but also that of community forest funds, human resources and more. The Nepal-UK Community Forestry Project is now called ‘Livelihoods Forestry Project’ to reflect the ways in which the concept of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ have informed the project (James Bampton, personal communication, LFP, July 2003).

These agencies have in turn embraced the importance of integrating ‘gender’ in their projects and programmes. Through analysis of the recent publications, manuals, discussions with key officials working in gender issues<sup>40</sup>, I found that ‘gender’ is conceptualized as cross-cutting and relational issue. This is a fundamental departure from the previous understanding of gender issues in community forestry, as I discussed in the sections above. Furthermore, donors and I/NGOs are also transforming their organizational structure to be more gender and social equity sensitive, which is reflected in budgeting, programming, staffing amongst others.

8 out of the 10 interviewees who were members of either GSELG and/or GSWG openly admitted to me that donors and I/NGOs have played an instrumental role in pushing the MFSC (including the Department of Forestry) to reform the Ministry and integrate gender and social equity in its programmes and policies. Hence, the above discussed focus on ‘gender and social equity’ issues in community forestry at the national level is driven by these shifts in international discourses that have percolated into donor priorities and projects.

- ***The Socio-Political Landscape of Nepal (1996-2008):***

Gender and social inclusion has occupied center stage in the ongoing attempts at state-building and re-defining of state-society relations in Nepal. There exists a consensus amongst scholars, policy-makers, and the general public that due to the constant political infighting between the major political parties, ‘democracy’ (1990-2003) failed to address deeply entrenched inequalities in Nepal based on gender, ethnic, and caste-based axis of differences.

In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M) launched a ‘People’s Movement’ or a ‘Maoist Revolution’ aimed at re-defining the state and society relations in the country. Although driven by communist ideology of peasant revolution (Bhattarai 2003; Seddon and Karki 2003), CPN-M came into prominence by capitalizing on existing inequality-based grievances and mobilizing support and sympathy in the rural hinterlands of the country (For further discussion see: DeSales 2000; Hutt 2003; Sneiderman and Turin 2003; Thapa and Sijapati 2003; Deraniyagala 2005; Whelpton 2005). After ten years of civil conflict which cost more than 20,000 lives, in 2006, the CPN-M and the government of Nepal signed a peace agreement with the aim of electing a new constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. One of the outcomes of the Maoist movement was national recognition and elevation of the historical socio-political forms of exclusion into public discourse



(DFID/WorldBank 2006). Furthermore, the ongoing debate with respect to the constituent assembly is how to redress the historical state-society relations that fostered exclusion of vast majority of the populace on caste, ethnic, and gender lines. However, ethnic-based factionalist movements continue to threaten the fragile peace process<sup>41</sup>. These political developments therefore highlight the urgency of addressing gender and social exclusion in the ongoing state-formation processes.

The concerns over historical exclusions on the basis of gender, caste and ethnicity in Nepal have also been fuelled by the academic community. A recent cross-country study by the notable Nepal-based feminist economist, Meena Acharya (2004) demonstrates that the historical caste, ethnic and gender-based inequalities continue to be reflected in the low performance of Dalit (low-caste), 'Janajatis' (ethnic minorities), and women in human development indicators (income, health, and education) as well as in political participation. Furthermore, these inequalities are deeply entrenched in social norms and values and are supported and sustained by the state.

A recent and influential joint study by the DFID and the World Bank (2006) '*Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal*' points to the 'legal exclusion' of groups based on caste, ethnic and gender lines. With reference to gender-based discrimination, the report finds Nepal's legal framework continues to discriminate against women in the areas of citizenship, inheritance rights, education, employment health, sexual offenses, marriage and family relations, court proceedings and identity.

Other studies lend further support to the argument that discriminatory practices in everyday social relations against women, low-castes and ethnic minorities have been tolerated and even supported by the state administration (Dahal, Acharya et al. 2002; IIDS 2002; Bhattachan, Tamrakar et al. 2004; Lawoti 2005; Malla and Shrestha 2005).

In light of these broader political developments and the growing momentum for change in structures of society, the government of Nepal has been formulating policies to address caste, ethnic and gender-based exclusions in the country. Through analysis of four national development plans since the Panchayat era (1987-2007), I found that from not even recognizing the existence of discriminations, the Tenth Plan (2002-2007, most recent one) explicitly recognizes gender, caste, and ethnic-based exclusions in the country and stresses,

for the first time, the need to introduce 'affirmative action' to level the playing field (See: HMG/N 2003).

Similarly, in the forestry sector, the main chapter on forest and soil conservation in the Tenth Plan presents a strong focus on gender and social equity and states some of the following: women shall be encouraged in forest management and use of resources; gender driven discrimination shall be discouraged when it comes to ensuring access or control over economic and social resources; efforts shall be in place to raise awareness about gender equality; and efforts shall be made to prioritize the interests of women, poor and Dalits – the forestry sector is expected to make a huge contribution to their upliftment (NPC 2002; GSWG 2004).

The changing socio-political landscape of Nepal and implications for national level policies therefore, provides the context for the increased attention to institutionalize gender and social equity concerns in community forestry by the donors, INGOs as well as the state alike. However, because the process of re-defining state-society relations are still ongoing in Nepal, I argue much of the efforts at formulating gender and social equity policies in community forest rests on these broader level political developments.

### **4.3 Summary**

This research is concerned with the interrelationship between gender relations and local institutions of community forestry governance. It also examines and explicates how external actors interact with and influence institutional processes and gender dynamics. In this respect, this chapter has provided the historical context for community forestry in Nepal. Chapter 6 and 8 will highlight how these broader level changes in forestry policies have percolated at the local level and shaped and informed how external agents intervene in Bhatpole and Gharmi.

This chapter has discussed the evolution of forestry policies in Nepal - from pre-nationalization to the ongoing attempts to formulate gender and social equity policies in community forestry. I have argued that shifts in international discourses and changes in national political landscape have together shaped and informed the evolution of forestry policies in Nepal.

Community forestry in Nepal was introduced with the aim of reducing 'forest degradation' and involving local people in the management of forest resources. These policies were at large informed by international discourses on environmental degradation and populist ideologies of development, on the one hand, and re-shaped by national level political landscape, on the other hand. Nepal's experiments with two major forms of community forestry– Panchayat to user group – are outcomes of the interplay between these national and international level discourses.

In the current era of 'second generation issues' of community forestry, gender and social equity policies in community forestry are acquiring considerable prominence. These policies must also be understood in the context of international discourses on 'governance of natural resources' and 'gender mainstreaming', on the one hand, and the current political developments in Nepal, on the other hand.

In this regard, the ongoing attempts to mainstream gender and social equity in community forestry policies are intimately connected to and a continuation of the historical evolution of community forestry policies in Nepal.

## ~ Chapter Five ~

### 5 Gender Relations amongst the Tamangs of Bhatpole: Socio-Cultural Practices, Markets, & Women's Agency

The aim of this research is to examine the interrelationship between gender relations and local institutions of forest governance, through two empirical studies of gender relations and community forestry in Bhatpole and Gharimi villages. In this regard, this chapter examines and explicates the gender relations amongst the *Tamang* ethnic groups of Bhatpole through analysis of intra and extra-household relations. The subsequent chapter will focus on how these gendered relationships inform and shape gender dynamics in the formation, functioning and change in local institutions established to govern forest resources.

The argument presented in this chapter is two-fold. First, socio-cultural practices, at the household and extra-household levels, allowed *Tamang* women considerable voice and autonomy in their lives. Market biases for *Tamang* labor within and outside of the Jaisithok Village Development Committee (VDC) systematically favored male labor as opposed to female ones, and in turn, created gender inequalities in intra-household labor and resource allocation processes. In this regard, gender relations amongst the *Tamang* of Bhatpole were not inherently unequal but rather inequalities emanated from market biases for *Tamang* labor which in turn were superimposed at the *Tamang* intra-household level. However, far from being silent spectators of these inequalities, women's agency evolved to collectively address and re-shape gender relations. This chapter will, therefore, focus on the interplay between socio-cultural autonomy, market-based inequalities, and women's agency in re-defining gender relations.

In order to present the above arguments, this chapter is divided into five major segments. The chapter begins with an introduction to Bhatpole, and situates the *Tamangs* in the broader political-economy of the village. The chapter will then discuss the following socio-cultural practices and the values and norms they embody: organization of the household, marriage practices, intra-household allocation of income, and gender division of labor in family farm production and domestic labor. Third, the chapter will turn to the agricultural and non-agricultural labor markets for *Tamang* labor within and outside the

village, unpack the gendered biases embedded in these markets, and discuss the implications of these biases for intra-household relations between *Tamang* men and women. This will be followed by analysis of women's agency and their role in re-shaping gendered constraints and relations. The final section will briefly summarize the major aspects of the chapter and point to how these analyses inform the subsequent chapter on gendered dynamics and local institutions of community forestry in Bhatpole.

## **5.1 Overview of the Research Setting: Place, People and History**

This section briefly locates the village of Bhatpole, Jaisithok VDC and situates the *Tamangs* within it. It demonstrates that the village political economy and the historical domination of the *Jaisi-Bahun*s within the village are critical for analyzing and explicating gender relations amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole.

### **5.1.1 Introducing Bhatpole & the Tamangs:**

Bhatpole village is in Wards 2 and 5<sup>42</sup> of Jaisithok Village Development Committee (the lowest administrative unit of the government, VDC from henceforth), which is amongst the 87 districts of Kavre Palanchok District in Central Nepal. The VDC is located close to roads and cities. Melamchi highway cuts through the VDC whereas Aarniko highway is only 2 km away. The VDC is adjacent to the major towns of Kavre Palanchowk district, Dhulikhel and Banepa, and 48 km North-East of Kathmandu<sup>43</sup> (CEAMP 2004).

According to the official VDC and District Development Committee (DDC) level records (2004), the VDC had total population of 3,529 and encompasses the following ethnic groups in order of population size: *Tamang*, *Jaisi-Bahun*, *Magar*, *Chhetri*, *Thakuri*, *Bhujel*, *Gharti*, *Newar* and *Kamai/Damai (Dalit)*. *Jaisi-Bahun* and *Tamangs* were the largest groups in the village, with a population of 1338 (38%) *Jaisi-Bahun*s and 1140 (32%) *Tamangs*. *Tamangs* were spread throughout the village, but mainly concentrated in Bhatpole. The total area of the VDC is 8.24sq km with a height of 700-1,700 above sea level. Bhatpole is located between the heights of 900-1,400 in the highlands of the VDC, whereas the *Jaisi-Bahun*s are mainly concentrated in the low-lands of between 700-1000 above sea water. Most of the *Jaisi-Bahun* settlements are easily accessible by dirt roads whereas Bhatpole is an hour's hike from the lowest point of the VDC and is largely inaccessible through dirt road during the monsoon seasons.

### 5.1.2 *The Tamangs in Context:*

*Tamangs* are of Tibeto-Burman origin and constitute the largest ethnic minority in Nepal. According to Andras Hofer's (2004) landmark study on state and society relations in Nepal, '*Tamang*' as an ethnic group had not existed in official records until 1932. Similar, notable anthropologists such as Nancy Levine (1987) and David Holmberg (1989), who have built on Hofer's work, find the name applies to quite a diverse group located in central Nepal. Furthermore, there is no uniform *Tamang* culture, social structure, no overarching political institutions, and people speak different Tibeto-Burman language, some so different as to be mutually unintelligible (Levine 1987).

The Nepali state, in the process of state-making, constructed the label of '*Tamang*' to incorporate a diverse populace within the state machinery. Those who qualified to be '*Tamangs*' also welcomed the opportunity to be elevated into a higher position than their former status, as *Bhotiyas* or Tibetans, would have allowed them to be. The state and its ruling elite doubted the political loyalties of *Bhotiyas* and held them in contempt for eating beef (Levine 1987; Holmberg 1989; Hofer 2004). Under the *Mulki Ain* (state enforced caste-hierarchy) of 1854, the *Bhotiyas* were at the bottom as the 'alcohol drinking, enslavable castes' whereas the '*Tamangs*' were ranked relatively higher as the 'alcohol drinking but non-enslavable castes'. As Hofer (1979, 2002) points out, the higher the position of a group in the caste hierarchy, the higher was its bargaining power for economic and political recognition with the state. Even the oral history of the village conforms to the above.

I spent the second month of my field research (October 2004) studying the history of the village. In the process, I conducted innumerable interviews and informal discussions with the *Tamangs*, *Jaisi-Bahun*s, *Magars* and other ethnic groups. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present my findings in-depth. Nevertheless, I provide a brief overview of the VDC, how the *Jaisi-Bahun*s emerged into prominence in the VDC, and the importance of understanding *Tamang* and *Jaisi-Bahun* relationship for the purposes of this chapter and the thesis more generally.

A commonly held version by most of the *Tamangs* was that the territory of 'Jaisithok' (a name acquired only recently) was largely inhabited by the *Limbus*, *Kiratis* and some *Newars*. 'Bhatpole', for instance, gets its name from its original inhabitants, the 'Bhats' (a *Newar*

ethnic group). The *Tamangs* were given land grants by the state as early as mid-1700s, around the time when Prithivi Narayan Shah and his house of “Gorkha” began re-unification of present day Nepal. The *Tamangs* settled in the upper (in their current location) and left the rest of the low-lying land as largely uncultivated. The VDC had since then seen many forms of migration. The original inhabitants of the village—*Kiratis* and *Limbus*—migrated to the Eastern part of the country whereas the *Newars* to town centers<sup>44</sup>. Along similar lines, Caplan’s (2000) landmark study on land, social change and ethnic relations in Nepal discusses how Limbus and Kiratis lost access to their ancestral land in central Nepal and were pushed to the Eastern parts of the country as the state-making process expanded. The other ethnic groups in Bhatpole traced the origin of their settlements in the village after the arrival of *Tamangs*.

The *Tamangs* of Bhatpole often distinguished themselves from other *Tamangs* in Jaisithok, in neighboring VDCs, and other districts of the country. According to my informants (5 elderly *Tamang* men who were known for being well versed with the history of the village, October 2004). *Tamangs* were divided into complex layers of clans and religious orientations and further sub-divided into sub-clans and sub-religion. While clans denote kinship ties, religious orientations signify the particular shamanic Buddhism they follow<sup>45</sup>. *Tamangs* of Bhatpole recalled many differences in rituals, language, and other customs between themselves and other *Tamangs* in the rest of central Nepal. These differences between *Tamangs* made it difficult for the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole to relate to one another and foster a Pan-*Tamang* identity<sup>46</sup>.

### 5.1.3 The Evolution of *Tamang* – *Jaisi-Bahun* Relations in the Village:

It is important to identify and understand the *Tamang* – *Jaisi-Bahun*s relations in the VDC for the purpose of this chapter and the thesis more generally. As I will proceed to argue in the subsequent discussions, gendered relations between the *Tamangs* in Bhatpole were not inherently unequal. Inequalities were instead transmitted through gender biases embedded in markets for *Tamang* labor within and outside the VDC. I will discuss in Section 5.3 that the *Jaisi-Bahun*s of the village functioned as a monopsony for *Tamang* labor within the VDC. The gender inequalities in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community informed and shaped the nature of and value accrued to *Tamang* men and women’s labor. This relationship in turn percolated and contributed to gender inequalities at the *Tamang* intra-household level. The relations between

these two ethnic groups also serve as a contrast to the relationship between *Bahun*s and *Biswa-Karmas* (or low-castes) of Gharmi as I will discuss in Chapter 7.

The *Jaisi-Bahun*s emerged as the dominant ethnic group in the village in spite of having migrated 50 years after the *Tamangs*, and in separate groups. According to 8 *Jaisi-Bahun* informants (including the former VDC Chairperson and Secretary) there were different groups/clans of *Jaisi-Bhauns* who had migrated to the village and in different periods. The *Sapkotas* were the first wave of *Jaisi-Bahun* who migrated between the late 1800s. Other *Jaisi-Bahun*s such as the *Kafles*, *Timilsinas*, and *Sapkotas* also migrated shortly thereafter. The *Timilsinas* received land grants from the *Ranas* (see discussions on Section 4.1.1) whereas the others bought land from the *Tamangs* to begin settlement in the village.

Irrespective of different kinship ties and settlement histories, the interviewees said a sense of common identity emerged amongst the *Jaisi-Bahun*s. I was told by the interviewees that inter-marriage within the *Jaisi-Bahun* population was common place, including at the time of the field study. Furthermore, many *Jaisi-Bahun*s had common reasons for migrating to Jaisithok, as is demonstrated by the quotation below by the former chairperson of the VDC (October 2004):

*Many of the Jaisi-Bahun in Jaisithok came for a fresh start after having lost their status in their respective communities...There was an internal hierarchy within the 'Bahun' community. The 'Updadhaya' Bahun were at the apex and the 'Jaisi' Bahun at the bottom. Upadhayas who defied codes of behavior for Bahun by marrying a widow, for example, were downgraded to 'Jaisi' Bahun status. Our forefathers were shunned from their respective communities and they migrated to Jaisithok in the [late 1800s and early 1900s] as Jasithok had become known as a safe haven for different Jaisi-Bahun to come and settle.*

The name of the VDC 'Jaisithok', which translates as the residence of *Jaisi-Bahun*s, reflects the significance of the *Jaisi-Bahun* population in the village. According to the official VDC land records (2004), the *Jaisi-Bahun* had together occupied majority of the land, irrigated and unirrigated alike. The richer echelons of the *Jaisi-Bahun* community also sold agricultural produces to the local markets of Tamaghat and Banepa on a regular basis. Many supplemented their income through involvement in the non-agricultural sector. Majority of the formal employment and local businesses such as village shops, cement factory in Ward No. 2 and others were occupied by the *Jaisi-Bahun*. The *Jaisi-Bahun* landlords and



businessmen hired vast majority of the daily wage agricultural and non-agricultural laborers in the village, including the Tamang ones (see section 5.3.2)<sup>47</sup>.

From the 20 *Tamang* men and women (of various ages, October 2004) I interviewed and the countless others I had informal discussions with during the course of my field study in Bhatpole, I was able to decipher that the *Tamangs* had conflicting perceptions of the *Jaisi-Bahun*s. On the one hand, the *Tamang* generally stereotyped *Jaisi-Bahun*s as ‘greedy’ and ‘manipulative’, and perceived that the *Jaisi-Bahun* were able to succeed economically and politically by manipulating the *Tamangs*. The interviewees had many stories to tell about how *Jaisi-Bahun*s tricked their forefathers into selling their land. On the other hand, *Tamangs* also blamed themselves for “lagging behind the *Jaisi-Bahun*s” and admired the *Jaisi-Bahun*s for their abilities to “embrace and thrive in a changing environment”. In many ways, the latter stereotypes overshadowed the former and explain for the relatively amicable co-existence of these two ethnic groups in Jaisithok VDC<sup>48</sup>. The quotations below illustrate the stereotypes of *Jaisi-Bahun*s held by the *Tamangs* and also their perceptions for why *Tamangs* lagged behind on their own account. It was interesting to note that these views were held by *Tamangs* of varying ages, which further bolsters the argument above.

*Our ancestors were given a combination of low and high-altitude land during Prithivi Shah’s reign. But they did not understand the value of low-land for agricultural purposes. Have you heard this saying about us Tamangs? It is said that we Tamangs always find the most difficult terrain to settle in and you will find this is true for Tamang settlements in neighboring districts as well. The Jaisi-Bahun were smarter. They manipulated our ancestors into selling all of their low-lying, fertile land for marginal prices.*

*(Tamang male, in his late 50s, October 2004)*

*The Jaisi-Bahun have been able to succeed because they are more unified for productive purposes than we are. There were different clans of Jaisi-Bahun who came to settle in the village from different places. And yet they have been to establish such cohesive relationships amongst themselves. There is unity in so many of their decisions. Let us give an example of payment for daily wage laborers. Tamangs get paid the same amount no matter which Jaisi-Bahun household they work for. We, Tamangs, are all kinsmen but we only collaborate for unproductive purposes. If there is a wedding or a funeral, everyone contributes and helps out with the work. But when it comes to getting electricity and clean water into each home in the villages, then everyone fights.*

*(Tamang male, early 20s, October 2004)*

## **5.2 Gender & Socio-cultural Practices Amongst the Tamangs**

*We have many differences with the Jaisi-Bahun...our society does not treat its women the same way that they do. But what can we do. They are rich and we are poor. We depend on them for our daily bread, and they impose their values on our women too.*

*(A middle aged Tamang man, working in the village, November 2004)*

The quotation above in many ways captures the essence of how gender relations were organized amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole. As the first sentence of the quotation reflects, *Tamangs* of Bhatpole often perceived the socio-cultural practices were fundamentally distinct from the *Jaisi-Bahun*s. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to do a comprehensive, comparative analysis of the gendered practices between two ethnic groups. However, the subsequent section, in line with the second part of the above quotation, will discuss how gender inequalities within the *Jaisi-Bahun*s informed and shaped markets for *Tamang* labor within the VDC.

This section will focus on the following facets of gendered relations in the *Tamang* community of Bhatpole: organization of the household and community; marriage practices; intra household allocation of resources (land, dowry and income); and gender division of labor in Bhatpole (domestic work and family farm production). These socio-cultural practices embodied gender egalitarian norms and relations, and serve to highlight the gender egalitarian relations that existed in and of themselves amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole.

### ***5.2.1 Organization of the household, Family and Community in Bhatpole***

As a part of the 50 household-structured interviews I conducted in the village, I focused on how households, family and the community were organized in Bhatpole. I found that the household for the *Tamangs* was the primary unit of residence, consumption, reproduction and production. Households were organized along patrilineal lines and were mostly ‘nuclear’ in nature. Nuclear households consisted of husband, wife, children, and sometimes elderly parent(s). Children started their separate household after marriage. Elderly parents stayed with one of their sons when their sons perceived them as unable to take care of themselves.

Residence was patrilocal, inheritance and descent were both patrilineal in the village. In other words, a woman moved into her husband’s village upon marriage; descent and inheritance were both from the male line. As will be discussed in more detail subsequently, decision-making processes were de-centered and rarely monopolized by the ‘head of the household’, however. Other members of the household, including female ones, could exercise voice and influence over marriage decisions, allocation of labor and other resources. Because of the nature of marriage practices in Bhatpole<sup>49</sup>, newly married women were not viewed as ‘strangers’ to the household and were also incorporated in the household decision making and

resource allocation processes. Furthermore, intra-household allocation of labor (for family farm production and domestic labor) depended upon 'availability' (who was available to work) rather than 'gender' per se.

*Tamangs* often distinguished between 'family' and the 'household' whereas 'family' and 'community' were used interchangeably. As one of my informants (middle aged *Tamang* man, working in the village, November 2004) explained to me, 'family' for the *Tamangs* incorporated community-wide relations and village members referred to one another as kinsmen and kinswomen. The village was divided into various 'Waiba' clans, however, as I was told by the above informant, all households in the village could trace a common ancestry.

*The entire village is related to one another. We belong to an extended family...The ways in which we [Tamangs] distinguish between [kinsmen] and others is through marriage practices and mortuary obligations...we are not allowed to marry other Tamangs in the village and we have to observe mortuary obligations.*

However, community level decision-making processes were a paradox. I observed that decisions that the *Tamangs* classified as 'cultural' received widespread participation and consensus whereas others (such as investments in development activities) that required collective effort often lead to dispute and lack of consensus. The quotation below, taken in relation to differences between the *Jaisi-Bahun*s and *Tamangs*, helps illustrate this paradox:

*The Jaisi-Bahun*s have capitalized on the development aid that comes into the village. The drinking water, electricity, roads, schools and other facilities that are in the village are largely concentrated in the *Jaisi-Bahun* areas. Our ward level representatives were meant to represent our interests in VDC wide meetings, and ensure we would benefit from development as well. But they could never be as effective as the *Jaisi-Bahun* representatives could be and have done little to develop Bhatpole.

*(Tamang male, married, school teacher and most educated man in the village, Nov 2004)*

Similarly, in the two weddings and 'bartaman' (male initiation ceremony) that I was able to observe while conducting my field study, the entire *Tamang* village had voluntarily contributed, to varying extent, food, labor, and finances. Whereas in other incidents, I observed that the requirement to contribute labor and finances for setting up electricity poles as well as common drinking water taps in the village often resulted in disputes and lack of consensus. When I inquired on this paradox, two of my informants (who were themselves seasonal migrant workers) suggested to me that this needed to be understood in the context of *Tamang* male identity and out-migration issues.

*Tamang* men had historically migrated outside the village for seasonal employment. Their migrant support networks were not always Bhatpole-based, and *Tamang* men did not regularly interact with other *Tamangs* in the village while they were away. Investing in cultural events such as weddings and festivals were therefore perceived to be integral for preserving a sense of common *Tamang/Bhatpole* identity. The same perceptions were not extended to other areas of village life requiring collective action. In comparison to activities needing village wide consensus and collective action (that included men), women were more readily willing to engage in collective efforts amongst one another as I will discuss in more detail in the section 5.4.2.

### 5.2.2 *Marriage Practices*

I conducted a series of interviews of 20 men and women (of various marital status, November 2004) to understand the marriage practices in Bhatpole as well as to decipher the gender differences, if any, in the choice and voice that *Tamang* men and women exercised in entering and exiting marriages. The interviewees included six households who had gotten their sons and daughters married in the last five years.

According to one of the *Tamang* informants (*Tamang* woman, late 50s, November 2004), *Tamangs* had two major forms of marriages in Bhatpole—arranged between bi-lateral cousins and theft—and both of them were equally common. The major difference between the two was fundamentally to do with *Tamangs*' perceptions of 'ideal' forms of marriages and marriage transactions. Marriages embodied relations of exchange, reciprocity and hierarchy between wife-giving and wife-receiving households. For the *Tamangs*, wife-giving households were hierarchically superior to wife-receiving households and arranging bi-lateral cross cousin marriages were viewed as the 'ideal' way of off-setting this hierarchy. My interviewees (male) would often say the following with regards to why 'arranged marriages' were the preferred form of marriages:

*We have rights over our mother's brother's daughter*<sup>50</sup>.

Furthermore, the hierarchies between the wife-receiving and wife-giving households were evident through the 'ideal' forms of pre and post-marriage transactions that preceded arranged marriages:

*The groom's family [wife-receiving] has to bear through majority of the wedding related transactions. They have to first give a brides-price as negotiated and agreed between the two [wife-giving and wife-receiving] families. Once married, the husband has to contribute labor to his wife's household in peak agricultural seasons and/or as needed. He*

*and his family also have to contribute food and cash as mortuary rites if [and when] the woman's family members were to die.*

*(Tamang male, early 20s, recently married at the time of the field study, November 2004)*

At the same time, interviewees explained that 'theft' marriages were the most common forms of marriages in the village precisely to circumvent the exuberant expenses incurred during the wedding and in the payment of the brides-price.

*Theft marriages for us are elope marriages, usually done through consent from family members, and to avoid paying the wedding related expenses. In majority of the cases, it is done because the groom's family cannot or does not want to incur the brides-price and wedding related expenses.*

*(Tamang male, late 30s, married with one child, November 2005)*

The three interviewees who had gotten their children 'arranged' married in the last two years said that the wedding related expenses took a toll on their finances. Their households had spent Rs.20,000-30,000 each on bridesprice alone. Expenses also included rice, beaten rice, vegetables, meat, and alcohol that had to be served to approximately 500 guests who attended the wedding. These were gathered from household storage, bought and donated by relatives in the village. Nevertheless, the cash required was a substantial amount for Rs.3,000-7,000 per month from male seasonal migration constituted the largest component of household revenue for majority of *Tamangs* of Bhatpole<sup>51</sup>. All three households said they had to borrow extensively from local money lenders to meet all of the foreseen and unforeseen expenses. Nevertheless, they had gone ahead with it because weddings were 'social events' when the entire village came together to rejoice. Furthermore, four of the male interviewees who had 'theft' marriages said that they would have preferred arranged marriages, but could not have afforded it. One of them said that he had just recently gotten employed and did not have sufficient savings to cover wedding related expenses. The other said his family was knee deep in debt from his elder brother's marriage two months before his.

In spite of this, the men and women I interviewed agreed there was little distinction between the constraints and choices that men and women could exercise in both theft and arranged marriages. There were certain rules that all men and women had to follow or else risk being out-casted from the community. As the quotation from the following interviewee illustrates, *Tamangs* marriages needed to abide by 'marriage permissible' principles, which could be both real and/or 'fictitious':

*We Tamangs always marry with other Tamangs, preferably with those who live close to the districts and with whom we have history of marriage alliances. If the potential groom*

*and bride is not from nearby we need to consult with a Lama [equivalent Buddhist priest] first to find ancestral linkages and make sure they are marriage permissible households...Recently there have been Tamang men and women who have had theft marriages with other Tamangs as far as Ramechhap district<sup>52</sup> and they have had to prove to their families that they abided by these principles.*

*(Tamang woman, late 50s, November 2004).*

Gender-specific material constraints posed more restrictions than gender ideologies on men and women's abilities to divorce, remarry, and/or elope. There were many cases, for instance, of elderly *Tamang* men and women who had been married more than once. Many of the younger women interviewees pointed out that their material dependence on men prevented them from entering and exiting marriages in similar ease as their parents' generation, on the one hand (See 5.4.1). On the other hand, younger male interviewees said, for instance, the customary practice of paying '*jharra*' or compensation to the deserted women's husband was what prevented them from eloping with another man's wife. '*Jharra*' was particularly high if the woman's first marriage had been an arranged one in which case the new husband would have to compensate the old husband of the entire amount of wedding expenses.

Nevertheless, *Tamang* men and women interviewees felt both men and women could exercise considerable voice in entering and exiting marriages.

*Our parents might encourage us to marry a particular individual...with our fathers' sister's son, for example...but we [girls] give the final consent.*

*(Tamang woman, late teens, engaged to be married at the time of field work, November 2005)*

All of the male and female interviewees, with 'theft' and 'arranged' marriages, said they had chosen their own partners.

*Tamang* marriage practices in Bhatpole also had far-reaching consequences on other dimensions of gender relations. For instance, as three of my informants (two middle aged *Tamang* men, and one elderly *Tamang* woman) who were well-versed with marriage practices in different communities within the VDC and beyond pointed out, the choices *Tamang* women had in entering and exiting marriages contributed to *Tamang* women's greater autonomy in every day life. Even newly married women enjoyed considerable freedom and autonomy to move within and outside the Village. This was in stark contrast to the experiences of *Biswa-Karma* women in general and newly married women in particular (Refer to Chapter Seven on gender relations in *Gharmi*).

Women interviewees (three in their late 20s and early 30s and one elderly, focused group discussion, November 2004) also suggested that it was in the interest of women to adhere to marriage permissible and non-permissible principles. The *Jaisi-Bahun* of the village viewed *Tamang* practice of bi-lateral cross cousin marriages and fictitious marriage liaisons as ‘incestuous’. But according to the *Tamang* women, marrying into their father’s sister’s house and/or symbolically elevating the status of ‘wife-giving’ households often eased women’s transition from their natal to marital home. As one of the *Tamang* women (*Tamang* woman, early 30s, married with children, November 2004) commented:

*We don’t feel the same way about our marital home as the Jaisi-Bahun women who have to leave their homes and settle at a stranger’s house do. Our marital home is not alien to us, and we are treated with respect and love especially during the early phases of our marriage.*

Furthermore, the nature of relationship I observed between married women and their marital family members was not characterized by the level of modesty as was atypical of *Dalits* of Gharimi, for instance (See Chapter Seven). Familial relationships for *Tamangs* dictated that the junior and senior members should treat one another with mutual respect. But this did not seem to be disproportionately imposed on newly married women in particular. For instance, I found that initially women shied away from speaking with me and men often responded on their behalf. As my field work progressed, I came to realize much of women’s reluctance to interact with me was caused women’s fear of making mistakes while speaking in Nepali<sup>53</sup>. Similarly, in village wide meetings that I was able to observe, neither men nor women shied away from expressing themselves. In fact, many women were vocal in their criticism of men’s lack of commitment to village development activities. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent Chapter Six on gender and community forestry in Bhatpole, these dynamics between men and women help explain how and why women came to play a leading role in initiating community forestry in the village.

### **5.2.3 Intra-Household Resource Allocation Processes: Land, Marriage Transactions & Income**

The major resources in Bhatpole were land, livestock, jewelry, income, and durable consumer items. Both men and women contributed resources to the household. Intra-household allocation of resources depended on one’s contribution to the household, which in turn defined one’s rights over these resources. Rights in this sense varied and included the

ability to make decisions regarding the access, sale, disposal, lease, and bequeath of resources.

The major **marriage transactions** were in the form of brides-price, post-marriage obligations, and dowry. Bridesprice payments could be circumvented in 'theft' marriages. But in both theft and arranged marriages, the 'wife-receiving' household was obligated to contribute labor (as and when needed) and resources for mortuary rites to the wife-giving household. For example, it was common practice, I was told, for a man to be called upon by his wife's natal household during agricultural periods. It could be argued, as Ursula Sharma (1986) does in her seminal research on marriage transactions in India that communities where bridespayments were practices provided little autonomy for women. According to Sharma, such marriage transactions tended to be arranged between the families with limited input and tangible benefits to the women concerned. But the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole did not see marriage transactions as a time to profit from 'selling' their daughter and/or to get compensated for the loss of family labor.

The 5 recently married *Tamang* women, I interviewed on their marriage transactions, (three who were married to neighboring villages and two who were married to Bhatpole, November 2004), for instance, pointed out that their natal family rarely kept the bride price for itself. The food and alcohol that their natal household's received as bride price was spent on for wedding related celebrations whereas much of the cash and jewelry was given as part of the dowry to the daughter in marriage. Moreover, marriages did not symbolize a transfer of the married woman from her natal to her martial home. Women maintained their ties to the natal home through frequent visits during the first phases of their marriage as well as other post-marriage obligations mentioned above.

Most *Tamang* women were also given 'dowry' in marriage. According to the 6 women interviewees who had just gotten married, dowry was the most substantial wedding related expense that their natal families had incurred. All of these women said they received jewelry, cash, livestock, and household items as dowry. Their parents dipped into their savings and the bride price to finance these. The dowry, they argued, was not equal to the land that their brothers inherited<sup>54</sup>. Nevertheless, women were able to exercise independent control over the content of dowry. They could make all decisions regarding lease, disposal, sale and transfer of their dowry. Their marital household members could not lay claims on their dowry without



their prior consent. As the quotation below reflects, these women viewed having independent control over their dowry cushioned them (to a certain extent) from marital break-down and/or elevated their position in the household if and when they chose to use their dowry during financial crisis.

*My first husband eloped with another woman within the first two years of our marriage. The little money and jewelry I had left from my dowry helped me move on financially.*  
(Tamang woman, early 40s, divorced and re-married, Nov 2004)

*My in-laws had taken a loan out to buy two buffaloes and sell the milk to the local market. One of them died suddenly and they were not able to make the payments on time. I lent some money to them for which they continue to be grateful and look up to me more than before.*  
(Tamang woman, early 20s, natal home another district, Nov 2004)

**Land** was considered the most valuable form of property in Bhatpole<sup>55</sup>. Inheritance of parental property remained the primary way of acquiring land. Under *Tamang* customary law, only men had entitlements over the ownership of land. The following quotation below illustrates the atypical response from interviewees about men's rights over land.

*Land is our heritage, it is what our forefathers left us. Because a man is the bearer of our heritage, the land should also pass to men.*  
(Tamang man, early 20s, Nov.2004).

Any infringement on the above was heavily contested. For instance, in households with no male offspring, *Tamangs* commonly thought the land needed to be passed onto the closest male kin. An ongoing land-related dispute at the time of my field work was between a man who had decided to pass on his property to his daughter (only child) and his brothers' son who claimed the property on the grounds he was the nearest male kin.

I spoke to fifteen women of various age and marital status (Nov/Dec 2005) to elicit responses on women's perceptions about gender and land rights in *Bhatpole*. Women said their access to land was mainly mediated by men, by their fathers or brothers before marriage and by husbands after marriage. Unmarried and deserted women in particular felt customary laws were gender biased. By not being allowed to own land, women felt more material dependent on men and exposed to poverty and hardship, as the quotation below from one of the interviewees illustrates (also refer to Case Study of Sita Maya Tamang in section 5.4).

*I am a middle-aged unmarried woman and my parents died many years ago. I have little choice but to depend on my brother and his family for my physical as well as emotional survival. I cannot risk making competing claims over our parental land which he sees as rightfully his.*

Compared to the perils that unmarried and divorced women faced, eleven of the women interviewed in stable marital relationships said they were able to access as well as exercise considerable decision-making power over their husband's land. They viewed land did not merely belong to their husbands. It was "*hamro jagga*" translates as 'our land' and implies collective property of the household. Women said men consulted them (but did not necessarily allow them a decisive voice) in land-related decisions such as what crops to plant; what kinds of and how much fertilizers to use; whether or not to place the land as collateral; to lease the land; to sell the land etc. This was interesting given the assets (dowry) that women brought to the household were considered 'women's property' while land which men brought in were more 'joint'.

Furthermore, it was quite common for men to register purchased land under their wives' name as a way of circumventing land taxes. In household structured interviews, I found that most *Tamangs* owned between 10 and 15 ropanis of land with little fluctuations between various households. The five women I interviewed (one newly married women, one elderly, and others married with children) with land under their name agreed that having formal titles to land did not alter their position in the household. The purchased land was still considered 'joint property' and women exercised the same voice and decision-making as they did for the inherited ones. Nevertheless, as one of the five women (married with one child, husband works in Kathmandu) remarked in the quotation below, having formal title provided a sense of security in the case of marital break down:

*I have a good relationship with my husband and that is why he has registered some of the purchased land under my name. But you never know what will happen in the future and I have seen enough women suffer because they are left with no property when their husbands' leave. If there is a problem between the two of us then I know I will not have to beg.*

Both men and women exercised control over their individual income. During the course of my field study, I interviewed 25 women and 10 men (who represented a cross-section of *Tamang* society, December 2005) on how income was allocated in their households. Interviewees were varying ages, marital status, living in both nuclear and joint households, and with and without male seasonal migrants. Both men and women (unless elderly and disabled) earned and contributed income to the household. Men and women alike said they

kept 'separate purses' and 'jointly pooled' a pre-negotiated amount for the collective well-fare of the household.

Interviewees highlighted that other household members had limited rights over what individuals allocated as 'separate purse'. This is illustrated by the quotation below from an interview married woman, with two children and husband working in the village:

*I work hard in daily wage work in the village and earn money so why should anybody else have any say on what I do with my money as long as I make my share of contribution to the wellbeing of my household.*

In comparison, who contributed how much 'joint conjugal funds' was subject to negotiation and bargaining between household members. Two discernible patterns existed in how the 'joint conjugal funds' were managed. In households where men were present in the village (residing permanently and/or returning temporarily for holidays and in between jobs), joint conjugal funds were managed jointly by both men and women. In households where men away, as the quotation (married with one child, husband working in Kathmandu, December 2005) below illustrates, women were responsible for management of the funds.

*I manage all of our household revenue and expenses when my husband is away. When he comes back, we do it together.*

Men and women alike said that collective expenses were to cover both the 'recurrent' as well as 'special' expenditures, as illustrated by the quotation from an interview with a married Tamang man, working in the cement factory in Ward No.2.

*My wife and I both earn money...we both have to make sure we contribute something for the expenses we incur on a regular basis...such as rice, vegetables, salt and spice, meat occasionally, school fees for children...but we also have to contribute more irregular expenses... [for instance] if someone falls ill...buy agricultural tools and other household supplies...We Tamangs have a lot of social and familial events that we need to contribute to such as at weddings and festivals.*

I was able to decipher through these interviews that men recognized and valued women's relative contributions to the household. This is illustrated in the quotation below from an interview with a married man, working in Kathmandu as a bus conductor, who had returned to the village for his sister's wedding. This in turn, I argue helps explain the measure of control that women exercised in the intra-household allocation of income.

*I earn more than my wife does but she also works hard and earns money. If she were not working on a regular basis then it would be difficult to make ends meet. And that gives her every right to have a say in how our household accounts are managed.*

In spite of women having separate purses and considerable voice in influencing the joint conjugal fund (particularly in male absence), gender inequalities in the allocation of income persisted. These inequalities were not inherent within the *Tamang* community as much as transmitted through gender biases embedded in markets structures, which I will discuss in the sections 5.3 and 5.4.

#### **5.2.4 Gender Division of Labor in the Household: Family Farm Production & Domestic Work**

In order to decipher the gender division of labor and the inequalities, if any, in the work burden and symbolic value attached to men and women's labor, I conducted interviews of and daily activity schedules with 20 women and 10 men (of varying ages and marital status, December 2004). These interviews and daily activity schedules suggested that a clear division existed between the work that was conducted at the household level and those outside of it. I begin by first presenting my research findings for gender division of labor within the household. As I will demonstrate, men and women's work were conceptualized as different but equally valuable, and overlapping and flexible in practice.

The daily activities schedule demonstrated that following types of work were included in **family farm production**: planting, maintaining, and harvesting crops; fertilizing and irrigating soil; drying and storing crops; engaging in animal husbandry; collecting fodder as organic manure etc. When I set out to examine what the main differences and similarities between men and women's work were in Bhatpole, I encountered many gender stereotypes of men and women's comparative advantage in family farm production. *Tamang* interviewees portrayed women as 'patient', 'hardworking' and 'dedicated' while men as 'strong' and the anti-thesis of women. Such stereotypes in turn informed how the *Tamangs* viewed the types of work men and women were "able" to focus on. Women were perceived as better able to conduct activities requiring 'slower and sustained' effort while men in those needing 'strength'.

*Women can better prepare compost, manure land, do weeding etc. because they require constant work and supervision throughout the year. Weeding, for instance, can take 10-15 days to weed thoroughly and staple crops such as corn and paddy can take two or even three cycles of weeding. Men are in charge of ploughing, building and maintaining terraces that require strength but need short time spans to complete.*

*(Tamang male, early 30s, seasonal migrant worker, interviewed when he returned to the village, December 2004)*

*Tamangs* rarely put these gender stereotypes about what constituted men and women's work in practice, however<sup>56</sup>. I found, through the 30 daily activities schedule I conducted with men and women interviewees, that women's work, in particular, was conducted interchangeably by both men and women, and was more dependent on who was 'available' to work than gender per se. The interviewees defined "availability" in terms of whether or not one was involved in income generating activities at the time when labour was needed for family farm production (see: section 5.3).

Male interviewees did not view (what was stereotyped as) 'women's work' as less important than men's work. Interestingly, men openly admitted to conducting 'women's activities' while women interviewees said they chose not to do 'men's work'. Women interviewees viewed ploughing, building and maintaining terraces to be a 'burdensome' work that they would rather leave to their men folks to do. In this regard, associating different abilities and qualities to men and women's work did not necessarily translate into unequal division of labour between *Tamang* men and women.

Parallels can be drawn between the gender division of family farm production and **domestic labour**. The tendency to associate what were defined as 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes to work was also extended, in principle, to demarcate gender division of labour in the domestic arena. Similar to the case for family farm production, *Tamangs* viewed women were responsible for 'caring' and 'nurturing' while men for 'provisioning' of the household. Much of the domestic duties such as cooking, caring for the elderly and cleaning were therefore meant to be within women's domain of work. Once again, these stereotypes were not followed in practice. Allocation of work was flexible and both men and women conducted them interchangeably. As with the case of family farm production, 'availability' to work was more important than gender in prescribing household responsibilities.

Such similarities between gender division of farm production and domestic labour lend support to Hirschon's (1984) argument that the types of work that men and women do in certain contexts cannot always be understood as distinct entities. They are often a part of a social process with parallels and continuities. Having said that, gender division within Bhatpole was distinct from those outside of Bhatpole (in the VDC and cities/towns where *Tamang* men work). Section 5.3 and 5.4 will elaborate on these distinctions and will discuss

how gender differences in valuation accorded to men and women's work *outside* of Bhatpole and the *Tamang* community produced gender inequalities *within* the *Tamangs*.

### **5.3 Gender inequalities in Markets for *Tamang* Labor:**

Family farm production for majority of the *Tamang* households was barely sufficient for household consumption let alone for sale. *Tamangs* therefore had to diversify their livelihood<sup>57</sup> and depend upon agricultural and non-agricultural labor, both within and outside of Jaisithok VDC, to compensate the short falls in their livelihood at the family farm level. This in turn resulted in *Tamangs* of Bhatpole constantly interacting with the market for agricultural and non-agricultural labor at the VDC and wider levels.

This section will discuss how the markets for *Tamang* labor were embedded in the gender biases that existed at the VDC and wider levels. The subsequent section will discuss how these biases were in turn transmitted through the market for *Tamang* labor and superimposed into the intra-household level in the *Tamang* community. Within the VDC, the Section will show that *Jaisi-Bahun*s functioned as the monopsony for *Tamang* labor. They not only decided on the wages earned by *Tamang* workers but also the terms and conditions of men and women's employment. These decisions were in turn, informed by the prevailing gender inequalities in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community. Employment outside the VDC, in neighboring cities and towns, further accentuated the disparities in opportunities and constraints *Tamang* men and women faced.

#### **5.3.1 Domination of the *Jaisi-Bahun*s and the Gender Disparities in the Markets within VDC**

The household-structured interviews I conducted with the *Tamangs* demonstrated that vast majority of the *Tamangs* could not depend upon family farm production for their livelihood. Apart from producing small quantities of tomatoes and vegetables to the local market, *Tamang* households did not produce sufficient for self-consumption let alone for sale. There were little variations in land ownership amongst the *Tamang* households in Bhatpole. To give the range of land ownerships, there were a few (poor, female headed households) with less than 3 *ropanis* of unirrigated agricultural land, and only one household with irrigated land (4 *ropanis*) in addition to 24 *ropanis* of unirrigated land. On average, *Tamangs* owned between 10 and 16 *ropanis* of unirrigated land, which were largely unsuitable for mass scale agricultural production.

Vast majority of the interviewees pointed out that the agricultural production (except for maize, primarily for livestock consumption) was sufficient for 4-6 months a year. 49 out of 50 household structured interviewees said they supplemented their income through employment in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in the VDC as well as outside of it. Most of the household interviewees said adult men and women in the household worked solely for the *Jaisi-Bahun* in the VDC. Furthermore, 40 of the household interviewees said that at least one member of the adult male member was working as seasonal migrants (as bus and taxi drivers, in restaurants, in construction-related and other types of semi-skilled work) in towns and cities, in addition to working for the *Jaisi-Bahuns*.

The *Jaisi-Bahuns* were the largest employers of daily wage agricultural and non-agricultural labor in the VDC. According to VDC-level official records (2004), there were a total of 520 HA of which only 9% is irrigated and the rest unirrigated. The unirrigated land was classified into degrees of productivity contingent on the location of the land. The low-lying parts of the VDC were where majority of the irrigated land as well as the productive unirrigated lands were situated. Given Bhatpole was located in the high altitude part of the VDC whereas the *Jaisi-Bahun* settlements were in the low, it was the *Jaisi-Bahun* who controlled vast majority of the productive land. According to household structured interviews I conducted with *Jaisi-Bahun* and *Tamang* households in the VDC, the amount of land (irrigated and unirrigated) owned by the *Jaisi-Bahun* households was, on average, almost three times more than that owned by an average-wealthy *Tamang* household. Equipped with a higher quality and quantity of land, the majority of *Jaisi-Bahun* had also invested in better agricultural input and techniques to increase agricultural production. The *Jaisi-Bahun* farmers in the VDC supplied paddy, maize, and different types of vegetables in bulk to the neighboring markets of Tamaghat and Banepa. In addition, some of the *Jaisi-Bahuns* had also invested in non-agricultural enterprises such as the cement factory in Ward No. 2.

*Tamang* informants (seven men and women, in two focused group interviews, worked for *Jaisi-Bahuns* on a regular basis, December 2004) and members of other ethnic groups (4 men, Magar, from Ward No.1, December 2004) in the VDC who worked for the *Jaisi-Bahuns* on a regular basis suggested the *Jaisi-Bahuns* landowners often exercised disproportionate bargaining power on the labor market in the village. The *Jaisi-Bahun* employers made major

decisions related to determining of wages, quantity of workers to hire and type of work to be conducted by each laborer with little input from the workers themselves.

The subsequent discussion focuses on how the prevailing gender division of labor amongst the *Jaisi-Bahun*s historically informed and influenced the functioning of the labor market for *Tamangs*. I trace the changes in gender division of labor amongst the *Jaisi-Bahun*s, and how these have shaped the terms and conditions of *Tamang* men and women's employment within *Jaisithok* VDC. I will focus on the market for *Tamang* labor in the agricultural sector because of the importance of the sector throughout the history of the VDC, and the parallels that exist between agricultural and non-agricultural market for *Tamang* labor.

**5.3.2 Gender Division of Labor within the Jaisi-Bahun & Markets for Tamang Labor within the VDC**

Gender and caste based ideologies and practices intersected to define men and women's roles and responsibilities in agricultural production in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community. According to seven elderly *Jaisi-Bahun* interviewees (3 men and 4 women, Dec. 2005) who had lived through the major changes in the VDC, agricultural production had increased dramatically in the last few decades. The *Jaisi-Bahun*s of *Jaisithok* had emerged as one of the most prominent suppliers of paddy and vegetables to neighboring markets of *Tamaghat*, *Banepa* and *Dhulikhel*, for example. The interviewees attributed this to many factors such as better irrigation facilities, availability of fertilizers, and better linkages to markets. Such intensification of agricultural production also coincided with the increasing involvement of *Jaisi-Bahun* women in agricultural production.

Both men and women interviewees pointed out that *Jaisi-Bahun* women had played minimal role in agricultural production three decades ago<sup>58</sup>. *Jaisi-Bahun* women faced more restrictions than their male counterparts did in undertaking agricultural duties.

*When I was a young woman almost thirty or forty years ago, young women just worked indoors and rarely in the fields...our elders used to warn us that working in the fields would make a woman more visible and reduce her caste... There were so many things that our caste did not allow us to do...for example, hauling manure was not considered 'chokko' (clean)for women...*

As the quotation above from an interview with a Brahmin elderly woman (late 50s, married into the village, witnessed the changes in gender division of labor, October 2004) suggests, gender-based norms had prevented *Jaisi-Bahun* women from working in agricultural fields



(considered “public place”) whereas caste-based ones had thwarted them from assuming “ritually defiling” duties (such as hauling manure).

Such gendered norms restricting women’s involvement in agriculture had relaxed substantially in the last three decades. At the time of the field study, *Jaisi-Bahun* women played a crucial role in agricultural production. For instance, in the daily activities schedule I carried out with 20 *Jaisi-Bahun* women and men of varying ages and marital status, I found that women devoted as much time if not more on agricultural production as men did (October 2004).

At the same time, the findings of my interviews also suggested that these changes in the quantity and mode of production had barely augmented the position of women in *Jaisi-Bahun* society. *Jaisi-Bahun* community of Bhatpole continued to harbor and put into practice the view of men as the ‘breadwinners’ and women as the ‘dependents’, and in the process, devalued the contribution women were making to agricultural production and to the household. *Jaisi-Bahun* women’s contribution to agricultural production largely went unrecognized and undervalued. The *Jaisi-Bahun* women interviewees said they participated in the agricultural production process in their capacity as family laborers, but had little influence in the major decisions related to agricultural production such as what to plant, how much to consume and sell, how to allocate the profits acquired from sale of agricultural products etc<sup>59</sup>. Similarly, I found that *Jaisi-Bahun* women devoted most of their time for agricultural production but rarely got paid for it and thus did not contribute ‘visibly’ to the household. When I inquired further, two of the women interviewees who belonged to the richer echelons of the *Jaisi-Bahun* community said that they were not allowed to get paid for the work that they did because that would make them into ‘a common laborer’ and their reputation as well as those of the household would be tarnished. I was told that women, especially those belonging to middle and high-income households, frequently worked in their neighbor’s or kin’s fields but this took the form of ‘voluntary labor’ which got compensated in kind and not in cash. Such practices were integral for dividing the work burden amongst women, but contributed to the devaluation of women’s work as the following quotation helps illustrate:

*Increases in our agricultural roles have made little substantive changes in our lives. We are still expected to be subservient to our male folks. Our work merely reifies the status and privilege of our families in the broader community.*

*(A middle aged Jaisi-Bahun woman and also a development worker in the VDC, October 2004)*

- ***Implications for Tamang Men and Women's Employment Opportunities:***

The prevailing gender division of labor in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community had historically shaped the market for *Tamang* labor within the VDC. Interviews and discussions with 5 elderly *Jaisi-Bahun*s as well as 2 *Tamang* informants (Dec. 2004) suggested that *Jaisi-Bahun*s hired both male and female *Tamang* workers for the types of work that were prohibited to their respective genders. In particular, they hired *Tamang* men for both 'masculine' work and those they considered as 'ritually defiling' for high-castes to conduct. Examples of such work included transplanting seeds and ploughing. *Tamang* women were hired for the more 'feminine' work but ones that were performed in "public" arena and thus barred for the *Jaisi-Bahun*.

Both *Tamang* male and female labor were integral for agricultural production and not easily substitutable. However, *Tamang* men earned more money in wages than *Tamang* women did. The tendencies to value masculine and therefore male labor in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community help account for these differences in wages.

*Tamang men were paid higher than women because the work men did were more important...For instance, Tamang men were hired to plough the land...we could not plough ourselves, but ploughing was crucial to begin the agricultural cycle.*

*(Jaisi-Bahun man, early 60s, major landlord and employer of Tamang labor, recalling the differences in wages given to Tamang men and women, Dec. 2004)*

Changes in agricultural production—intensification of production coupled with greater involvement of *Jaisi-Bahun* women—I argue was having contradictory implications for the market for *Tamang* women's agricultural labor. The expansion of agricultural production in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community increased the demand for *Tamang* women's labor whereas the addition of *Jaisi-Bahun* women's involvement in agriculture devalued *Tamang* women's labor.

*Jaisi-Bahun* employers suggested increase in agricultural production led to increase in their demand for agricultural laborers (men and women<sup>60</sup> alike). The 20 household structured interviews I carried out in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community (October 2005) pointed out that households generally hired the most number of laborers (50-100 per day) in June/July and Nov/June for harvesting, preparing seeds, and planting paddy. They required less for other seasons. Similarly, *Tamang* women in household structured interviews said they found employment easily during paddy seasons (the most labor intensive agricultural crop) but less

easily during other agricultural seasons such as maize, millet, potato, tomato, and other vegetables. At the same time, the addition of *Jaisi-Bahun* women's ("voluntary") labor in agricultural production had increased the labor supply for 'women's work', and rendered *Tamang* women's labor 'easily substitutable'.

*If a Tamang woman does not come to work the next day, it is not difficult to find someone else who can replace her. There are so many women from our community who can do the same work as Tamang women do. But the same is not true for Tamang men.*

*(Jaisi-Bahun man, early 40s, former chairperson of the VDC, and one of the major landlords, April 2006)*

In this respect, the devaluation of work performed by *Tamang* women needs to be explained through the continued devaluation of women's work in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community, on the one hand, the increasing 'substitutability' of *Tamang* women's work (a consequence of more *Jaisi-Bahun* women entering agricultural work), on the other hand.

In comparison, *Tamang* male labor was considered less easily substitutable and more valuable than *Tamang* women's work (as also suggested by the quotation above). The *Jaisi-Bahun* employers pointed out that 'ploughing' was still barred for the high-castes and reserved exclusively for *Tamang* men. *Tamang* male labor was less readily available in contrast to *Tamang* female labor. As I will discuss subsequently, most working age *Tamang* men opted for employment outside the VDC while *Tamang* women tended to stay within the VDC<sup>61</sup>.

The higher importance of *Tamang* male labor as opposed to female ones was reflected in the differences in wages earned by *Tamang* men and women. Wages varied depending on agricultural seasons, but according to household structured interviews with *Jaisi-Bahuns* and *Tamangs* alike, the standard amount was Rs.150/day for men whereas 100/day for women.

I argue parallels could be drawn between the agricultural and non-agricultural markets for *Tamang* labor. *Tamangs* were involved in a variety of non-agricultural employment in the VDC with concentration in portering and construction-related work. The household structured interviews revealed majority of the *Tamangs* were employed by the *Jaisi-Bahuns*. *Jaisi-Bahuns* demarcated the type of work they would hire *Tamang* men and women for as per their understanding of men and women's differential capabilities. As porters, for example, *Tamang* informants (3 men and 2 women, conducted daily non-agricultural work, focused group discussion, Nov. 2004) said women were given less heavy loads to carry. Men took on most

of the responsibilities in construction related contracts whereas women simply carried cement and other building materials. The types of work that were given to men and women were in turn used to justify the unequal wages earned by *Tamang* men and women. At the time of the field work, men earned Rs.80/day whereas women earned Rs.60/day in general.

In the above discussion, I have argued that gender inequalities were not inherent in the *Tamang* community but were informed and shaped by gendered biases in the *Jaisi-Bahun* community. Such biases were in turn transmitted through the market for *Tamang* labor within the VDC. Similarly, the following section will discuss that the opportunities for migrations and earn higher wages outside the village also systematically favored *Tamang* men over *Tamang* women, and was a product of *Tamang* women's lack of access to gender inclusive markets outside of the VDC.

### **5.3.3 Gender Disparities in Seasonal Employment Opportunities outside of the VDC**

There was a long history of migration of *Tamangs* outside of Jaisithok VDC in search for employment opportunities in neighboring towns and cities. According to interviews with 20 *Tamang* women and 10 men (of various ages, experiences with and without migrating, Dec 2004), three main patterns of migration were discernible. *Tamang* men began migrating to neighboring towns and cities since the 1950s as porters, construction workers, in shops, factories etc. The proximity of Jaisithok VDC to roads, towns and cities made migration relatively accessible to *Tamangs*. While these forms of migration continued, in the 1980s and 1990s, approximately 45 *Tamang* men and women of the ages 16-25 migrated to Kathmandu to work in the carpet industry. Since the collapse of the carpet industry in the late 1990s, migration patterns had reverted back, in many ways, to what it was in the 1950s. Nearly all of the women had returned to the village whereas men continued to work in towns and cities. Majority of the *Tamang* male population in Bhatpole had experiences seasonally migrating outside the VDC for employment purposes. There were only 8 households (all members included) who migrated in non-agricultural seasons to work in the brick factories of Bhaktapur. Vast majority of the migrants returned to the village during peak agricultural seasons.

Most of the *Tamang* men and women alike of working age (16-25 years), in interviews and informal discussions, said they preferred to seasonally migrate outside the VDC for

employment. Men and women recalled similar reasons for why they wanted to seasonally migrate and suggested lack of steady and well-paying employment opportunities was the major 'push factor' whereas the possibilities of finding stable and lucrative employment in neighboring cities and towns was the major 'pull factor'. Even though *Tamang* men had relatively more opportunities within the VDC than *Tamang* women did, men preferred to seasonally migrate outside the village. Male interviewees expressed that employment in the village was unsteady, pay low, and the terms and conditions of work remained largely dictated by the *Jaisi-Bahun* employers. As one of the male interviewees (mid-20s, unmarried, left for seasonal migrant work to Kathmandu at the time of field study, Dec 2004) remarked:

*There are little opportunities for us in the village. We only get hired during peak agricultural seasons. It is difficult to find steady source of employment the rest of the year. The non-agricultural labor that we get is unsteady, and the pay is inflexible and low. We get paid the same amount of money no matter which Jaisi-Bahun household we work for. They have already negotiated how much they are going to pay us amongst themselves, and we have relatively little input in these decisions. We might get better treatment in one house than the other, but there is little difference in pay and even smaller prospect for increase in wages in the future.*

Nevertheless, both men and women interviewees said they preferred to seasonally migrate outside of Jaisithok most of the year and return to Jaisithok during the peak agricultural seasons. This way, they could return to the village during peak agricultural seasons to help out in family farm production and work for daily wage labor in high-caste households. They could find casual employment in cities and earn a steady source of income from thereof the rest of the year. In spite of relatively similar responses by men and women as to why they preferred to work outside the village, migrants tended to be predominantly men.

I asked the above mentioned interviewees (20 women and 10 men) a series of questions to find out why seasonal out-migration was male dominated in Bhatpole. I focused my inquiry on factors within and outside the *Tamang* community that could explain for the observed gendered patterns of migration (Chant 1992; Chant 1998). My research findings therefore suggest that gendered constraints emanating from outside the *Tamang* community rather than those within it explain for gender disparities in migration patterns.

I examined gender differences in movement, gender division of labor, and gender differences in skills needed for migration and found that there were little differences between *Tamang* men and women. For example, the *Tamangs* enforced little, overt restrictions on women's movement. I was able to observe during the time of my field study that women

freely moved around for various purposes in their everyday lives such as for daily wage labor, visits to relatives in natal homes, and/or to the market to sell their produce. *Tamang* male and female informants (2 men and 3 women, Dec. 2004) said it was common practice and widely accepted for *Tamang* women to either stay for prolonged periods of time or frequently visit their natal homes during the early stages of their marriage, for example<sup>62</sup>. Women also had prior experiences migrating outside the village. Nearly all the former carpet male and female workers I interviewed, for instance, said that their parents and other village members encouraged them to work in the carpet industry, but the final decision was left to them. In this respect, the ideology of ‘controlling women’s movement’, predominant amongst the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi (See Chapter 7), for example, was virtually absent in Bhatpole. Similarly, as the quotation below illustrates, *Tamang* women pointed out in interviews that they also faced less restrictions in comparison to the *Jaisi-Bahun* women in Jaisithok VDC.

*Jaisi-Bahun women are richer than we are. But they cannot enjoy the same level of freedom of movement and speech that we can in our lives.*

*(Tamang woman, late 30s, married with children, Jan 2005)*

Similarly, with regards to gender division of labor, *Tamang* women spent more time than *Tamang* men did on domestic labor. This was not because of a strictly enforced division of labor between men and women, but the by-product of male out-migration (Refer to Section 5.4 for more discussion on gender differences in participation in labor markets and implications for intra-household relations). Gender division of domestic and family farm production were flexible with men and women conducting much of the activities involved interchangeably (see section 5.2.4). Similarly, there tended to be little distinction in the ‘skills’ needed for migration between *Tamang* men and women. Employments that *Tamang* migrants sought were casual in nature and the interviewees said they accumulated the skills required from experiences with migrating such as ability to perform the assigned work, adapt to new environment, articulate oneself in Nepali (as it was their second language).

Instead, I argue gender biases in market structure and networks could better account for gender disparities in migration amongst the *Tamangs*. Men and women’s experiences in the carpet industry serve as an illustration.

Working at the carpet industry was the only form of steady employment that had been available large number of men and women. I interviewed 8 former carpet workers (3 men and

5 women) who were in the village at the time of my field study. The interviewees spoke at length of the difficult working conditions in the industry. For instance, severe abdomen pain was a common problem many workers complained about in the carpet industry, and was caused by the dust from the wool entering the body through the mouth and getting deposited into the abdomen. But the management did little to address these concerns and improve working conditions more generally. Nevertheless, there were little discriminations against the workers based on their gender. Both men and women interviewees agreed there were little variations on the duties they were assigned (weaving carpets, rolling wool, designing and more) and wages they were paid (as per the output produced). After the carpet industry collapsed, much of the informal or casual labor market in towns and cities specifically sought male labor.

*We Tamangs are illiterate and do not have the skills required for skilled employment. We have to depend on widely available, semi-skilled jobs such as bus and taxi driving, construction related, portering, working as waiters and cooks in restaurants and hotels that specifically seek to hire young men who are willing to put in long hours.*

*(Tamang male, former carpet factory worker, had different part-time in Kathmandu & Banepa, Jan. 2005)*

The interviewees also suggested differences in men and women's 'networks of migrants' was critical in explaining the observed gender disparities in migration patterns. Interviewees considered being a part of a network was important in getting updates on employment opportunities; emotional and financial support as and when needed; adapting to new working and living environments amongst other benefits. For instance, the interviewees mentioned *Tamang* men from Bhatpole who were working in Kathmandu were the first to inform them of vacancies in the carpet industry. The *Tamang* men and women from Bhatpole formed divided themselves into smaller groups that went together to work at different carpet factories dispersed around Kathmandu city. As the migration process continued, such groups often expanded and included others who were also working in the carpet factory. These groups lived and worked alongside each other and helped one another in difficult situations.

However, *Tamang* women migrants said that they relied on networks more than men did. They expressed their inability to migrate independently and without the support of these networks. Women interviewees recalled how harassment of all sorts was a constant feature of everyday life in the city. Having membership in networks was particularly important in coping with and/or learning to avoid these harassments<sup>63</sup>. As one of the woman recalled

(former carpet industry worker, married and was visiting her natal family in Bhatpole for a relatives' wedding at the time of the interview, Jan 2005):

*"I would not have been able to survive in the city if I did not have my friends who I could trust and depend upon".*

Tamangs had little access to employment opportunities outside of the carpet industry which was willing to take on both male and female workers. When the carpet industry collapsed and most of the *Tamangs* were laid off, the *Tamang* men interviewees said they found employment easily in places where unskilled, male labor was in high demand. Women's lack of linkages to markets that were willing to hire unskilled, female labor in large numbers coupled with women's unwillingness to migrate independently (i.e. outside the network)<sup>64</sup> meant vast majority of the women had to return back to the village. I argue these explain for why out-migration for employment purposes had been predominantly male-led since the collapse of the carpet industry.

This section has discussed the gender inequalities embedded in the markets for *Tamang* labor, both within and outside of Jaisithok VDC. The following section will focus on how these inequalities were transmitted at the *Tamang* intra-household level and influenced the lives of men and women. Discussions will focus on both the constraints that women faced in their lives as well as women's agency in actively re-shaping these gender inequalities.

#### **5.4 Transmission of Gender Inequalities & Women's Agency**

*We are more dependent on men than men are on us. We depend on them for work and for money. But we have learnt that by cooperating amongst ourselves, we can help each other out.*

*(Middle aged woman of Bhatpole, Feb 2005)*

The women of Bhatpole were well aware that the gender biases in markets for *Tamang* labor were producing inequalities between men and women at the intra-household level (as the quotation above also demonstrates). Far from being passive victims of these inequalities, however, women of Bhatpole had also, over time, adopted multiple strategies to re-shape these gendered constraints. Women's strategies were both aided by the 'spaces' within the existing gender relations in Bhatpole and actively shaped by women themselves through greater cooperation and collaboration with one another. This section will therefore, discuss both the gendered constraints women faced in their lives as well as women's agency in re-shaping gender inequalities.



#### 5.4.1 *Transmission of Inequalities & Constraints Imposed on Women's Lives*

I conducted twenty interviews with *Tamang* women (married, of varying ages and with husbands working as seasonal migrant workers, Jan 2005) to decipher how their lives were being influenced by inequalities in markets (opportunities and wages) for *Tamang* labor. These interviews suggested inequalities transmitted by gender biases in markets were being superimposed on gender relations at the intra-household level, and were resulting in women's higher dependence on men for material, labor and extra-local support.

As I have discussed earlier in the chapter, markets structures for *Tamang* labor within and outside of Bhatpole were such that systematically favored male labor over female ones. *Tamang* men found it relatively easier to get well paid employment opportunities within and outside the village. The 20 women I interviewed said the higher income that their husbands earned and contributed to the household was integral for the well-being of the household members. For instance, one of the *Tamang* women interviewees (mid 30s, married with children, husband working as a seasonal migrant worker, Jan. 2005) said:

*Our elders used to say the income earned by men working outside is a complement to household income. Now, it is the primary source of household survival and what we earn through daily wage labor in the village supplements the household income.*

At the same time, women spoke of the consequences of men's higher earning power at the household-level. Women interviewees with husbands working in Kathmandu in various semi-skilled employments said their husbands were absent for long periods of time, and often brought savings with them when they returned to the village. While men were away, women would often rely solely on their individual earnings to manage household expenses, with little left for personal usage. Women interviewees expressed a sense of loss of control over their income when it entered the household as compared to men. Along similar lines, other women interviewees with husbands working in higher paying jobs said they were disproportionately dependent on men's income but felt their access to male income was insecure. This is illustrated by the following quotation from an interview with a *Tamang* woman (married with two children, and with a husband who was working as a seasonal migrant worker, Jan 2005):

*My husband has been working as a taxi driver in Kathmandu for seven years now. He earns significantly more than I do. We had agreed before he left that he would send money on a regular basis to cover the medium and major expenses of the household such as those incurred for children's schools, clothes, wedding and festival-related expenses. But he no longer sends money on a regular basis. He says it is because Kathmandu has become expensive but I suspect he spends it on alcohol and going out with friends. I try to take all*

*the jobs that I can get to cover the times he does not send money. But I can never earn as much as he does. We fight about this every time he comes back to the village....*

I argue such responses need to be understood in the context of how male income interacted with pre-existing intra-household income allocation processes. I discussed in section 5.2.3 on intra-household allocation of income that household members both pooled their income into a joint conjugal fund and retained separate purses. How much one contributed to the joint fund and/or kept separately was negotiated between household members, but the bargaining power tilted in favor of those who were contributing more to the household. Because it was often the case that men earned and contributed higher income, men had greater bargaining power over how much they contributed to the joint fund and retained as separate purse.

Women also remarked in interviews and informal discussions how their material dependence on men was having far-reaching consequences on the other dimensions of their lives. The implications for women's ability to exercise the same level of choice to enter and exit marriages as men could, is reflected in the quotation below:

*I cannot choose anyone I want to marry as my brother can. I have to look out for what kind of job he has and whether or not he will be able to offer me a good life.*

*(Unmarried Tamang woman, informal discussion about marriage practices, Nov. 2004)*

*My husband and I have been having problems for years. Sometimes, I feel like leaving him to either move back with my parents or run away with another man. But my parents do not have money to take care of me and my children. While we are still married, at least my husband has the compulsion to contribute to the household. But if I were to run away with some one else, he will ask for 'jharra' instead.*

*(Married Tamang woman with three children, husband working as seasonal migrant worker, Jan 2005)*

Women interviewees with male household members who seasonally migrated also pointed to the marked differences in their '**work burden**' (time allocated for various types of work) when men were present in the village vis-à-vis when men were away. The following quotation helps illustrate how a woman's domestic and farm production responsibilities increased in male absence:

*When my husband is gone, I have to do everything...I have to cook, clean, work in our farm, work in other people's farm ...When he returns home, he is busy with his work, but at least he shares some of the cooking, cleaning and other responsibilities with me.*

*(Tamang woman, married with children, husband working as seasonal worker, Jan 2005)*

Similarly, I asked 20 women (Jan 2005) interviewees to make detailed, daily activities schedule of their work during peak and off peak seasons. Interestingly, 18 of the women noted that their husbands returned in peak agricultural seasons, shared domestic and family farm production responsibilities with them, and suggested that their overall work burden decreased as compared to off peak seasons while men were away. I argue these responses need to be understood in the context of how gender division of labor was allocated at the household level. As I have discussed in section 5.2.4, men and women conducted domestic and farm production related work interchangeably. 'Availability' to conduct work was more important than gender per se in determining who did what and when. Because men were more likely to be away for seasonal work and women more likely to remain in the village, women were 'available' to work during off-peak seasons than men were.

Women interviewees also expressed a sense of dependence on men to mediate their **extra-village interactions**. Drawing from my own experiences, I found it much easier to build rapport with men than with women at the beginning of my field work. Except for a handful of vocal women in the village, most women would shy away from talking with me, would start giggling with each other if I asked them a question when they were in a larger group, and would even run away if they thought I was approaching them for an interview. Women with perfectly understandable Nepali would be more comfortable if and when men were present to act as interpreters. My relationship with most women in Bhatpole became less tenuous as I carried on living in the village and continued with my field study. Even then, a few months into my field study and after a lengthy discussion about her daughter's marriage, a women interviewee said:

*Please do be careful before you rely on me and my responses for I fear I am an illiterate Tamang woman and I may have said the wrong things to you.*

*(Tamang woman, early 40s, children married, Nov. 2004)*

I had initially suspected that women's unwillingness to interact with me was somehow related to the gender dynamics inherent within the *Tamang* community. But I found gender relations in the *Tamang* community were much more lax than I had expected<sup>65</sup>. In the Bhatpole-wide meetings that I was able to observe, women of all ages and marital status did not shy away from expressing their opinions to a village wide audience. However, in their interaction with those from outside the village (such as government and non-government

officials, Jaisi-Bahun employers, and myself towards the beginning of my field research in Bhatpole), majority of the women took the backseat.

My informants (5 *Tamang* women of varying ages and marital status, Jan 2005) suggested two main reasons why women did not interact directly with those they viewed as 'outsiders'. As the quotation below reflects from one of my informants, women conceptualized their life 'spaces' as separate and simultaneously linked to those of men's. Their 'spaces' were limited to the 'local' (the village, local market, neighboring villagers, and others with whom they had well established relationships) whereas men were a part of both local and extra-local spaces. Women perceived men who seasonally migrated outside the village (to the extra-local level spaces) were better able to interact and bargain with extra-local actors.

*We did not want to speak to you without the help of our men when you first came to village...because we did not know you, we did not know what you wanted from us, we did not understand all the things you said, and we were not sure if you could understand us...Many of us have never left the village since we have been married. Our lives are here...in the village, neighboring ones where we have relatives and friends, the local markets where we sell our vegetables, and our natal home...We do not know how to interact with others. The men [in comparison] work outside the village from a very early age. When they return, they also become a part of the village and our lives...they help us with the [domestic and agricultural work]...But when they are at work, they need to interact with so many different types of people all the time and have learnt to be able to speak to outsiders like you.*

*(Tamang woman, early 30s, married with children and husband working as bus driver in Kathmandu & Banepa, Jan 2005)*

Similarly, women were also deeply conscious of differences in gendered relationships between themselves and their *Jaisi-Bahun* employers, and the higher value accrued to male labor as opposed to female ones. As the quotation below demonstrates, women depended on *Tamang* men to negotiate on their behalf with their *Jaisi-Bahun* employers as a strategy to negotiate for a favorable outcome:

*Every time I need to negotiate with my male [Jaisi-Bahun] employer...to take a day off of work, negotiate for my pay...I get one of our male family members to speak to them on my behalf...I know what it is like for Jaisi-Bahun women...they cannot go up to a man, especially a powerful man, the same way that we can with our men [Tamang]...*

*(Tamang woman, 30s, married with children and husband working in the village, Jan 2005)*

Most of the women I spoke to said they trusted their male kin to represent their interests at the extra-local level. At the same time, the case study below of Sita Maya Tamang

(*Tamang* woman, mid 30s, two children, husband deserted, discussion on marriage practices in Bhatpole Nov. 2004) provides a glaring example of the concerns women had over their asymmetric dependence on men, and their lack of access to formal and informal channels outside of their ‘spaces’.

**Figure 3:** Case Study of Sita Maya Tamang

My husband left me for another woman. I have two children. He has threatened me to either get out of his house and land or face the consequences. He wants to move here with his new wife. I have nowhere else to go. My parents are old, poor, and cannot take on additional responsibilities. The villagers know what a difficult situation I am in. They tried to help me in the beginning, but they are not going to continue. They are all related to him, and blame me for getting married to someone who has had multiple wives and notorious separations. I have heard if I file a case, I could get some form of compensation on the grounds that he deserted me. But I cannot do this without someone from the village supporting me. You see my Nepali is not good enough, my ability to interact with outsiders is even worst, and I would not even know which doors to knock. Anyways, who would listen to a poor *Tamang* woman like me?

The chapter has thus far discussed how the egalitarian facets of gender relations in *Tamang* society have been influenced by VDC and regional level economic processes. I have argued that gender biases emanating from outside the *Tamangs* of Bhatpotole, transmitted through the market for *Tamang* labor, were producing gender inequalities at the intra-*Tamang* level. This section explored how unequal opportunities for men and women in the markets for *Tamang* labor have imposed material, labor, and extra-local constraints on women. The implications of *Tamangs* interacting with the broader economic and political processes have been more complex than producing winners and losers, however. The next section will discuss how the women of Bhatpole have also responded to these constraints in their lives.

**5.4.2 Capitalizing on Spaces & Re-Defining Gender Relations: Co-operation amongst Women**

*Tamang* women had devised various ways of mitigating the common, gendered constraints they faced in their every day lives. I focus on how *Tamang* women were capitalizing on the ‘spaces’ within *Tamang* socio-cultural practices, and investing on greater cooperation and collaboration with one another.

Many married women, in the absence of their male family members, used de-facto land rights to plant and sell vegetables (particularly tomatoes) in local markets in order to decrease their material dependence on men. I have discussed in section 5.2.3 women’s access to **land** was mediated by their male kin. Women in congenial relationships could, nevertheless, exercise voice and influence in land-related decision making processes.

Tomatoes could be sold at a hefty albeit fluctuating price in neighboring markets. According to interviews with seven women (married women, husbands working as seasonal migrants, Jan 2005) who were regular tomato sellers, women expected an average annual income of Rs.15,000 to 40,000 from tomatoes alone, depending on the quantity and quality of their harvest along with the supply and demand for tomatoes in the market. Furthermore, women took charge of all the planting, harvesting and sale-related responsibilities for tomatoes, and exercised exclusive claims on the profits made. Women's claims on the fruits of their labor were accepted by their husbands and other male kin. The following quotation from an interview with one of the women interviewees' husband, a migrant worker who had returned home in between jobs, helps corroborate this:

*My wife works hard to grow and sell the tomatoes at the local market. I am not around to help her and she has the right to do as she pleases with her earnings.*

The women preferred to focus on growing and selling tomatoes because of the following reasons: (1) the market for tomatoes was not far from the village and they often went in groups to sell them. (2) The seasons for tomatoes were twice a year, during off-peak agricultural seasons while their male family members were away. When I asked women what they did with the profits they earned, the interviewees responded as follows:

*It cushions me when my husband does not contribute his share on time.  
(Tamang woman, married, husband working as seasonal worker, Jan 2005).*

*It gives me a source of independent income.  
(Tamang woman, newly married, husband mostly working in neighboring villages as construction worker, Jan 2005)*

While I was finishing up my field work in the village, women had also begun a vegetable farming group to diversify the products they planted and introduce more organized forms of collective action in agricultural production amongst themselves.

In addition to strategies aimed at increasing their income, women had also developed strategies to mitigate labor related constraints they faced in male absence. The 20 women I interviewed said they shouldered most of the production related activities in male absence. I argue this has to be understood in the context of the inherent flexibility in gender division of labor which explains for the relative ease with which women were able to substitute for men's labor. The only job in family farm production reserved exclusively for men, even at the time

of my field study, was ploughing. Women said that once the major crops (maize and some paddy) were harvested, their male kins prepared the fields for the next cropping cycle and then left for seasonal migration.

It could be argued that by reserving male labor for ploughing, women's dependence on men in family farm production and men's monopoly in the inauguration of planting seasons were maintained<sup>66</sup>. But the women interviewees alluded to the role that they played in maintaining this division. Women said they regarded ploughing with a strong aversion and considered it a 'burdensome' work that they would rather leave for men to conduct. Further, women also implied in interviews that they helped maintain the associations of ploughing with "man's job" in order to ensure their husbands and male family members returned home during agricultural seasons, as the following quotation illustrates:

*We would not plough even if we could. We have to maintain an anchor for our men to return to the village.*

*(Tamang woman, early 40s, husband working as seasonal migrant worker, Jan 2005)*

The above suggests, as Jackson and Palmer-Jones (1999) argue, that gender division of labor is not merely about 'time allocation' of work by gender but also by lived experiences of work. In other words, how individual subjectivities informs preference and choices, and influences the positions adopted in intra-household bargaining (explicit and implicit) over labor.

In addition, *Tamang* women widely and visibly participated in various forms of **exchange labor** to actively reduce the labor vacuum produced in male absence. According to my informants (5 *Tamang* women of varying ages and marital status, Jan 2005), collective labor agreements had a long history in Bhatpole. *Tamang* household had always lacked capital to hire daily wage workers even at an ad hoc basis. Instead, they depended on collective labor agreements, which drew from pre-existing social relationships in the village. Since the advent of widespread seasonal male out-migration, however, collective labor arrangements had become gendered to the extent that they were more commonplace amongst women than amongst men. For instance, majority of the women pointed out that they conducted exchange labor on a regular basis in the annual daily activities schedule that I conducted with approximately 40 women throughout my field work.

Women came together to collectively work in each other's fields especially during off-peak agricultural seasons and/or at times when men were away from the village. The

following quotation from an interview demonstrates how labor exchange arrangements were conducted:

*We make groups of 10-15 women at a time, make schedule for when to do what, and take turns to work in each other's fields...except for ploughing, we do everything else...such as transplanting seeds, weeding, storing...*

*(Tamang woman, mid-40s, married, husband working as seasonal migrant worker, Jan 2005)*

Furthermore, women also shared domestic responsibilities with one another such as cooking, caring for children and others as the following quotation below illustrates:

*It is my turn to look after the village children today because my friends are away on daily wage work. Our employers won't let us work if we bring our small children along. Those of us with young children have come up with a system to take turns to look after them. Today it is my turn, tomorrow I will go to work, and a friend will take over.*

*(Tamang woman, late 20s, married, husband working as seasonal migrant, Jan 2005)*

According to interviews with 15 women from the village who participated in these labor exchange arrangements, women cooperated because of the benefits they derived from cooperation. These labor arrangements cushioned women against the labor scarcity in male absence; freed women's labor for other activities such as the production of tomatoes; and facilitated collective action amongst women in Bhatpole.

*My work burden increases substantially while my husband is away. I have to look after the house, the children, the farm, and do daily wage work all by myself. If it was not for these labor sharing agreements that we have amongst one another, I would not be able to manage.*

*(Tamang woman, early 30s, married with husband working as seasonal migrant in Kathmandu, Jan 2005)*

Other women interviewees suggested that it was the common constraints as well as the collective will to address these constraints that explained for such widespread collective action amongst women. The quotation below illustrates this:

*We work together because all of us have to stay in the village and cope in the absence of men.*

*(Tamang woman, early 50s, chairperson of community forestry, husband had stopped working as a seasonal migrant when I was in Bhatpole, Jan 2005)*

In addition to the presence of individual and collective incentives to cooperate, women consciously and heavily invested in maintaining collective action amongst one another. Women informants (3 Tamang women, of varying ages, all married & involved in collective labor arrangements, Jan 2005) saw clear differences in collective labor arrangements amongst



women and between men and women. Men also provided support as and when needed to other *Tamangs* living in the village during weddings, festivals, construction of houses etc. However, I was told that this was not calculated, monitored and reciprocated the same way that women's work were.

*Our men also help each other out...but this is more ad hoc and is not strictly monitored...when they need to monitor who does what then they cannot work together...as you must have noticed yesterday with the men fighting about where the electricity pole will be located, it is not enough to be related to each other to work well together all the time.*

*(Tamang woman, early 20s, married, Jan 2005)*

Campbell's (1994) distinctions between 'kinship' and 'exchange-based' labor, in his study on labor arrangements amongst a particular group of *Tamangs*, helps explicate the differences between men and women's labor arrangements I observed in Bhatpole. Campbell argues that both forms of labor are based on social relationships. However, 'kinship' labor does not amount to a substantial day's work and gets compensated in kind and not cash. 'Exchange labor' instead "...shifts the balance away from the valuation of social relationships to direct calculation of labor" (Campbell 1994: pp. 293).

In line with Campbell's argument of 'exchange labor', the women of Bhatpole had put in place informal agreements to monitor and enforce cooperation amongst one another. As the following interview from one of my informants (*Tamang* woman, married, member of the collective labor arrangements, Jan 2005) explains, the emphasis of exchange labor was on reciprocity, direct calculation of labor, and 'equal balance' between the labor that was exchanged:

*We have an agreement with one another that we will work in one another's fields in rotation. One of us is always in charge of keeping track of who worked how much and make sure that they are reciprocated by others...we keep a track of both days worked and [output of work].*

Cooperation did not mean absence of conflict, however. Conflicts were commonplace, and as the women themselves pointed out, conflicts were often related to who kept the records, what counted as 'equal' output, who had not come to work but expected the other to contribute to her field and so forth. However, women interviewees suggested it was not the absence of conflict but the ways in which women managed conflict that was critical in maintain high levels of collective action amongst women. Furthermore, women had devised means and norms for managing conflict amongst one another. Women interviewees said that

conflicts and disagreements, as and when they took place, were either arbitrated by a group of women with a reputation for making 'fair' judgment and/or through consensus.

Drawing on this discussion on women's agency, the subsequent chapter on gender and community forestry will discuss how these pre-existing forms of cooperation allowed women to play a prominent role in community forestry, on the one hand. And how women employed the 'spaces' within existing gender relations to bargain with men to mediate their interactions with forest officials responsible for overseeing the community forest, on the other hand.

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed how gender inequalities between men and women were evident in women's disproportional dependence on men for material, labor, and extra-local support. These inequalities however were not inherent within the *Tamang* community of Bhatpole as much as transmitted through gender biases embedded in markets for *Tamang* labor within and outside Jaisithok VDC. At the same time, far from being silent victims of these inequalities, women had also used their agency to, over time, develop collective strategies to respond and address these challenges.

The organization of the household, marriage practices, gender division of labor in family farm production and allocation of resources which together constituted the gender relations within the *Tamang* community of Bhatpole did not necessarily place men and women on an equal footing but did embody gender egalitarian principles and practices.

*Tamang* households depended on a diverse portfolio of income generating sources both within and outside the VDC to meet their standard of living. But the markets for *Tamang* labor within the VDC were governed by rules and norms prevailing in the Jaisi-Bahun community which systematically devalued women's labor vis-à-vis men's. Similarly, gender differences in demand for *Tamang* labor coupled with the inadequacies of the *Tamang* networks to tap into more gender inclusive markets posed significant constraints for women to migrate. The implications of these inequalities were three-fold: men found employment opportunities more easily than women did within and outside of Jaisithok; men earned substantially more than women did; and men were more able to migrate outside Jaisithok VDC than women.

These inequalities in turn were superimposed on intra-*Tamang* level gender relations and produced the following constraints on the lives of women: material, labor, and extra-local dependence. At the same time, women had also developed collective strategies for mitigating these constraints in their every day lives.

This chapter serves as a precursor to Chapter Six on the interrelationship between gender relations amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole and local institutions formed to govern community forest resources in the village. I will argue in the next chapter that the prevailing gender relations amongst the *Tamangs*, as discussed in this chapter, were constantly drawn upon to govern these institutions. The intra and extra-household relations demarcated men and women's entry, interaction and influence in institutional processes. The leading role that women played in the formation and functioning of these institutions will be explained in terms of gender egalitarian dimensions of socio-cultural practices amongst the *Tamangs*, gender inequalities transmitted through biases embedded in markets, and women's collective response to these inequalities. Hence, the major themes explored in this chapter—autonomy, inequality and adaptation—will figure prominently in the analysis of gender dynamics in local institutions formed to govern Birawtapakha and Koldanda community forest.

## ~ Chapter Six ~

### 6 Community Forestry in Bhatpole: Gender, Institutions & the External Actor

This chapter will discuss the formation, functioning and change in the local institutions established to govern community forest institutions. It will demonstrate that community forestry was conceptualized as a 'women's initiative' with men's role as that of supporting women. However, in the official handover of community forestry, the District Forest Office-Kavrepalanchok District (DFO-K) and its responsible staff were dis-embedded from the gendered context in Bhatpole. The DFO - K superimposed a set of institutions that were largely disjointed from the informal institutions women had collectively formulated to govern the forests prior to seeking official handover of the community forest. As women did not follow the formal institutions strictly, the forest officials threatened to withdraw community forest usufruct rights of the women. Rather than passively accepting the reprimand, women actively strategized to seek men's support in negotiating on their behalf with the DFO - K and thereby bridging the gap between informal and formal institutions. However, the change in DFO - K's support to community forest that prioritized and targeted women community forest users, were further attenuating the disjuncture between formal and informal institutions.

In presenting the above, this chapter argues gender relations amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole constantly shaped and informed the formation, functioning and change in local institutions of community forest. It will explain how prevailing gender relations – socio-cultural practices, market-based inequalities, and women's agency – shaped and informed gender differences in involvement and incentives in community forestry governance. It will also discuss how the DFO - K interacted with and influenced institutional processes and gender relations.

This chapter is divided into four major segments. It begins by introducing the Users and Community Forests of Bhatpole, and the historical and material basis for how and why community forest originated as women's led initiative. Second, the chapter will discuss the formulation of institutions (formal and informal), the disjuncture between the informal institutions women had collectively decided upon prior to seeking support from forest

officials and the formal institutions the forest officials had superimposed on the users. This will be followed by discussions on how the above disjuncture continued in institutional functioning and with what implications for community forestry. Third, the chapter will discuss two parallel sources of institutional changes—(1) those negotiated by the *Tamang* women users to bridge the gap between formal and informal institutions, and (2) those being implemented by the DFO - K to address ‘gender’ issues in its support to community forestry user groups (CFUGs) under its jurisdiction—and the implications of these changes for gender dynamics in local institutions. The chapter will end with a summary as well as how the major arguments of the chapter have addressed the research concerns of this thesis.

### 6.1 Introducing the Users and the Community Forests of Bhatpole

The two community forests that this chapter focuses on are Birawtapakha Community Forest in Ward No.2 and Koldanda Community Forest in Ward No.5., in Bhatpole village, Jaisithok Village Development Committee (VDC), Kavrepalanchok District of Central Nepal. The Department of Forestry handed over the Birawtapakha community forest in 1997 whereas Koldanda community forest in 2003. Birawtapakha community forest was a largely barren land, owned by the VDC prior to handover whereas Koldanda had been a ‘*Panchayat Forest*’ in the 1980s governed by the Village Panchayat. Both the forests were governed by the *Tamangs* living in Bhatpole (Ward No.2 and Ward No. 5) although administratively, they were registered as two different community forests in the DFO-K records.

Birawtapakha community forest was a total of 5.68 hectare with the following as its major forest products: *Chilaune* (*Schima wallichii*), *Champ* (*Michelia champaca*), *Sallo* (*Pinus roxburghii*), and *Lapsi* as its major forest products. Koldanda community forest was a total of 2.5 hectare with *Salla* as the only forest product. At the time of the field study, only fodder was available from the two forests, and sold to groups of users on a rotation basis. Discussions were under away amongst the community forest users and committee members to begin siviculture activities in Birawtapakha community forest and distribute the residual forest products amongst the users.

The Panckaal Rangepost under the DFO-K was the major external actor overseeing and facilitating the Birawtapakha community forest and Koldanda community forest as per the Constitution and Operation Plans of the two user groups. The Constitution and Operational Plans were the formal institutions governing the forests, which defined the rights of the users,

outlined the major plans for forest management (BirawtapakhaCFUG and DFO/Kavre 1997; BirawtapakhaCFUG and DFO/Kavre 1997; KoldandaCFUG and DFO/Kavre 2003; KoldandaCFUG and DFO/Kavre 2003). But as I will demonstrate in the proceeding sections they were not closely followed in practice. There were fundamental incompatibilities and contradictions within the formal institutions. The two community forest had different committees, two sets of ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ developed to formally govern each community forest. And yet, both the community forests were located in Bhatpole, the entire *Tamang* population of village registered as their users, and with the *Tamangs* were adopting a unifying, informal decision-making processes to govern both forests. Consequently, as I will demonstrate in greater detail, the users more closely followed a set of informal institutions that they had developed both independently and in conjunction with the formal institutions. The subsequent discussions will focus largely on Birawtapakha Community Forest as Koldanda Community Forest had only recently been handed to the *Tamang* users of Bhatpole when I started my field study (June 2004), but I will also refer to Koldanda forest as needed.

It is important to define at the outset how I have understood ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ institutions for the purposes of this current chapter as the subsequent discussions will draw heavily from these definitions. I understand ‘informal’ institutions as the ‘rules in use’ that the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole collectively formulated to govern community forests. These informal institutions heavily borrowed from existing patterns of collaboration and ongoing negotiations amongst the *Tamangs* users. Formal institutions are the Constitution and Operational Plan that are meant to guide CFUGs in governing the community forest as well as the forest officials in supporting the CFUG. The documents together outlined the management plans for the community forests as well as the roles, responsibilities of the users and committee members.

## **6.2 Gender Differences in Incentives in CF:**

Community forest in Bhatpole was conceptualized from the very beginning as a women’s initiative, with women at the forefront of promoting and supporting it. According to interviews I carried out with 10 men and women on the origin of community forestry (October 2004), the idea of community forest in Bhatpole was borrowed from the experiences with in neighboring Thuli Ban (translated to ‘Big Forest’ in Nepali) community forest. Thuli Ban was a dense community forest located in Panchkaal VDC an hour’s walk away from Bhatpole, and governed by a myriad of ethnic groups living in close proximity to the forest. The residents of Bhatpole were secondary users in Thuli Ban CF. The concept of establishing

a community forest in Bhatpole received widespread support from *Tamang* women because it professed to address: (a) an everyday constraint that women faced in their lives—lack of access to forest products; and (b) allow women a greater role in the community forest decision-making process. 47 out of 50 households I interviewed said women in their household were ‘actively’ involved in community forest since the beginning. In comparison, only 7 men admitted to be involved in the process. This invariably reflects the degree of support for community forest amongst the women of Bhatpole.

This section will discuss how women’s decision to make community forest a women’s led initiative was shaped by gender inequalities in access to forest products, women’s socio-cultural autonomy to assume decision making roles at the community level, and women’s agency in addressing historical experiences of exclusion from forest governance resources.

### ***6.2.1 Access to Forest Products: Envisioned Outcome of community forest***

*Tamangs* of Bhatpole required forest products for both agricultural and domestic purposes. All of the 50 *Tamang* households I interviewed in household structured interviews (October 2004) said they depended upon firewood for cooking, and fodder for feeding livestock and organic manure. In addition to these everyday needs, households also required timber for construction related purposes. There were few fuel-efficient technologies available to most *Tamang* households. For instance, I was told by field assistants from a Canadian NGO working in Jaisithok there were only 5 Improved Cooking Stoves and 1 bio-gas installed in the village<sup>67</sup> at the time of the field work. I argue the absence of fuel efficient technologies contributed to *Tamang* households’ high levels of dependence on forest products. Access to forest products in this respect was imperative for household livelihood.

*Tamangs* pointed out, in household structured interviews as well as numerous informal discussions (Oct/Nov 2004), that the following were major mediums for accessing forest products: (1) private land, (2) community forest, (3) purchase from local market, and (4) other sources (such as public land, patron-client relationships, residues of agricultural products and others). I will demonstrate below that each *Tamang* household had to employ a combination of these mediums to meet household requirements. Furthermore, access to these mediums was gendered within the household to the extent that women faced greater difficulties accessing each medium than men did.

*Private land* was the most important and secure way of gaining access to forest products in the village and the VDC more generally. *Jaisi-Bahun* landlords with more than 20 *ropanis* of land on average planted fodder plants, trees and other forest products to secure themselves a steady supply of forest products (Personal communication with the ex VDC chairperson and secretary, June 2004 and interviews of 5 *Jaisi-Bahun* farmers, Oct 2004). Distribution of land was skewed in the VDC<sup>68</sup> and gaining secure access to forest products from private land was a viable option for only the richer echelons of the Jaisithok population. *Tamangs* of Bhatpole, with low ownership of private land, were unable to secure access to forest products. For instance, the household structured interviews with the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole revealed that only 5 households (out of a total of 50 households) could depend on private land to meet forest product for approximately 12 months. Therefore, most *Tamang* households had to rely on means other than private land for accessing forest products.

*Tamangs* of Bhatpole had secondary usufruct rights to the *community forests* in Thuli Ban community forest, located in neighboring Panckaal VDC, approximately one and a half hour's walk from Bhatpole village. According to the interviews I conducted with two of committee members and secretary of Thuli Ban community forest (December 2004), the forest had an abundant supply of fodder, fuel wood, grass whereas timber and NTFPs were in limited supply. However, only primary users had secure access to forest products in Thuli Ban community forest. *Tamangs* of Bhatpole, as secondary users, were only entitled to collect firewood and fodder for a total of four months<sup>69</sup> per year, twice a year. *Tamangs* of Bhatpole also had to pay a fee of Rs.5 per *bari* (roughly 30kg) for fuel wood and fodder to the Thuli Ban community forest committee. Interviews in household structured interviews said the average time to go to the forest, collect the allowed forest products, and carry them back to Bhatpole could take 3 or more hours. Most complained allocating so much time for forest product collection had tremendous opportunity cost in the form of foregone labor for work and leisure.

A wide range of forest products were also available at the local *markets* (of Tamaghat and Banepa in the nearby town-market). The market prices for forest products at the time of the fieldwork were the following: fodder and fuelwood cost Rs.20 to 50 per *bari* and timber poles cost between Rs.100-200 (fluctuations were attributed to the seasons and availability of forest products). Most *Tamang* households indicated in household structured interviews that market was the last resort for buying fodder and fuelwood whereas buying timber poles was



the most viable but expensive option. The fact that the average daily wage agricultural labor for *Tamangs* varied between Rs.100-150 per day (depending on male or female labor) gives an indication of the financial burden on *Tamang* households when consuming forests products from the market.

*Tamangs* also had other ways of gaining access to forest products. Most of the interviewees said that they collected forest products from public land (i.e. side of the road, barren pieces of land) at least once a week. Depending on the nature of relationship, some were able to negotiate with their *Jaisi-Bahun* patrons small supplies of firewood and other forest products. Similarly, cow dung and residues of corn were often used as substitute for fuel wood.

The interviewees expressed concerns with not only the availability of forest products, but also the quality of what was available to them. For example, some of the criteria interviewees employed to define 'quality of firewood' included the following: how fast the fuel wood burnt; how long it lasted per cooking time; how much smoke it generated etc. The interviewees attributed respiratory and eye sight problems due to the smoke generated by low quality fuel wood.

These interviewees ranked the above mentioned mediums (private land, community forest, market, and other sources) differently according to the quantity as well as quality of forest product available. Majority ranked forest products from Thuli Ban community forest as the preferred source for the range and quality of forest products available.

- ***Gender Dimensions of Access to Forest Products:***

There was a general agreement amongst my interviewees that in comparison to men, women experienced greater hardship in accessing forest products through the above mentioned mediums. I found through the detailed interviews with 20 *Tamang* men and women that poor and deserted women interviewees (4 out of 20) with the least access to private land confronted the most difficulties in securing forest resources. Even women in stable marital relationships (8 out of the 20) said, as the quotation below demonstrates, the burden of securing sufficient firewood and forest products for household consumption were on their shoulders.

*My husband is often away for work outside the village. He helps with collecting forest products when he can. He often returns when there is work available in the VDC...during the peak seasons...he cannot help as much as I would have liked him to because he has to work first thing in the morning.*

*(Tamang woman, married with children, husband seasonally migrating outside of the village for work Nov 2004)*

Similarly, in the gender activities scheduling exercises I conducted with 20 women and 10 women (of varying ages and marital status, as part of my analysis of gender division of labor in Bhatpole, Nov-Dec 2004), there were marked differences between male and female responses. Vast majority of the women pointed out that ‘collecting forest products’ was their responsibility and spoke of the difficulties they faced in ensuring sufficient household supply on a regular basis. Men in comparison said that they only collected when they were ‘available’ to work, i.e. why they were not engaged with daily wage work and/or away for seasonal employment.

Thuli Ban community forest was closed during monsoon seasons to allow the forests to regenerate. The monsoon seasons were also the peak paddy seasons where men returned en masse<sup>70</sup> from seasonal migration. But, when the community forest opened, men were usually not ‘available’ to collect forest products as they would have left the village for seasonal employment elsewhere. For instance, my assistant accompanied women to the Thuli Ban community forest five times when it was open for secondary users between 2005/06. She witnessed not more than 5 men at any time, in comparison to 20-30 women, collecting forest products. Moreover, most of the women interviewees with seasonal migrant male kin pointed out that their ability to purchase forest products in local markets was contingent on receiving income from men.

I argue the above needs to be understood in the context of how gender relations, transmitted by market-based inequalities, shaped men and women’s differential access to forest resources<sup>71</sup>. Land was primarily controlled by men, but women in stable marital relationships had considerable voice and influence on land related decisions, which included gaining access to forest products. I pointed out in section 5.2 and 5.4 on intra and extra-household division of labor, ‘availability’ to work for the Tamangs was more important than gender per se in allocating household labor. Gender division of labor was flexible and domestic duties (of which forest collection was a part of) were conducted interchangeably by both men and women. However, the gender biases in the market for *Tamang* labor led to the

situation where it was primarily the men who were either away for seasonal work and/or engaged in daily wage work. Consequently, men were not available to collect forest products as much as women were. In the discussion on intra-household allocation of income, I pointed out that men and women contributed to the ‘joint household fund’ and retained ‘separate purses’. Because of market-based inequalities, it was men who had greater control over household income than women did. This included the purchase of forest products from local markets. In this respect, women viewed community forestry as an avenue for decreasing their dependence on men and securing access to forest products.

### **6.2.2 Women’s Greater Influence in Decision-Making: Envisioned Process of Community Forest**

*Tamang* women of Bhatpole envisioned that by having greater voice and influence over the community forest processes, they would more likely secure access to forest products (outcome of community forest). The importance women placed on the community forest process and their role in it was shaped by women’s experiences of being excluded from other forest governance initiatives.

For most *Tamang* women I spoke to in the village (and particularly those between the ages of 35 and older), Koldanda *Panchayat* Forest remained a vivid memory of being excluded from previous forest governance systems. Koldanda was a public land located in Ward No.5 (Bhatpole) that was owned by Jaisithok Village *Panchayat* and officially handed over as *Panchayat* Forest in the mid-1985. According to *Tamang* men and women informants (3 women and 2 men, between the ages of 35-55, who were well versed with experiences of Koldanda *Panchayat* Forest, Nov.2004), the forest was meant to increase access to resources for *Tamangs*, but the District Forest Office granted usufruct and decision-making rights to the Village *Panchayat* of Jaisithok VDC. The village *Panchayat* in Jaisithok was dominated by high-caste, *Jaisi-Bahun*s with little interest in involving and delegating responsibilities to the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole. The major decisions related to the *Panchayat Forest* (such as what forest products to plant, what protection rule to implement and more) were made by the Village *Panchayat* and the DFO – K. The *Tamangs*, who were meant to be the major beneficiaries of *Panchayat Forest*, played a marginal role in the process.

*We were informed that there would be a forestry project starting up in the village, in the barren land, by our Village Panchayat representative. But we were never consulted about any of the decisions related to community forest... And when it came to forest protection, a forest guard was hired and we were treated as thieves.*

*(Tamang woman, late 40s, actively involved in promoting and supporting community forest, Nov. 2004)*

According to informal discussions with two *Jaisi-Bahun* informants<sup>72</sup>, the Village *Panchayat* was primarily interested in timber whereas the forest officials remained concerned with ‘scientific forest management’. Consequently, the only forest product found in the forest was ‘*sisso*’, a long growing species of hardwood. Even after 20 years of forest protection, the forest was still not mature enough to be harvested at the time of the field study.

In the present context, the *Tamangs* had secondary usufruct rights to Thuli Ban community forest. Women interviewees thought they had little ‘voice’ in the Thuli Ban community forest decision making and benefit sharing processes. The quantity and type of forest products that *Tamangs* could gather, when, and for how long were all made by the Thuli Ban forest committee and primary users. As secondary users, *Tamangs* of Bhatpole could not participate in the CF decision making bodies (such as the forest committee and General Assembly of users), and had little option but to abide by the decisions made by the primary users of *Thuli Ban* CF.

### **6.3 Disjuncture between Formal and Informal Institutions: Institutional Formation & Functioning**

The previous section discussed gender differences in incentives to be involved in community forest. This section will examine formulation and functioning of community forest institutions. In doing so I will discuss how two parallel institutions, formal and informal, were formulated at the local level to govern community forests. *Tamang* women of Bhatpole had agreed on a set of informal institutions prior to seeking the official handover of Birawtapakha forest as community forest from the DFO-K. However, the ‘interface’ between forest officials and local women were marred by unequal power relations. Instead of complimenting women’s ongoing efforts at the local level, the forest officials of the DFO-K were dis-embedded from the context and formulated a set of formal institutions (Constitution and Operational Plan) that were disjointed from the informal ones women had agreed on. The section will demonstrate how such disjuncture intensified in institutional functioning and with what implications for community forest in Bhatpole.

### 6.3.1 *Formation of Informal Institutions*

The *Tamang* women of Bhatpole conceptualized the community forestry in Bhatpole as a woman's only initiative, and defined men's role as limited to supporting women at best. Women had already formulated and agreed amongst themselves a set of informal institutions to govern the forests, before they even approached the DFO-K for official handover. Much of these informal level institutions drew from and built on pre-existing forms of collaboration amongst women. Men's acceptance of their nominal role was also informed by socio-cultural practices that enabled women voice and choice to make decisions, on the one hand, and markets for *Tamang* labor that constrained men's abilities to collaborate the same way as women did, on the other hand.

- ***Drawing from and Building on Existing Forms of Collaboration:***

I pointed out in the previous chapter that gender relations amongst the *Tamangs* were not inherently unequal. Rather, inequalities emanated from gender biases in markets for *Tamang* labor which in turn, had percolated to the intra-household level within the *Tamang* community. Consequently, the gendered constraints that women faced in their lives such as material, labor and extra-local dependence on men emanated from these market-based biases. However, women had also addressed and re-defined these inequalities through greater collaboration (labor exchange) amongst one another. Because community forestry professed to address lack of access to forest resources commonly faced by *Tamang* women, collaborating for forest governance became a part of and intertwined with ongoing forms of collective efforts amongst them. This is reflected in the ways women drew from these pre-existing forms of collaboration to discuss and decide on community forest institutions.

According to interviews with 15 *Tamang* women (Nov 2004) who were involved throughout the community forest process, women discussed the concept of community forest with each other and decided to request the DFO-K for official handover of community forest during exchange labor work. Furthermore, just as women invested in maintenance of collective action amongst one another (see: section 5.4.2), they also invested time and resources in collaborating for community forestry. As the quotation below demonstrates, women drew from their extra-village level networks to formulate more informed, informal institutions to govern the forests:

*We did not know anything about how community forest functions. We were just secondary users in Thuli Ban and were merely told when to come and collect forest products. We were never a part of the community forest process. We decided to call some of our Tamang friends and relatives who were primary users of the Thuli Ban community forest and get them to explain to us what rules and regulations are needed. Much of what we [Tamang women from Bhatpole] agreed came from Thuli Ban community forest.*

*(Tamang woman, middle-aged, said was actively involved in promoting the community forest process, Jan.2005)*

The interviewees pointed to the following informal-level institutions that women decided on: user eligibility criteria; means of forest protection; penalties for rule breakers etc. Many of these informal level institutions were directly ‘borrowed’ from the lessons learnt in Thuli Ban community forest. The following quotations demonstrate such ‘institutional bricolage’ with reference to forest protection rules:

*We decided that we would draw the boundaries of the forest before hand, as the first community forest committee of Thuli Ban had done, to ensure that there were no land-related disputes later on.*

*(Tamang woman, late 30s, ordinary community forest user, Nov.2004)*

*We decided the system [graduated penalty] that the users of Thuli Ban community forest employed would be used in our community forest.*

*(Tamang woman, early 40s, ordinary community forest user, Nov. 2004)*

But the process of ‘borrowing’, I argue was also accompanied by selective contextualization to Bhatpole and on trial-and-error basis. For instance, certain rules were modified to reflect the particularities of Bhatpole, as illustrated by the quotation below:

*Thuli Ban had primary and secondary users. They had a very rich and natural forest and they could afford to allow a wide range of households to gather forest products. But Birawtapakha was barren forest and we could not afford the same luxury and only Tamangs of Bhatpole would be eligible for membership.*

*(Tamang woman, early 40s, one of the major promoters community forest in Bhatpole, Nov.2004)*

Tamang women interviewees of Bhatpole pointed to the amount of time and effort they had invested in laboriously deciding on these rules and coming to a consensus on each. The discussion below on men’s role in the community forest process highlights this.

In spite of such concerted efforts, women also said they demanded support from forest officials on the following grounds. First, it was to get Birawta Pakha legal recognition as a CF and the Tamang women as a CFUG. Second, the proposed community forestry land was largely barren, and women wanted support from the government for nursery and other raw

materials for forest plantation. Third and importantly, as the quotation below demonstrates, women wanted the forest officials to support them on their ongoing collective efforts to formulate community forest institutions.

*There were many things that we did not know about how best to govern the community forest...So we wanted the forest officials to support us in our efforts.*  
(Tamang woman, mid 30s, ordinary community forest user, Nov.2004)

• **Men’s Nominal & Supporting Role in community forest:**

My female informants pointed (3 Tamang women, ages of mid 30s to early 50s, involved in the community forest process since the beginning, Nov.2004) out one of the most contentious issues women faced during the early stages of community forestry in Bhatpole was deciding on men’s role in the CF process. There were two, main positions. On the one hand, majority of women feared that involving men would significantly increase the costs of participation and/or would entail broadening the scope of community forest to meet men’s interests and priorities as reflected by the quotation below:

*Some of us felt by including men we would face many difficulties...Most of our men work outside of the village, and have different commitments and interests...Ensuring men participate would lead to difficulties in deciding on meeting time, in consensus-building, increase the range of issues that we would have had to discuss...*  
(Tamang woman, middle aged, present at the discussions on involving men in the community forest process, Nov. 2004)

A few other women, in comparison, felt that involving men in the community forest process would be instrumental for its success. They viewed community forest was not merely about successfully managing the forests, but equally about partnership between the local users and forest officials. Women’s ongoing forms of collaboration with one another could be sufficient for the former, but the latter required engaging with the forest officials as well as understanding and complying with government’s forestry related rules and regulations. One of the women interviewees in support of including men in the CF process said she had argued that Tamang men’s support would have been critical in approaching, communicating, and negotiating with forest officials on women’s behalf (Tamang woman, early 50s, involved in community forest and wide range of village development activities, Nov. 2004).

I argue both of these positions were shaped and informed by gender relations in Bhatpole. Women’s position to not include men in the community forest process needs to be understood in the context of socio-cultural practices amongst the Tamangs of Bhatpole,

gender biases in markets for *Tamang* labor, and the implications of these biases for intra-household gender relations, on the one hand. Women were reluctant to include men because most men were away for seasonal employment and did not have the same tradition of cooperation as women did. On the other hand, the position to include men needs to be understood in light of women's dependence on men for extra-local mediation and women's perceptions of forest officials as extra-local actors.

After much deliberation and debate on the issue, I was told by the interviewees that women reached a compromise on the two positions - strategic and short-term support from men. Community forest would remain a women's led initiative but support would be sought from certain key men in the initial phases of CF. Women assumed, as my women informants pointed out, that men would act as interlocutors between them and the forest officials during the initial phases. Men's role would diminish as the community forest process evolved, and interactions between the women users and forest officials more common place.

Consequently, women nominated 7 men who they thought would be able to bridge the gap between themselves and government officials. Women used the following criteria to 'nominate' men: availability, basic literacy skills, ability to speak to outsiders, ability to explain to women etc. I found that all of the seven nominated men had/were working in daily wage work within the VDC or in neighboring VDCs and were not absent for prolonged periods; one of them was the most educated in the village, another one was well known for his ease with Nepali and in conversing with outsiders etc.

I interviewed 5 (of the 7) nominated men along with 15 ordinary men (30s and above, who knew about community forest, Nov/Dec 2004) on their perceptions on the initial phases of community forestry in Bhatpole. The 5 nominated men said that they had not volunteered for the position, but agreed to support women because of their admirations for women's efforts. However, they expressed that community forest was a 'women's only initiative' and they saw their role as supporting women for a short time.

The responses I received from the 15 ordinary male interviewees were along similar lines. Most were generally supportive of women. The following remark from a *Tamang* man, age 32, working as a taxi driver in Katmandu about his wife's role as a user in community forest illustrates some of the responses I received:



*"I could not commit to community forest because I was rarely in the village. Having secure access to forest products was more important to my wife...I only had to face the hardship of finding sufficient forest products when I returned to the village... I supported her decision [to be a part of community forest] because it was her time and her effort, and she could do as she pleases with it."*

Others said they supported women and agreed to be passive participants in community forest because they could benefit alongside women from secure access to forest products but would not have to contribute to community forest governance. Still others said as long as women's decision to start community forest was in a barren, public land and did not impinge on existing property relations between men and women, they were supportive of women's efforts.

I argue that the above responses need to be understood in the context of patrilineal forms of inheritance which prevented women from controlling land; *Tamang* socio-cultural practices that nevertheless enabled women considerable voice and power to make decisions independent from men; and the tradition of seasonal male out-migration in the village which made it difficult for men to cooperate the same way that women did.

The chapter has thus far discussed how gender relations informed and shaped men and women's interests and involvement in the community forest process as well as in the formation of informal level institutions. But community forest was not merely about collective action at the local level, there was an added dimension that of the forest officials who were responsible for working in partnership with the local communities in forest governance. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, *Tamang* women demanded government support to begin plantation work, and better tailor the informal level institutions they had formed to the context of Bhatpole. However, when the forest officials were introduced to the equation, they formulated Constitution and Operational Plans (formal institutions) that were disjointed from informal ones. The subsequent discussion focuses on the interface point between the forest officials and the local users, and will argue that the source of the disjuncture was the dis-embeddedness of the forest officials in Bhatpole.

### 6.3.2 *Formation of the Formal Institutions of community forest: Emergence of the Disjuncture*

I inquired about the official community forest handover process, including the formation of the Constitution and Operation Plan, with both the forest officials responsible for overseeing Birawtapakha Community Forest at the DFO-K and the *Tamang* users of Bhatpole. The latter, in comparison to the former, were able to recall and discuss in depth about community forest formation process.

The forest ranger and guard in Panchkal Range Post (responsible for overseeing community forest in Bhatpole at the time of the field research) told me that since community forestry started off in Bhatpole in 1997, three different forest rangers and guards had been responsible for overseeing the community forest. Neither the ranger nor the forest guard, present at the time of the field work, could comment on the specifics of the Birawtapakha community forest formation process<sup>73</sup>. Instead, the Ranger (Dec. 2004) provided a generic answer to my specific questions on community forestry process:

*I have been overseeing Bhatpole for the past two years ago. I have only focused on post-hand over support for Bhatpole. But we have a standard protocol to follow while establishing community forest...as stated in the community forestry guidelines and we cannot deviate from the instructions in them...when was Birawtapakha handed over?...that would be 1995 community forestry guidelines<sup>74</sup> my colleagues must have followed while handing over Birawtapakha...*

The DFO-K maintains internal and external records of all CFUGs in Kavrepalanchok District. The internal records (such as monitoring reports, feedback from senior officials etc.) are limited to circulation within DFO-K whereas the external ones (such as ‘constitution’, ‘operation plan’, certificate of any awards received by the CFUG, formal correspondence between DFO-K and CFUGs, and annual audit reports) are available to the members of the public. I could not get access to any of the internal documents and was told by one of the Rangers in charge of overseeing the documentations that most of the documents were lost in storage!

The community forestry hand over process was, in comparison to the DFO-K’s, fresher in the minds of the local users. I interviewed fifteen women and five men (who were involved in the community forest process since the beginning) about their interactions with forest officials as well as the formation of Constitution and Operational Plan. The interviewees

suggested that the forest officials were largely disembodied from the context in which community forest was handed over.

The male interviewees in particular characterized much of their interactions with the community forest officials at the time as ‘tedious’, ‘tiresome’ but also ‘quick’ and ‘incomprehensible’. In other words, trying to get the forest officials to visit the village and commence the community forest handover process was stated to be ‘tedious’ and ‘tiresome’. But at the same time, when the forest officials did come, they spent no more than a week, in total, to handover the community forest. The quotation below reflects to the first two sentiments:

*There was a 2 month gap between the time we went to request for the handover till the time the forest officials finally came to the forest to inspect the condition of the forest and our abilities to govern the forests. Even then, they came to our village [Bhatpole] only three times after that...to hold discussions on the ‘constitution’ , ‘operation plan’ , and validate the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ .*

*(Tamang male, mid 30s, supporting women in community forest at the beginning, Dec. 2004)*

According to the Community Forestry Guidelines (CPFD 1995) forest officials responsible for working with local communities and handing over community forest are required to ensure all the users are identified and included in the community forest formation processes; the proposed community forest is mapped and surveyed; each of the components of ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ are discussed at length with the identified users; that the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ are ratified by the local users and approved by DFO-K; and material, legal, financial and technical support is extended on an ongoing basis post-handover. The Guideline without explicitly stating a specific time frame calls for forest extension officials to be involved as long as it takes to achieve the above objectives.

The interviewees pointed out that the forest officials relied mainly on men and rarely on women in the pre-handover process as well as in the formation of the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’.

*Because it was mainly few of us men who were making repeated visits to the forest office to get the ranger and/or the forest guard to come, when they first came to the village, they relied on us to show them around the village, forest, and conduct the forest survey. But later on, when it was time to hold discussions on the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’, they also relied on us to gather a group of potential users to discuss and form the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’...it was left to us to decide who we thought would be best.*

*(Tamang male, late 40s, supporting women in community forest from the beginning, Dec. 2004)*

Hence, instead of identifying and including those who had primary stake in the community forest process (the women), it appears to be the case that the forest officials prioritized limited number of people who could more readily converse with them (the men). The four men, however, said they made sure that both men and women participated in the drafting of the 'constitution' and 'operation plan' related meetings. This was to ensure representatives of those who had primary stake in the community forest process (women) and those who could more readily negotiate on their behalf (men) were included.

However, mere presence of women in these meetings was not sufficient to ensure their substantive involvement. As the quotation below demonstrates, the women interviewees said they found it difficult to interact directly with the forest officials. The forest officials also rarely encouraged them to participate.

*There were more women than men in the discussions, but the forest officials rarely addressed us. They were not interested in finding out why we had requested for the community forest, and what we wanted to get out of forest governance... [For example] they spent most of the time telling us how we were to protect the community forest ...I could not understand what they had said...they read most of the time and did not seem to be interested in making sure we understood.*

*(Tamang woman, late 30s, participated in all 'constitution' and 'operation plan' drafting meetings, Dec. 2004)*

The above quotation needs to be understood in light of the interactions between gender inequalities in the *Tamang* community, on the one hand, and the dis-embeddedness of the forest officials, on the other hand. I argued in the chapter five on Gender Relations in Bhatpole that women often perceived their spaces as confined to the 'local' and viewed 'extra-local' interactions as men's domain. This was a product of extra-local inequalities (market biases both within and outside of the VDC) that in turn, had percolated and superimposed on the *Tamang* intra-household gender dynamics. I argue these explain for women's reservation to interact with the forest officials directly during the formation of 'constitution' and 'operation plan'. Furthermore, the DFO was also unable to understand the gendered context of Bhatpole and therefore oblivious of women's interest and stake in community forest.

• ***Preparation of the Operational Plan:***

The forest officials’ dis-embeddeness of the context in which Birawta Pakha forest was requested for handover is further corroborated by my informants’ (3 Tamang men and 2 woman involved in the community forest process from the beginning, Dec. 2004) account of the ‘operation plan’ preparatory processes.

The forest officials spent majority of the ‘operation plan’ preparatory work measuring forest boundaries, area per hectare of the forest, altitude of the forest, and forest products found with the help from 4-5 men (who were amongst those ‘nominated’ by women to act as interlocutors). Only then did they convene a larger group of potential users (which included women) to discuss the content of the ‘operation plan’. But *Tamangs* who were present said the meeting was predominantly about the forest officials going through the government prohibited activities in the community forest (such as no grazing, encroaching forests etc. that are outlined in the Forest Regulation 1995).

The forest officials also asked the participants in the larger group limited questions pertaining to the type of forest protection system the users would like to have; how much to charge users to access forest products (timber, fuel wood, fodder, medicinal plants) as and when they would be made available; penalties and fines to be levied on transgressors. However, the interviewees complained the forest officials had only paid lip service to asking and incorporating the responses of local users. For instance, the women had agreed to monetize forest products once the forest products were planted and made readily available to local users. But the forest officials placed monetary value on potential forest products *Tamangs* would have access to before plantation activities even took place. Forest officials demanded and put in place in the document a pre-defined set of monetary penalties (contingent on the nature of offense/transgression) to be levied on users.

In this respect, the forest officials overlooked the informal mechanisms women had agreed to draw from to secure cooperation amongst them. Even in the few instances where the ‘operation plan’ included the informal rules women had agreed on a priori, the forest officials rigidified and formalized what, for *Tamangs*, were meant to be inherently flexible and adaptive rules. The ‘operation plan’, for instance, states that forest protection will be through hiring a forest guard, as agreed by the forest officials. But it does not include that this would be subject to re-negotiation as the community forest process evolved.

• ***Critical Examination of the Constitution:***

The first ‘constitution’ of Birawtapakha community forest serves to further illustrate the dis-embeddedness of the forest officials in the context of Bhaptole. A critical examination of the ‘constitution’ document reveals the following: the entry of information in the document appears to be standardized (cut and paste from other documents); the assigned roles and responsibilities in the document were not matched by similar understandings of the users responsible; and importantly, the names of the users listed in the ‘constitution’ were those of ‘men’s’.

The document appears to be a standard format used by the forest officials for more than one CFUG. It contains a mixture of handwritten and typed content. The handwritten aspects are the only ones where details of the Birawtapakha community forest are explicitly mentioned. For instance, name of the Birawtapakha CFUG; the amount to be charged as membership fee, the number of committee members and position holders; the number of committee meetings to be held (each month) are all in handwriting. The rest of the document (typed) appears to be standardized. For instance, the document specifies what the roles and responsibilities of the community forest members, of the community forest committee, and each of the major position holders (such as chairperson, secretary, and treasurer). This was particularly intriguing because most of the committee members and users alike said they struggled to understand what their roles and responsibilities were when community forest was first handed over<sup>75</sup>. This in turn suggests that it was not the *Tamangs* who had entered the information but was rather pre-entered. This led me to study and investigate the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ of 45 community forests at the DFO-K. I found comparable entries in ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ documents of at least 5 other community forests who were handed over around the same time period as Birawatapakha community forest.

The last two pages of the Birawatapakha community forest ‘constitution’ lists the names of all the community forest users, which are predominantly male names. I have pointed out throughout this chapter that Birawatapakha community forest was a women-only initiative where men’s role was limited to supporting women at best. In this respect, the names of users in the Birawtapakha community forest ‘constitution’ should have reflected the above (women).

The final procedure for officially handing over community forestry in Bhatpole entailed (a) validating the 'constitution' and 'operation plan' drafts with the users; and (b) formal approval from the DFO-K to finalized the official handover (HMG/N 1995). According to my *Tamang* informants (3 *Tamang* men and 2 *Tamang* women), the entire village was gathered to validate the 'constitution' and 'operation plan'. I was further told that the forest officials read out the two documents which were followed by very little discussions on either of the documents. I interviewed 10 *Tamang* men and women who had attended the meetings, and 8 admitted that they had not even understood the differences between the 'constitution' and 'operation plan' let alone understand the specifics of what were being validated. As one of them confided in me, the validation was rather a show of formality with a lot of fan fare. Others were supportive of the rushed manner in which the documents were formulated and validated as they were merely concerned with shortening the government red-tape. In spite of this, women continued to hold optimism as illustrated by the quotation below:

*We thought that the validation just marked the beginning. And as we began working with the forest officials more closely and frequently, we would be able to grasp and bridge the gap between what we had formed and the 'constitution' and 'operation plan'.*

*(Tamang woman, mid-30s, attended the 'constitution' and 'operation plan' validation, community forest user, Dec.2004)*

### **6.3.3 Functioning of community forest: The Intensification & Implications of the Disjuncture**

I conducted a total of 20 interviews of men and women on the post-hand over support extended by forest officials (Dec/Jan 2004/5). The interviews suggested that the nominal level of interactions between the forest officials and local users had not improved since handover. The following quotation reflects the hands off approach taken by the forest officials in post-handover support to the CFUG:

*The only support we received by forest officials was in the first two years of community forest was the 2000 seedlings of various fodder, timber, fuel wood and some NTFPs that they granted to the Tamang users.*

*(Tamang woman, late 30s, former community forest committee member, Jan 2005)*

As mentioned in the introduction, Birawtapakha community forest was largely barren and sloppy land. Forest officials gave the 2000 seedlings mentioned in the quotation above to begin forest plantation and initiate the community forest process. Apart from the seedlings, there was little post-formation support.

Furthermore, the interviewees felt specific forest products that were granted were not based on sound assessments of the needs/priorities of women users. As the following quotation from an interview with a *Tamang* woman, who was part of the group that went to the DFO-K nursery to collect the forest products, points out (Jan 2005):

*We were just told to pick up the seedlings from the DFO nursery close to Dhulikhel. We had little choice but to accept what was being granted to us...The forest official never came to the village and asked us what we wanted...we did not have the finances to purchase the seedlings ourselves...we did plant what we could find in public and private land...but this could not amount to what the DFO was able to offer us.*

Other interviewees also stated the forest officials did little to ensure the forest products they were supplying was well suited for the particular ecological context of Birawtapakha community forest. According to an interview with a *Tamang* man (late 30s, Jan 2005) who had also gone to collect the seedlings from the nursery:

*The forest official responsible for overseeing the DFO nursery where we were instructed to go to collect our seedlings had already separated 2000 seedlings for us to carry back to our village and start the plantation. We told him that perhaps it would not be a good idea to take all these in one go and instead requested him to take a batch of forest products to plant, see how they survive and decide what to do with the rest accordingly. The area where Birawtapakha community forest lies is steep and very prone to landslides. But our suggestions fell on deaf ears.*

The *Tamang* interviewees said the interactions between the forest officials and *Tamang* users decreased even more after the handover of CF. They could not recall more than four visits made by the forest ranger and forest guard to Bhatpole. The purposes of these visits were: (1) two visits to oversee the plantation of seedlings; (2) monitoring the progress; (3) reprimand the users for failing to govern the CF. I argue the interactions between forest officials and local users in 'monitoring' highlights the continued disembeddedness of the forest officials and the asymmetric relations between the forest officials and local users.

As per the community forest guidelines (CPFD 1995) and my discussions with six forestry officials at the national and district levels (Jan 2005), monitoring refers to evaluation of the implementation of 'constitution' and 'operation plan' that are meant to be carried out jointly by the forest officials and CFUGs in periodic intervals. The objective of monitoring was also to strengthen partnership between forest officials and CFUGs by learning from one another. In Bhatpole, however, there was a fundamental disjuncture in the above. Monitoring became 'policing' of how the seedlings were performing and how closely the CFUGs had followed the 'constitution' and 'operation plan'.



*When the forest guard informed us that he will be accompanying his hakim [superior officer, referring to the forest ranger] to see us in the village, he told us that this would be to see how we were managing our forest and to tailor the DFO's support to us accordingly. We did not doubt them and gave honest responses to all their questions to the best of our ability. We told them that one of the major reasons why the seedlings had not grown was because there had been a big rainfall which triggered landslide and destroyed most of the plants. This had happened just a month prior to their arrival.....But they were not interested in listening to what we said.*

*(Tamang male, late 30s, former community forest committee member at the time of the interview, Jan 2005)*

*After they finished checking the forest...they called for a sit down meeting... they asked us about the specifics of the 'constitution' and 'operation plan', there were many blank faces amongst ourselves. We were protecting and managing the forests as we understood and agreed with each other...Many of us had not even understood what the differences in the two documents let alone the specifics of what were written...They asked us about many things...such as how we protected the forests...We had stated during the 'operation plan' writing time that we would hire a forest guard. But that turned out to be too expensive and instead we decided that we would all keep an eye on the forest...*

*(Tamang woman, Female, late 40s, community forest user at the time of the interview, Jan 2005)*

Other interviewees also commented on the pre-occupation of the forest officials with formal institutions, disregard for the more widely used informal means of ensuring collective action, and the lack of constructive dialogue and exchange between the users and forest officials.

*They asked us when we held committee meetings and General Assembly...we had held only one village wide meeting [GA] because it was so difficult to get everyone to meet at the same time and same place...we held the more regular meetings [referring to committee meetings] on an adhoc basis, as and when needed...it was common for us to discuss community forestry related issues when we were meeting to work in a big group for exchange labor, to go to the market and whenever we got together...we had agreed amongst one another that it was our responsibility to inform the others absent from the discussion...but the community forestry officials wanted to see 'minutes of meetings', most of us can barely write our names and we could not produce any to show them.*

*(Tamang woman, early 30s, community forest committee member at the time of the interview, Jan 2005).*

These interviewees pointed out the forest guard and ranger responsible for monitoring returned to address a village wide audience their major findings. The forest officials accused the CFUGs of not protecting the forests, and breaking the contract with the government by not following the constitution and operational plan closely. They warned the CFUG that if this situation were to carry on they would recommend to the District Forest Officer to consider withdrawing usufruct rights to the community forest to Birawta-Pakha CF.

*We were told that community forest was all about partnership between the sarkar [government] and local users like us. But all the times that we were having a difficult time figuring out how to govern the forests, how to ensure the forest seedlings were not destroyed, the forest official never came to support us. We tried to approach them but they were never available to us. But when the forest guard and his hakim [superior officer, referring to the Forest Ranger] finally came it was to scold us for 'not managing our forests'.*

*(Tamang woman, mid-30s, involved in community forest from the beginning, Jan. 2004)*

The above discussion has thus far shown that instead of complimenting women's ongoing efforts, the forest officials in charge of 'facilitating' the CFUG of Bhatpole were largely disembedded from the context in which community forestry was being handed over, and superimposed a set of formal institutions that were disjointed from the informal ones women had agreed upon. Furthermore, in institutional functioning, the forest officials assessed the extent to which the formal institutions were being followed, reprimanded the users for not following the formal institutions closely, but without understanding the reasons for the disjuncture in the first place. The above discussion on the interface between forest officials and local users in monitoring therefore highlighted the continued disembeddedness of the forest officials, and the asymmetric relations between forest officials and women users.

#### **6.4 Institutional Change: Disjuncture between Local and National**

This section will focus on two, distinct institutional changes that community forest in Bhatpole was undergoing at the time of my field study. These changes were: (1) renegotiated by the *Tamangs* users at the village level, and (2) were being influenced by the broader changes in community forestry policies at the national level. At the local level, women successfully negotiated men's inclusion in community forest with the aim of bridging the gap between formal and informal institutions, and thereby securing community forest usufruct rights. I will discuss the implicit (intra and inter-household level) and explicit (micro-credit) strategies that women employed as incentives for men to be more involved in the community forestry process. At the same time, the DFO – K, in line with shifts in community forest policies at the national level, was prioritizing and targeting 'women' users in the formation and post-formation support. I will discuss the context behind these changes and their implications for gender relations between men and women, and with the forest officials.

**6.4.1 Institutional Change at the Informal Level: Negotiating Institutional change and Including Men**

I conducted a series of interviews with twenty *Tamang* women (users and committee members alike, Dec/Jan 2005). I was told women held a series of meetings to discuss the fate of community forests upon receiving reprimand from DFO-K. Conclusions of these meetings were threefold.

First, as the quotation below also illustrates, women recognized that there were considerable disjuncture between institutions created by women and those superimposed by the forest officials.

*There were many discussions we [women] held after the forest officials threatened to take our community forest away from us. We recognized then what we were doing was wrong. We were assuming that we could govern the forests as we wanted to and the government officials would support us. We had not realized that the government officials had their own priorities about community forest.*

*(Tamang woman, middle aged, community forest chairperson at the time of the field study, Jan 2005)*

Second, women still viewed community forestry as an important way of securing access to forest products.

*We thought that if we were to give ourselves one last chance, we would be able to govern community forests and have access to forest products.*

*(Tamang woman, late 30s, ordinary user at the time of the field study, Jan 2005)*

Third, following from the quotation above, women decided to ‘make institutions right’ which they understood as bridging the gap between themselves and forest officials, and by involving *Tamang* men as equal partners in community forestry process.

*We needed more support from men than we had been getting at the beginning of the community forest. The men who were helping us were trying their best, but they did not see community forest as their initiative and responsibility...We had to make sure men in the village that community forest was their's and would have a stake in ensuring that government's mandates were followed.*

*(Tamang woman, early 30s, ordinary user at the time of the field study, Jan 2005)*

According to the above mentioned women interviewees as well as discussions with ten male users, women employed various explicit and implicit strategies at both the intra and extra-household levels to secure men's stake in the community forest process.

*I was interested in starting a primary school in the village. I thought if there was a primary school in the village then parents would most likely send their children to school on a regular basis. I approached JICA with my proposal...They were interested and agreed to support on the condition that the villagers would also contribute labor and raw materials. I was not getting any support from the rest of the village. The women agreed to support me provided I agreed to take up a position in the community forest committee and the responsibility that went along with it.*

*(Tamang male, early 30s, school teacher and in the community forest committee at the time of the interview, Jan. 2005)*

At the inter-household level, male interviewees recalled various ways in which their wives and other female members had negotiated their involvement in the community forest process.

Women also had to secure more broad-based support from men in the village. Women viewed this would involve identifying and tapping into common gendered constraints men faced that could in turn be tied to participating in community forestry.

*We had to find some way of making sure that men did not see community forest as our project but their project...and you must have noticed yourself...our men do not want to get involved in any type of village development work unless they can see some benefit of doing so.*

*(Tamang women, early 30s, community forest user at the time of the interview, Jan. 2005)*

This I argue needs to be understood in the context of how collective action takes place in the village particularly amongst the *Tamang* men. In the previous Chapter Five, I had argued that *Tamang* men were more readily willing to be involved in what they perceived as maintaining cultural capital. But they were unwilling to support development oriented activities. Furthermore, I had also pointed out in the section 6.3.1 that men were supportive of community forest as long as they were not required to contribute themselves.

One of the major problems women identified men lacked was access to credit, especially in the form of small but regular loans. Because of gendered markets for Tamang labor, men had more access to credit than women did and for large sums at a hefty interest rate. Men struggled to find short-term loans. Hence, women decided amongst themselves that they would use the financial resources generated through the CFUG (such as membership fees, fines and penalties levied on community forest rule trespassers, and selling of forest products to users) to bargain and provide incentives for men to participate<sup>76</sup>.

*We had saved all the community forest money so we could lend amongst our selves ...we had gathered a couple of thousand rupees by then...from membership fees and auctioning grass amongst ourselves...but we decided to lend them out to men so that they would see the benefit of being a part of community forest.*

I found out that women had held series of meeting with men, when the latter had returned from seasonal employment, to propose the initiation micro-credit schemes. By the time I came to Bhatpole to conduct my field study, micro-credit had become an integral part of community forest. Loans were disbursed and repayments handed back to the community forest committee whenever men returned to the village. Records of loans and repayment schedules were kept simply and in a manner accessible to both men and women. Furthermore, a 'public audit' system was held once a year (during the paddy seasons, when men returned en masse to the village) to go through the account and publicly reprimand those who had not paid their loans as agreed.

All of these were in turn tied to community forestry. Interviews with male seasonal migrants and above mentioned women interviewees that only those men who volunteered their labor for "community forest" work (such as forest protection, attending community forest meetings, liaising with governmental officials etc.) were eligible for the loans. Similarly, the loan repayment and disbursements were scheduled around community forest committee meetings and other community forest related activities (such as planting, forest protection, fines and penalties and so on). The 'public audit' took place at the bi-annual General Assembly whereby all the major community forest related activities, committee decisions, grants and material received by the forest officials, and other community forest related issues were discussed amongst the users.

- ***Implications of Including Men in the community forest Process:***

Most men and women in Bhatpole were involved in community forestry in varying capacity and levels at the time of the field research. I found, through field level observation as well as discussions with ordinary users and committee members, a distinct gender division of labor had developed between the men and women as community forest evolved and men became a part of the community forest process. Women focused primarily on the day to day operations of the community forest, which entailed some of the following responsibilities: volunteering labor for forest protection; attending meetings regularly; helping out with financial management and so on. Most of the men also volunteered their labor for these community forest activities but only when they were 'available' for work. A group of 10-15 men focused primarily on negotiating with forest officials directly and persistently. Two of the men (secretary and one of the committee members), who remained in the village to work on their own fields and as daily wage workers, took on these duties on a regular basis. They

wrote letters to the community forest officials, and went to the Rangepost on a regular basis to negotiate with the forest officials to get seedlings and other relevant materials to re-start forest plantations. They also looked out for and attended community forest trainings offered by the DFO-K in order to better understand the criteria forest officials used to measure good community forest and in turn, use such information to fine tune community forest in Bhatpole.

To what extent such institutional changes were a win-win situation for all the men and women involved could be debated. I asked 15 *Tamang* men and women who were both ordinary users and community forest committee members about their experiences of the above discussed institutional changes (Dec/Jan 2005). Some of the men interviewees felt they were 'forced' into cooperating in community forest because it was tied to access to micro-credit. Furthermore, I would argue that the gender relations between men and women were in many respects replicated even in institutional change. Gender division of labor in community forestry was flexible, but only a handful of men were available for work. The women interviewees said they conducted majority of the day to day operations of the community forest. But as users, men and women were entitled to exercise the same voice and influence in community forest decision-making processes. Women interviewees complained that involving men had substantially increased the opportunity cost of participation. The meetings and decision making processes were always difficult and took considerable time. Similarly, ensuring men paid their loans on time, informing men who were away of what was going on in community forest process, ensuring they were volunteering their labor to forest protection and other community forest activities were always arduous tasks.

Notwithstanding, most men and women I spoke to thought the outcome of men having stake in community forest had turned out to be fruitful. Resource governance objectives of community forest were blurred and merged with other village wide priorities and aspirations. Men had successfully negotiated with forest officials to grant the CFUG 2,500 seedlings for a second round of plantation. The women users had also convinced the men to request the DFO-K for the hand over of Koldanda forest as community forest. The formal handover process (including the formation of the 'constitution' and 'operation plan') had been completed a few months before I started by field study. The protection of the CF was conducted on a revolving basis; users had a clearer idea of what their roles and responsibilities were; the committee meetings and General Assembly (GA) were held regularly; minutes of

the meetings were reasonably well kept; financial records of the community forest were given to an external auditor recommended by the forest officials for independent audit and so on. The committee members (men and women alike) were versed with the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ and had also worked towards increasing ordinary user’s (men and women alike) understandings of the documents. Most of the users I spoke to could tell the difference between the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ documents. Some users could even tell me roughly the content of each document.

I argue the above discussion has implications for the current analysis on gender and local institutions of community forest in Bhatpole. The ways in which women negotiated with men to change institutions internally must be understood in the context of women’s agency in reshaping gender relations (Chapter 5.4.2). Nevertheless, it also highlights the consequence (albeit unintended) of forest officials’ dis-embeddedness and the disjuncture between formal and informal institutions for gender dynamics in community forest institutions. Instead of community forest remaining a women’s initiative and men’s role being temporarily supporting women at best, women became more dependent on men as the community forest process proceeded.

#### ***6.4.2 Institutional Change at the Formal Level:***

In chapter four, I discussed how gender and social equity had become an overarching issue in community forestry policies. These national level policy shifts were also informing and shaping the support extended by the DFO-K to the CFUGs under its jurisdiction. I was told ‘gender and social equity’ was becoming an integral part of the support DFO was extending to the users under its jurisdiction. Given these policy shifts were still unfolding, it would be pre-deterministic to discuss their implications for gender dynamics in community forest and gender relations more broadly in Bhatpole. Instead, I focus on DFO-K and Tamang users’ perceptions of these policies, on the one hand. On the other hand, I examine how these policies were unfolding with regards to the above discussed relationship between the forest officials and local users and with what implications for the gender dynamics within the CFUG.

According to interviews with the ten District Forest Official and the Assistant Forest Official working in different districts (the two highest ranking officials in charge of overseeing forestry related activities in the District) the District Forest Official s rarely had a

voice and influence on the national policy making arena. The Department of Forestry (central level) informed its District Forest Officials of policy changes and instructed them to ensure these changes were incorporated and followed in community forest related support. However, each District Forest Official made its own yearly plan based on its understanding of central level instructions and analysis of how best to implement at the district level. In this respect, they alluded to the dual relationship they faced with the central level demands, on the one hand, and the realities and needs of the users, on the other hand.

In DFO-K, I found, through interviews with 12 forest officials (of various ranks within the DFO-K administrative hierarchy, Feb 2005) and analysis of yearly plans, that ‘gender’ and ‘social equity’ were being understood as targeting women, low-castes and ethnic minorities. I was told these were significant shifts from previous yearly plans which focused narrowly on meeting targets for handover of community forests, and on formal structures of participation as proxy for sustainable management of community forests. When I asked these officials the rationale for targeting women in particular, all of the interviewees variously stated that women were marginalized in community forest practices and that by targeting women they would be represented in and could benefit from participating in community forest. However, informed through my field study, I found such a blanket rationale to target all women and including *Tamang* women of Bhatpole was misplaced and incognizant of the local context of Bhatpole. As I have argued in the sections above, women were being marginalized by community forest processes, but not because of internal dynamics between men and women as much as the dis-embeddedness of forest officials in the context in which community forest was being handed over.

I also asked 10 men and women users (mostly committee members and users who knew about these changes) how they viewed DFO-K’s changes in approach, and emphasis on targeting women (Jan/Feb 2005) in the CF. The responses were far from positive. In particular, the men interviewees said, variously, that such shifts were against the spirit of broad-based and gender inclusive collective action.

*If it was not for us [men], the community forest would have collapsed by now...it is not fair to disregard us.*

*(Male, mid 30s, Secretary of the CFUG Committee at the time of the field study)*

As the quotation above illustrates, the men interviewees felt that since they were participating in community forest and had helped rescue it from the ‘brink of failure’, they had equal rights



over the opportunities and services offered to users by the DFO-K. At the time of the field study, only one of the women users of the community forest had participated in a Non-Timber Forest Product training sponsored by the DFO-K which was targeted exclusively at women users. I was told by my informants (2 *Tamang* male and female involved in the community forest process since its inception in Bhatpole, Jan 2005) that this was a subject of bitter row and conflict between the woman who had attended the meeting and two male committee members. The men had demanded that she pool her per diem in the community forest joint account but the woman had refused to do so. This case suggests excluding men from the possible benefits could create conflicts between men and women.

The changes in CF policies were being initiated with very little alterations in the relationship between forest officials and local users. In other words, the forest officials continued to be dis-embedded from the context of Bhatpole.

I interviewed forest officials (the Forest Guard and Ranger, Nov. 2004) responsible for overseeing the community forestry in Bhatpole. The officials had recently taken short training courses on 'gender sensitivity' but said they found it difficult to balance being 'sensitive to women' with the number of other responsibilities they had while facilitating user groups. Furthermore, I found that the Forest Guard was responsible for overseeing 35 CFUGs and the Ranger all the over a 100 in the Rangepost. Both of them pointed out, albeit reluctantly, that they could not spend equal amount of time on each CFUG under their jurisdiction and had to prioritize according to the richness of forests, the heterogeneity of user groups, and accessibility of CFUG. Bhatpole and Birawtapakha community forestry received very little attention from DFO-K because it was primarily a 'plantation' and not a rich community forestry. The users were all of *Tamang* origin and not heterogeneous. In addition, the Forest Guard also stated that neighboring village of Bhatpole were "Maoist hot bed" where government employees were targeted by the Maoist, which made it difficult for them to make regular and timely visits, let alone have an important presence in the village. The above suggests that the organizational constraints that the forest officials faced made it difficult for them to be more involved in Birawta-Pakha.

I also interviewed ten *Tamang* community forest committee members as well as ordinary users, who pointed out that forest officials rarely came to the village and made little effort to tailor the support they were providing to the specific context of Bhatpole. Most of the

trainings and workshops were for the district-wide CFUGs. Furthermore, women users suggested that these policy shifts would do little to augment their abilities to participate and benefit if they did not resonate with the gendered constraints that women faced in their everyday lives. As the quotation below illustrates, the conditions attached to the DFO-K offered trainings and workshops constrained women's involvement:

*The trainings that we have known about invite one woman at a time. We do not want to go by ourselves...we get scared that we will not understand what they say and will not be able to respond properly.*

*(Tamang woman, early 30s, community forest committee member, Jan 2005)*

### 6.5 Summary

This thesis examined and explicated the interrelationship between gender relations and community forestry governance. Because community forestry institutions are often supported by external actors and interventions, this thesis also examined how these actors interact with and influence institutions and gender dynamics.

This chapter has demonstrated how gender relations (the interplay between socio-cultural practices, market-based inequalities, and women's agency in redefining gender relations) amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole were constantly borrowed to shape and inform gender dynamics in formation, functioning and change in local institutions established to govern community forest. Community forestry was a women's initiative with women at the forefront of leading and supporting it. Furthermore, women also 'borrowed' from pre-existing forms of collaboration with one another to agree on a set of informal institutions to govern resources collectively. Men's role in the community forestry process was to be nominal and/or of supporting women at best. Such pre-handover arrangements by the users of the CFUG needs to be understood in the context of egalitarian facets of gender relations amongst the *Tamangs* and women's abilities to assume decision making powers; gender inequalities in access to resources; and women's collective agency in mitigating gender inequalities.

The DFO-K also played a critical role in shaping these institutional processes and gender dynamics. Instead of complimenting women's ongoing efforts, the DFO-K had not prioritized Bhatpole, were largely disembedded from the gendered context in which community forestry was handed over, and thus formulated a set of formal institutions (Constitution and Operational Plan) that were disjointed from the informal institutions that women had created.

The section on institutional change pointed to the changes that were occurring simultaneously at two levels. At the local level, women negotiated the inclusion of men in the community forest process in order to bridge the gap between formal and informal institutions. I argued these changes need to be understood in the context of women's collective agency in re-shaping gender inequalities and in this case, asymmetric relations with forest officials. Nevertheless, I also argued this highlights the consequence (albeit unintended) of forest officials' dis-embeddedness and the disjuncture between formal and informal institutions for gender dynamics in community forest institutions. Instead of community forest remaining a women's initiative and men's role being temporarily supporting women at best, women became more dependent on men as the community forest process proceeded.

Institutional changes were also being triggered by the DFO-K. I suggested this needs to be understood in the context of the dual relationship of the forest officials with the local users and the DFO. At the district level, the forest officials were increasingly addressing gender issues in community forest. But 'gender' was interpreted as 'women' and addressing 'gender issues' as 'targeting women'. The approach in principle assumed that women were being marginalized through existing gender relations and targeting women would address this. In employing such a blanket approach, the DFO-K was incognizant of the fact that in Bhatpole women were being marginalized not because of gender relations within the *Tamangs* but the dis-embedded and asymmetric relations between women users and the forest officials. Furthermore, the gender related support provided by the forest officials in the Bhatpole remained dis-embedded from the gendered context and did little to alter the nature of relationship between forest officials and local users.

The next two chapters will be on the second, empirical study of this thesis – gender relations in Gharimi and the interrelationship between gender relations and local institutions of community forestry – which present contrasting cases of gender relations, institutions and the role of external intervention in institutional processes.

## ~ Chapter Seven ~

### 7 Gender Relations amongst the Biswa-Karmas of Gharmi: Gender, Caste and Male Out-Migration

This thesis explores the interplay between gender relations, local-level institutions established to govern community forest resources, and external intervention. In this respect, this chapter examines how gender relations are constituted and re-constituted amongst the *Dalits* (or low-castes) of Gharmi village through analysis of household and extra-household gender relations. It also serves as a precursor to the next chapter on gender and local institutions of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forestry which will discuss the interrelationship between gender relations, local institutions and external intervention.

In this chapter, I argue that gender relations between men and women were inherently unequal in Gharmi. Socio-cultural practices (such as organization of the household, marriage practices, gender division of labor and property) and the values and norms that were embedded in these practices were systematically biased against women in general. These gendered inequalities, I argue, need to be located in the context of the following three interlocking factors: women's role as agents in the reproduction of gender inequalities, caste-based ideologies and politics, and evolution of male out-migration.

*Dalit* women of Gharmi were not passive victims of gender inequalities, and also participated in reproducing gender inequalities in multiple ways. There was little uniformity in interests amongst the women of Gharmi. Women are differently situated as per their life-cycle processes along with household attributes. In line with their relative position vis-à-vis men and other women, some women accepted/conformed to gender inequalities, others ensured they carve 'breathing spaces' within existing inequalities.

Caste-based ideologies and politics in Bhatpole were inextricably tied to how gender relations between low-caste men and women were constituted in Gharmi. On the one hand, in spite of the role that resistance against caste-based discrimination in the village had played in shaping a sense of collective identity (community) amongst the low-castes, caste-based ideologies informed and influenced low-caste practices. On the other hand, gendered socio-

cultural practices (such as allocation of labor and resources) were a product of and response to caste-based politics.

Gharmi was also been undergoing major changes in recent years that were having implications for gender relations at the intra *Biswa-Karma* level. The evolution of male out-migration for employment purposes had been driving these changes. There had been two main phases of male out migration in Gharmi. The first phase (seasonal male migration to the Terai and India) served to further entrench gender inequalities in the village. The more recent form of male out-migration to the countries of the Gulf and South East Asia was triggering changes in gender division of labor and income amongst the women receiving regular remittances.

In order to discuss the above interplay between gender, caste, and migration in constituting gender relations in Gharmi, this chapter will be divided into five main parts. It will begin by first, introducing the *Biswa-Karmas* and providing an over-view of caste-based politics in the village. This will be followed by discussions on socio-cultural practices amongst the low-caste and the role of caste, and migration in shaping them.

**7.1 Introducing the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi**

This section constitutes the premise of the current study on gender relations amongst the low-castes of Gharmi. It begins by briefly introducing Gharmi village and locating the low-castes within it. The section also identifies the importance of caste and male out-migration for understanding gender relations in Gharmi as well as gender dynamics in local institutions of community forestry governance. Finally, it discusses the evolution of inter-caste politics and the role that male out-migration had played in shaping it.

**7.1.1 Overview of People and Place of Gharmi<sup>77</sup>**

Gharmi village is located in Wards 8 and 9 of Lamachaur Village Development Committee (VDC) which is amongst the 43 VDCs of the District of Kaski in western Nepal. The VDC is accessible as it adjoins Pokhara Municipality<sup>78</sup> and is located 6 km away from one of the major highways (Mahendra Raj Marga) in the country. The VDC is divided into 9 wards, is 6.72 square km and has a population of approximately 8000. It encompasses a heterogeneous population with *Bahun*, *Chettri*, *Gurung*, *Magar*, *Biswa-Karma*, *Pariyar* and *Tamang* as its major ethnic groups. The village of Gharmi is located approximately 30-45

minutes walk from the Lamachar bazaar, the center of the VDC. A seasonal, dirt road does exist which is landslide prone and largely unused during the Monsoon.

The village of Gharmi is divided into three settlements, and is comprised of three main groups—the *Bahun (Poudyal)*, *Chettris (K.C.)* and *Biswa-Karmas* with each group occupying its own hamlet. The ‘*Poudyals*’ and K.C.s belong to the higher and middle castes respectively, while the *Biswa-Karmas* are the *Dalits* (low-castes). According to the VDC level records (2004), the total population of Gharmi is approximately 6,500 with 3,500 *Poudyals*, 2,500 K.C.s and 500 *Biswa-Karmas*. The *Biswa-Karmas* settlement is located between *Poudyal* and K.C. settlements.

**7.1.2 Importance of Caste and Male Out-Migration for the Present Study**

Caste and caste relations for the purposes of this thesis are understood not only as ideological concepts of ‘purity and pollution’ [as theorized scholars of Caste in South Asia such as (Dumont 1971)] but also in terms of social and economic relations between and within castes (Quigley 1984). Caste formed a central focus in the early stages of ‘nation-building’. A caste hierarchy was conceptualized and rigorously implemented by the Nepali ruling elites with the *Chettri/Bhramins* (like *KCs* and *Poudyals* in Gharmi) at the apex of the state enforced caste hierarchy, whereas the *Dalits* (like the *Biswa-Karmas* in Gharmi) relegated at the bottom (Bista 1990; Guneratne 2003; Hofer 2004). Scholars have shown the ‘fluidity’ within the state sponsored caste system - *Mulki Ain 1854* (Holmberg 1989; Bista 1990; Sharma 2004). However, in Gharmi, the high and low-castes often evoked state-sponsored form of caste-hierarchy to allude to their group’s respective position within the village. The high caste, on the one hand, used the state sponsored caste hierarchy to justify their higher status in the village. On the other hand, the low caste politicized their low status in their struggle against the high caste.

It is important to identify at the outset the reasons for why caste and male out-migration is important for this chapter, and for understanding gender dynamics and institutions of forest management in Gharmi (the subject of next chapter). Caste is inextricably tied to the ways in which *Biswa-Karmas* or low-castes view themselves (social identity) and the ways in which gender relations are constituted in Gharmi. I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapter, caste-based politics was crucial in rallying support for community forestry in Gharmi. Gender relations (informed and influenced by caste) were constantly drawn upon to influence men

and women's entry, voice and influence in the formation and functioning of institutions of community forestry. Similarly, male out-migration, in interaction with caste-based politics, influenced and was in turn influenced by gender relations. The evolution of male out-migration amongst the low-castes of Gharhi have entrenched gender inequalities. The recent migration in Gulf and South East Asia has triggered changes in gender division of labor and intra-household allocation of resources for women in households with male migrants. It is to these nexus between gender, caste and male out migration that the present chapter will focus on. But before going into that, let us briefly look at the evolution of caste-based politics and the role of male out migration in shaping it.

### 7.1.3 *An Overview of Caste-Relations, Politics of Resistance, and the Role of Male Out-Migration*

I had spent the first month (Feb 2005) of my field work studying the history of the village and in particular caste-based relations, and the emergence of 'low-caste' identity amongst the *Biswa-Karmas*. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in depth this part of my research. Instead, I provide a brief overview of the history of the village<sup>79</sup>, the major changes that Gharhi has experienced and how these changes have in turn informed low-caste identity and the politics of resistance.

The high-caste *Bahuns* and *Chettris* have historically assumed the dominant position in Gharhi village both economically and socially. Both the *Poudyals* and *K.C.s* prided themselves for belonging to the 'higher caste' or twice born castes. For example, to distinguish them from the *Biswa-Karmas*, *Poudyals* referred to themselves as '*Upadhaya*', the most auspicious *Jat* within the Bahun caste hierarchy. The *Biswa-Karmas* or '*Kami*' (as they were traditionally known in the caste hierarchy) were a *Dalit* caste designated for making agricultural tools and household utensils such as sickles, knives, hoes, shovels, plough tips, nails and axes, although many of them no longer focus on '*Kami*'-related work. The *Poudyals* and *KC* population each belonged to a single lineage, whereas the *Biswa-Karmas* were further divided into four sub-groups – *Khadka*, *Gadal*, *Baral* and *Ghotney*.

The history of settlement in Gharhi was sketchy at best and varied depending on who was being interviewed. Nevertheless, the 10 village elders I interviewed (5 *Biswa-Karmas* and 5 high-castes) agreed that high-castes along with the '*Gadal*' *Biswa-Karmas* were indigenous to Gharhi village. The other three types of *Biswa-Karmas* (*Ghotney*, *Baral* and *Khadka*) of

Gharmi were brought by the high-castes approximately 200 years ago. While the *Ghotney*'s are said to have originated from a bordering village of India, *Baral*'s came from nearby 'Bar', and *Khadkha* from Pokhara. The high-castes settled the low-castes (irrespective of their lineage) in close clusters and away from themselves. They granted *Biswa-Karmas* no more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  *ropani* of land, barely sufficient for building a house and kitchen garden. The patron-client relationship between the two castes was based on mutual interdependency. The high-castes depended on the low-castes as a source of labor and the low-castes on the high-castes for their livelihood.

The patron-client relationship which characterized caste-based relations in the village has undergone rapid changes since mid-1950s through economic factors such as monetization of the rural economy, improved infrastructure and greater linkages and interactions with external markets, on the one hand, and political changes in the form of demise of state-sponsored caste-hierarchy and land reform and secure tenancy policies, on the other hand. Such changes had created new forms of inequality between the high and low castes in formal employment, education, mainstream political representation and others. But, the *Biswa-Karmas* also benefited from these changes. 'Male out-migration' became an important feature of rural livelihood and *Biswa-Karmas* men started migrating outside the village (mainly to India and to the *Terai*, the plains of Nepal) for employment purposes. Most were able to accumulate sufficient income and lower their dependence on caste-based relations<sup>80</sup> since the 1960s, when migration first started out.

Male out-migration also aided in engendering and giving legitimacy to a group of *Biswa-Karmas* men I would label as 'political entrepreneurs', who were in charge of community-wide decisions making at the time of the field work. These were men who had migrated outside the village for employment purposes, were least dependent on caste-based relations, were well-versed with and influenced by caste-based struggles in India, were able to conceptualize a common *Biswa-Karma* identity based on common experiences of being dependent on caste-based relations and were able to mobilize support against caste-based discrimination.

The low-castes men I spoke to recalled many stories of how their forefathers resisted against the 'domination' of their high-caste patrons. But much of these earlier forms of resistance were individual rather than collective; and simultaneously covert and did not



amount to substantive challenge to the status-quo. The next chapter on community forestry will discuss in more detail how these entrepreneurs politicized community forest along caste-based politics which in turn were instrumental in mobilizing support for community forest. I observed that even after 10 years of community forest starting out in the village, the political entrepreneurs, who occupied major decision making positions in the community, still employed political discourses to reinforce low caste collective identity against caste-based discrimination. Some of the political discourses included the following: 'justice', 'equality', 'rights' and 'citizenship'.

Each of these discourse embodied different perceptions of how the high-caste had 'exploited' them. For instance, 'justice' was used in reference to the historical, social and economic marginalization of the low-caste at the hands of the high-caste. The low-castes accused the high-caste of having historically abused their asymmetric power and privilege to deliberately subjugate the low-castes. The following quotation from an interview I conducted with one of the most powerful and influential low-caste man in the village (age 64, February 2005) illustrates such sentiments, and provides example of how the low-castes perceived that the high-castes had breached the terms and conditions of contract in patron-client relationships.

*Back then, our forefathers did not sign a contract with the high-caste. Everything depended on trust, and what was agreed between us and the high-caste would be respected by both parties...[The general agreement was that] our forefathers would supply the labor needed and in return, the high-castes would give a pre-agreed portion of the final harvest, provide the necessary agricultural inputs, cushion against a bad harvest... But they often breached these agreements with little consequences...The land and harvest both belonged to the high-castes, we were poor they were rich and powerful, we were dependent on them for our livelihood.*

Furthermore, parallel to the politicization of caste-based discrimination in the nation-building debates at the national level (see sections 4.2 and 9.3), the low-castes in Gharmpi also employed the concept of 'citizenship', 'equality' and 'rights' to contest the high-castes. The quotation below from a *Biswa-Karma* woman of age 34 (married with two children, February 2005) illustrates this. The fact that the following quotation was from a woman who was married into Gharmpi village also reflects the pervasiveness of these discourses amongst the low-castes.

*Our right as equal citizens of this country has never been respected. We are labeled as 'untouchables' and we are shunned from the full participation of Hindu social life...such as entering temples, employing a Bahun priest for conducting low-caste rituals etc. They [high-castes] also observe elaborate precautions to prevent incidental contacts with*

*us....we are barred from entering high-caste homesteads, using the same utensils as those of high-castes, getting married to and/or having relationships with high-castes etc...They employ us mostly for ritually polluting jobs that they cannot themselves do to maintain their high caste status.*

I argue that engaging with these discourses is important for understanding gender relations in Bhatpole, and for shedding light into the contradictions at the intra *Biswa-Karma* level from a gender perspective. I will demonstrate through subsequent analysis, the socio-cultural practices that together constitute gender relations amongst the low-castes are themselves unequal. The caste-based notions of ‘untouchability’ that the *Biswa-Karmas* otherwise contest informs gendered socio-cultural practices in Bhatpole. For example, the low-castes considered menstruating women as ‘untouchables’, albeit temporarily, and subjugated them to many of the same rules of untouchability as mentioned that the high-castes imposed on low-castes, as shown in the quotation above (also see section 7.4). Furthermore, the national-level movement calling for equal citizenship rights to women (by allowing women to inherit land, for instance) rarely formed the basis for discourse and political contestation at the intra *Biswa-Karma* level. Most low-caste women of Gharimi were barred from inheriting parental land, for example.

## **7.2 Gendered Socio-Cultural Practices amongst the *Dalits* of Gharimi**

This section will discuss gendered socio-cultural practices at the intra and extra-household levels amongst the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharimi and how they systematically marginalized women over men. It will focus on: organization of the *Biswa-Karma* society (household, family and community); intra-household allocation of resources (land, dowry, and income); gender division of labor within the household (and their implications for extra-household allocation); and marriage practices (gender differentials in voice and choice embedded in them).

### **7.2.1 Organization of the household, family and community**

Social relations in Gharimi were organized along three levels—household, family and community. These various levels of societal organization were important because they help understand other facets of gendered socio-cultural practices that will be subsequently discussed. An underlying pattern that can be discerned is the way gender and seniority intersected and enabled senior men to occupy prominent positions throughout these various levels of organization.

According to the 50 **household** structured interviews I conducted as well as numerous interviews with *Biswa-Karma* men and women throughout my study, households were the main units of residence, consumption and production. Households were organized along patrilineal lines with the senior male as the designated head of the household. The particular contours of the household could not easily be drawn for they underwent various development cycles from being nuclear to joint and then nuclear again. Three main types of households were discernible: nuclear, joint and transition.

Nuclear households, with a husband, wife and children, were the most common configuration of households in Gharhi. Joint households were widespread as the eldest or the youngest son's family was often expected to remain with elderly parents. Households also underwent what I would label as a period of 'transition'. Parents expected unmarried sons (unless they were working outside of the village), unmarried daughters, and newly married sons to stay with them. The latter only separated to establish his own household when his wife had the first child. It was not unusual therefore for more than one newly married couple to reside in the same household. Formal and informal transfer of household property (land and other valuables) only took place when households separated into nuclear ones. The norm was to divide all the property equally amongst the sons, which excluded 'dowry' payments for unmarried daughter(s) and living allowance for parent(s).

Household decision making processes were centralized and defined predominantly by the senior, male head of the household. For instance, the gender division of labor as well as norms of inheritance restricted women's ability to control land. Other intra-household resource allocation processes particularly the allocation of income was centralized, pooled, and left to the discretion of senior men in the household (see subsequent discussions).

'**Family**' was a broader umbrella that often encompassed more than one household. For instance, men and women used 'family' to include multiple households of their brothers, parents and other male relatives. Separation of joint households into nuclear ones did not necessarily translate into separation of the family. The senior most male of the 'family' retained considerable influence over household level decisions. For instance, household level decisions including resource allocation ones were categorized into various levels of importance. What *Biswa-Karmas* classified as 'family-level' decisions were made, as the

quotation below from *Biswa-Karma* man (in his 20s, recently married) illustrates, in consultation and through approval from senior members of the household. The familial norms and expectations of behavior helped reinforce and maintain these senior male-led decision making structures.

*We often distinguish between household level decisions...what we label as minor decisions to do with school fees, purchase of food [etc] are made in our individual households. But other decisions...such as buying and selling of land, decisions to migrate for employment purposes...have to be consulted and approved by our fathers and senior members of our family.*

A strong sense of ‘samudaya’ or **community** existed amongst all *Biswa-Karma* men and women I met and had numerous discussions with. Interestingly, I found that many of the reasons coincided with dominant conceptualizations of ‘community’ debated in the Natural Resource Governance literature—community as small spatial unit, homogenous social structure, common norms (refer to section 2.3.3). The three common reasons were (*in italics*).

*We live together...*

The *Biswa-Karma* community lived in closely linked settlement hamlets away from the high-caste *Poudyal* and *K.C.s*. There was no discernible pattern to how the geographically clustered settlement hamlets were organized, however. In other words, people often owned land and lived in separate hamlets.

*We are all Biswa-Karma...*

The *Biswa-Karma* in Gharmi were sub-divided into four main lineages or ‘gotras’—*Gadal*, *Ghotney*, *Baral* and *Khadka*. In theory, inter *Biswa-Karma* marriages were permissible provided they were between *Gadals* and *Ghotneys*, on the one hand, and *Baral* and *Khadka*, on the other hand. However, the younger and older informants (male 21, male early 60s, female mid 30s) could only recall a few examples of inter *Biswa-Karmas* marriages that had occurred within the village. *Biswa-Karma* referred to one another as ‘kinsmen’ and/or ‘friends’ and preferred to arrange marriages outside of Gharmi.

*We share similar beliefs and practices...*

There were little variations in socio-cultural practices (such as marriages, division of labor, and intra-household allocation of resources). Economic differences within the *Biswa-Karma* community seemed to be more important than other forms of differences (such as ‘gotra’) in accounting for variations in the allocation of resources and marriage practices. For

example, those who were better off economically were more likely to add in extra contents in the form of dowry to their daughters.

At the same time, I argue the *Biswa-Karma* also consciously invested in a sense of ‘community’. The major socio-economic changes in the village and particularly male out-migration had economically differentiated the *Biswa-Karma* community. An internal hierarchy based on gender and age was omnipresent throughout the organization of *Biswa-Karma* society. However, these differences and hierarchy had, in fact, contributed to the notion of ‘community’. The legitimacy of those who held decision-making positions in the ‘community’ (senior men) was based on the relative economic independence and from working for the high caste. In other words, those who were able to accumulate wealth from extra local sources depended less on income derived from working for the high caste. Some of the key men holding these decisions had in turn been instrumental in politicizing and mobilizing support against caste-based discrimination in the village on the basis of shared experiences of patron-client relationships and collective sense of ‘moral outrage’ (community)<sup>81</sup>.

At the same time, ‘community’ masked differences based on gender and seniority. Community decision making positions were reserved primarily for men as the quotation below illustrates. The quotation was taken from an elderly *Biswa-Karma* man, who occupied key decision making position, was said publicly in the interview I carried in the presence of other men and women.

*It is not a woman’s job to lead the community...*

According to my informants as well as other council members, there had been no examples of women having occupied these positions in the history of the village. I posit that the following occluded women from occupying these positions: (a) gendered norms such as those of women’s seclusion prescribing and describing appropriate behavior as well as (b) gender biases embedded in markets for labor outside of the village.

**7.2.2 *Intra-Household Allocation of Resources: Land, Dowry and Income***

Land and dowry were the major forms of property within the village context. Access and control over these forms of property embodied the gendered inequalities inherent within the *Biswa-Karmas*. Land, the most valuable property in the village, was controlled almost

exclusively by men through inheritance and/or independent titling. Women could merely exercise usufruct rights, which were in turn mediated by their male kin. Dowry was 'given' to daughters in marriage, but it did not amount to the same value as the 'land' men inherited. Women often lost control over the major contents of the dowry once it entered their marital homes. Similarly, 'income' was commonly pooled and allocation of it was made by senior male head of the household with little consultation from other members.

The low castes gained access and/or control over **land** through three major mediums: inheritance, sharecropping and purchase. Low castes of Gharmi exercised patrilineal forms of inheritance of land that allowed only men to have legitimate claim over ancestral property. Even sharecropping rights land was traditionally inherited through the patriline. In other words, a low-caste man inherited through his father the rights to sharecrop a particular patron's land. With the demise of permanent sharecropping contracts in the village in the 1950s<sup>82</sup>, these rights could no longer be inherited. Nevertheless, only men were eligible for temporary sharecropping contracts. Many ordinary men and women interviewees perceived men should have more rights to inherit land.

*Lineage passes from father to son. Land is the crucial link to our lineage. So it is only right that sons should have legitimate claim over land than daughters.*

*(Biswa-Karmas woman, middle aged, with three grown up children, March 2005)*

*If daughters are allowed to inherit land, they will get dual access both from their husbands and their.*

*(Biswa-Karmas man, elderly, March 2005)*

*As long as they are good wives, they will get access to their husband's land and they will not have to depend on their marital home.*

*(Biswa-Karmas man, middle aged, March 2005)*

With the exception of a few cases of widowed and unmarried women having independent titles to land, I found out from the VDC records that vast majority of land was registered under men's names. *Biswa-Karmas* generally purchased land through male income and similar arguments to that of the above were also used by men to make exclusive claims on purchased land. Given the division of labor within and outside the household<sup>83</sup>, it was comparatively more difficult for women to earn enough money to be able to purchase land than it was for men.

At the intra-household level, the *Biswa-Karmas* often divided the land they owned into three parts: irrigated land, un-irrigated land and kitchen garden ranked in order of importance. I found in household structured interviews, cross-checked through VDC land records (March 2005) that only seven households in the entire village owned 'irrigated land', the most valuable form of land. According to interviews I conducted with 10 women (all married, six senior and four younger, March 2005), women had varying levels of access to land, contingent on level of seniority, organization of household and relative importance of land. These interviewees typically remarked, with reference to the particular ways in which access rights were defined in their household, that women in nuclear households and senior women in joint ones were often included in and consulted during most land related decisions (such as land purchase, changes in cropping patterns, purchase of inputs, use of labor etc.). But they said senior men retained the right to make the final decisions. Senior women also had uncontested access to 'kitchen garden', typically small plots of land surrounding houses, where they could decide which vegetable to plant, when and how. Junior women in joint households were obligated to contribute their labor to family agricultural production but were rarely allowed a say in the decision-making processes. In this respect, access to land was mediated by gender (male kin such as by fathers for unmarried women, sons and husbands for married ones) and seniority.

Moreover, land rights of unmarried women above the age of 35, divorced and/or widowed women were meant to be recognized. But these women often confronted difficulties in stating and acquiring their claims. For example, interviews I carried out with four unmarried women over the age of 35 found that their brothers had already sub-divided the property before they could lay their claims. One of the women remarked she had refrained from claiming her share from her brothers because she would rather forgo her claims than risk antagonizing her brothers<sup>84</sup>. Furthermore, there were only a few cases that my informants (male and female) knew of where the unmarried women had pursued her claims over the property, but all of them had ended up in protracted conflict within the family.

The low-castes considered '**dowry**' as an integral form of property that was 'given' to daughters in marriage. I conducted a survey of six, recent marriages and found that much of the contents of the dowry were household items and jeweler. Only the richest amongst the six household had included livestock, the more valuable content. In Gharmi, dowry did not function like a 'pre-mortem' inheritance as postulated by Goody and Tambiah (1973) for two

important reasons. First, there were no prescribed rules for how much dowry to give and what was given rarely matched up to the value of land inherited by men. The amount of dowry depended on a number of interlocking considerations such as the wealth of the wife-giving and receiving families, the 'worthiness' of the husband, the number of girls in the wife-giving family, and the total expenses of the marriage. With regards to the latter, the girl's parents hosted the wedding and had to taken on all marriage related expenses.

Second, women said they had little control over the dowry once it was taken to her marital home. Newly married women remarked, in interviews, that their marital household members treated dowry (household items) as joint property, to the extent that most were often divided in household sub-division. As for jewelry, as a newly married interviewee (March 2005) confided in an interview:

*My parents had invested so much of their savings on the jewelry they put as my dowry—two pairs of gold earrings, one pair silver anklet, and one tilari<sup>85</sup>... A few days after I got married, my in-laws told me to show them the jewelry I had brought. They scrutinized each item of jewelry and complained that they were 'cheap' and not up to the standard of what they were expecting. My mother in law told me she would safely keep them in her cupboard. Then one day, I found out that my jewelry would be used for my Nanda's<sup>86</sup> wedding. I never saw the more expensive pair of earrings again. What could I have said to my in-laws. After all, I was a new bride at that time.*

Interviews with the six parents who had recently married their daughters explained the purposes of 'giving of dowry' as carving a position for their daughters in their marital household. The more dowries one could offer the better one's married daughters' position in the marital household. Two of the parents also suggested that their responsibility, as parents, was to secure a smooth transition of their daughters' to their marital homes and not necessarily to ensure their daughter's independent access to resources.

Many of the patterns discussed above were also extended to allocate household **income**. Income to the household was contributed by both men and women alike. During the course of the field work, I interviewed over 30 women and 10 men who represented a cross-section of *Biswa-Karma* society. They were of varying ages, marital status, living in both nuclear and joint households, and with and without male members abroad for employment purposes. Given the reluctance on the part of some of these interviewees to disclose the patterns of intra-household income allocation (See discussion on Research Methods in Chapter 3.2.1), I also complimented the above interviews with detail discussions from my key informants—4



women (unmarried of age 19; married of age 23 with one child living in joint family; married with two children living in nuclear household, early 30s; married with four children living in joint family, early 40s) and 1 man (21; newly married with wife pregnant at the time of the study)—who had helped to the best of their abilities throughout the research process.

Interestingly, all of the interviewees without male household members who had migrated abroad (31 in total) pointed to commonalities in intra-household income allocation. The majority said that income was pooled and re-allocated by the male household head to meet recurrent (such as food, school fees, personal allowances) and special expenditures (such as agricultural inputs, wedding & festival related expenses, emergency expenses and sickness).

Seniority and organization of household (latter to a certain extent) also influenced the role of women in these income-related decision making processes. Newly married women living in joint households pointed to the lack of role they played in the allocation processes, as illustrated by the quotation below from a woman (age 21, married for two years, pregnant at the time of the interview, April 2005):

*In the two years of marriage, I have hardly gotten to see any money from my 'ghar' [house, referring to her marital home]. I can remember my 'sasus-sasura' [parents in law] being generous only twice. For both Dasain [a major Hindu festival celebrated in Nepal], they gave me a few hundred to buy myself a new sari, and at other times, my husband sneaks some undeclared money and gives it to me but these are rare. I have to request my mother-in-law several times if I need some money to cover my traveling expenses to visit my sister or my parents.*

Out of these women, five senior ones (who were all living in joint-households), and one junior woman (living in nuclear with her husband and three children) said they were allocated a set amount of income regularly (monthly and/or as and when needed) to manage the regular expenses of the household. But as the quotation below illustrates from an interview with a senior woman (age 58, living in a joint household with two sons and their wives April 2005) the amounts they received was barely sufficient to cover regular expenditures and their accounts had to be reported back to the senior, male household head:

*All the members of our family give the money we earn to my husband. He then gives me a certain amount every month for managing household expenses. The rest he keeps for himself and deposits to the bank if the amount is large. I am responsible for covering weekly and monthly expenses....we have lots of expenses and they vary from one season to another...but mostly it is for food such as salt, rice, spices...also for firewood when we are short. But by the end of it, I am barely making ends meet...I have to report everything to my husband...I need to ask my husband for any additional expenses....he keeps the money*

*in the bank and I can barely read or write so I cannot manage the overall budget of our house.*

According to my male (age 21) and female informant (married 23, with one child, April 2005), there were many factors at play in the above discussed intra-household allocation of resources. The cultural logic that underlie household decision making were also extended in the case of the intra-household allocation of income; familial expectations of 'respect' and 'authority' that the senior members commanded; and the differential contribution that men and women made to the household. Gendered norms limited women's abilities to earn as much as did men in daily wage work within the village, on the one hand, and migrate outside the village to take advantage of the better income generating potentials, on the other hand<sup>87</sup>. When I tried to pose a question (as diplomatically as I could) to a man of 68 years of age why he still managed all the income in the household, he vehemently replied:

*Why should I not? It is my money. I have earned it, and my entire family is living off of my earnings.*

### **7.2.3 Gender Division of Labor: Within the Household**

The *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi allocated intra-household labor for various purposes: family farm production, domestic work, sharecropping, daily-wage agricultural labor, daily wage non-agricultural labor, out-migration for employment purposes. For analytical clarity, these forms of labor can be categorized into labor within (family farm production and domestic labor) and outside the household (daily wage labor and out-migration for employment purposes). The present discussion will focus on labor within the household<sup>88</sup>. Men and women had clearly demarcated duties and responsibilities which were enforced through gendered norms, and accrued differential and unequal value to women's labor vis-à-vis men's. These gender inequalities were in turn reproduced and reinforced through gendered inequalities at the extra-household level, as I will discuss later.

The work schedules (daily, monthly and yearly) I conducted with men and women (10 each), separately and together during ten days in March 2005, suggested division of labor were both 'gender specific' and 'gender sequential'. Women were typically responsible for 'domestic work' such as cooking, caring for children and elderly, cleaning, collecting firewood and fodder and others. Only two men (age 18 and 25) reported they conducted domestic duties albeit in rare occasions whereas all of the women interviewed (irrespective of age and marital status) pointed to domestic duties as a part of everyday chores. I also asked

household members (irrespective of their gender) how much fuelwood they consumed. Women were able to give more or less precise estimates, whereas men had difficulties coming up with equally precise answers and/or commonly responded as the following quotation from an interview with a senior man (54 year old man, one of the village elders, and had also been the chairperson of community forestry, Feb 2005) illustrates:

*Why are you asking us? How would we know about fuel wood? You have to ask those who are in charge of the kitchen—the women.*

Family-farm work was 'gender sequential' as I observed during my field study and as shown by the following quotation from a *Biswa-Karma* woman informant (married, with one child, March 2005):

*In the family farm, men and women have separate tasks to perform...Men plough the land. We [women] transplant the seedling and carry the manure to the field. Both men and women do harvesting, carrying crops to the house and hoeing the soil. Women are responsible for storage and processing men are in charge of selling any surplus grain to the market.*

Interestingly, there existed a unanimous consensus amongst my interviewees and informants alike of the above described demarcation of labor between men and women. But I was also interested in finding out to what extent these demarcations were actually observed and adhered to in practice and for what reasons. These questions were more difficult to word in a manner accessible to interviewees. And because of the 'sexual' connotations attached to some, interviewees felt uncomfortable and/or unwilling to discuss them openly. Hence, my understanding had to rely on what two of my key informants (2, married woman, early 30s and mid-40s) said in series of informal discussions (between April-May 2005).

They suggested local interpretations of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', comparative advantage of men and women were at play in the above observed gender differences.

*Our work is divided according to who can do what best. A woman is better care-giver and nurturer of the family and a man a better breadwinner.*

*(Biswa-Karmas man, age 21, married with wife pregnant at the time of the field study, April 2005)*

As two of my female informants (married and well-settled in their marital home) confided in me that the act of ploughing was strictly a man's job in the *Biswa-Karma* community. The plough was associated with the penis and ploughing with sexual penetration. The low-castes also associated domestic work with 'nurturing and caring' attributes that were in turn

women's domain of work. Masculine ones were those that contributed higher material resources (food and cash), and hence men's work was typically outside the household. Cultural notions of 'ijjat' or honor were key in accounting for why these demarcations of labor were adhered to.

The low-castes perceived 'ijjat' was essentially maintained by avoiding local idioms of 'sexuality' and 'inappropriate behavior' for men and women. Transgressing the domains of the other gender's work was perceived as inappropriate behavior. For instance, my male informant said he used to help his wife with her household chores such as cooking and cleaning during her first pregnancy. He had to stop eventually because his friends and family members started mocking him as the 'jorru ko gulam' (henpeck husband). Both men and women agreed that women faced more stringent rules and had greater stake in following these rules, as the quotation below from a female informant (age 30, married woman) reflects:

*Women's honor is more fragile than a man's. Men can loose their reputation by gambling, adultery and alcoholism but they can always get it back. [Referring to one of the men in the council] had lost his honor in his youth, but now look at him... he commands so much respect in the community. But if women were ever to transgress their reputation would be tarnished forever and they would bring shame to their families.*

A woman would risk losing their 'ijjat' if she were perceived as: (a) transgressing 'appropriate behavior for women', (b) disrespecting the norms of 'seclusion' during menstruation; (c) disobeying the behavioral rules prescribed to women in public spaces. To take an example, when I asked my informants what would happen if a woman were to get caught ploughing, they replied she would be accused of being 'sexually loose'. Women were also barred from the following in the first three days of their menstruations: making physical contacts with other members of the family members, from entering the kitchen, and other such restrictions. These seclusion norms were enforced strictly and any transgressions were strongly reprimanded by the family and the community. Furthermore, I also observed throughout my time in Gharmi that a woman's (except for senior ones) interaction in the public domain were watched carefully and subject to much gossip by other *Biswa-Karmas* as the quotation below also reflects (*Biswa-Karma* woman, age 23, married).

*Most of us [women] have to observe many rules when in public, especially in the presence of men and senior members of the family. We have to be modest, speak only when asked, respond softly, and refrain from contradicting what our community leaders have already decided on....*

This was also in line with the differences in participation of men and women I observed in the two community forestry General Assemblies (village wide meetings) that I was able to attend during my field study, for example.

The above divisions of labor within the household and the norms embodying them were carried over to define what type of work men and women could do. These in turn limited women's access to pursue higher paid employment options outside the household.

#### 7.2.4 Marriage Practices:

I conducted semi-structured interviews of 12 women and 8 men (of different age and marital status, March 2005) to decipher how men and women perceived marriages and the gender differences, if any, in their abilities to exercise voice and choice in entering and exiting marriage agreements. Most of the interviewees (irrespective of their gender) remarked marriage was a major turning point in their lives but they felt powerless in the major marriage related decisions. The younger interviewees in particular said this was because the Biswa-Karmas community at large strongly upheld the rules of marriage—arranged, *jat* endogamous and village exogamous. In other words, the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharimi arranged marriages with a network of marriageable, '*Kami*' lineages that existed outside of Gharimi<sup>89</sup>. *Biswa-Karmas* women had to migrate permanently to their husbands' lineage, hence the difference between 'marital' and 'natal' home. There had been only a few instances of marriage that defied these norms and were widely criticized by other villagers. However, both men and women agreed marriage was more of a 'traumatic experience' for women than it was for men. As one of the male (middle aged, with a married daughter and a son, March 2005) interviewees remarked, sympathizing on women:

*When a woman gets married, she has to leave her family, her home, and her village and come and live at a stranger's home. The same is not true for men.*

As I was able to decipher through the interview I conducted with one of the *Bamins*<sup>90</sup> responsible for conducting marriages, gender inequalities were embedded in the symbolism behind marriage ceremonies. For instance, one of the major marriage ceremonies - '*Kanyadan*' - symbolized a 'handover' of rights over a woman from her natal family to her marital one. Furthermore, interviewees remarked that in general, consent from both parties was required for marriages to proceed. However, men and women exercised differential voice in entering marriages. As an unmarried woman interviewee (age 32, April 2005) remarked, a potential

groom could go and see as many potentially marriageable women as his family had picked without subsequent loss to his reputation. Women who had been repeatedly 'rejected' risked reduction in future marriage prospects.

Similarly, interviewees also said men and women exercised unequal abilities to exit marriages, as the quotation below reflects. Women said they lacked fall back options in comparison to men. A second marriage for men was much more socially accepted than it was for a woman. The quotations below illustrate these inequalities.

*I have been married for the last five years. Every time I and my sisters go to visit our 'maita' (natal home) during festivals, other special occasions, and more generally, they say 'cheli-beti' (married daughters) is home and everyone treats us with kindness and respect. But if we were to leave our husband and come to our 'maita' permanently, they would think of us as a burden.*

*(Married woman, late 20s, one child, April 2005)*

*Our society would not look upon a divorced woman kindly. If a man gets divorced, they might make fun of him for not keeping his woman under control, but it does not reduce his chances of re-marriage...Look at (referring to a fellow Biswa-Karmas villager), the whole village knows his wife left him because she could not tolerate his bad behavior to her, but his family still managed to find him another bride within the first year of his divorce...But if a woman gets divorced, she is shunned for life.*

*(Married man, mid-30s, April 2005)*

### **7.3 Role of Women in Reproducing Gender Inequalities**

There were multiple reasons for the above discussed gender inequalities. It would be simplistic to conclude these inequalities were consciously imposed by men to maintain their power and privilege. Although not a major focus of this current discussion, gender relations interacted and intersected with other social relations such as seniority and economic position to situate men variously within the *Biswa-Karma* society<sup>91</sup>. I argue there is a case to be made about the multiple and often conflicting ways in which 'women' were contributing to the reproduction of these inequalities. I will focus on the following: multiple and dynamic positions of women; intertwining of women's interests with those of the household; and "spaces" women carved within existing inequalities.

#### **7.3.1 Multiple and Dynamic Experiences of Gender Inequalities**

'Women' as a category were far from being a homogenous one. Gender intersected with other social relations such as life-cycle processes and organization of the household and lead to multiple and dynamic ways in which 'women' experienced gender inequalities. Some

women experienced gender inequalities more acutely whereas others had a stake in perpetuating them.

With regards to gender and life-cycle processes, women's position and their relative bargaining power shifted considerably throughout their lives. I have discussed how levels of seniority influenced women's voice on intra-household land, income, and labor allocation processes. (Senior women experienced greater voices in these domains than junior ones). This discussion will focus predominantly on the series of separate interviews I conducted with 30 women, of senior women and junior ones, to discern their perceptions of being unmarried, newly married, and senior woman. The contrast between 'newly married women' and 'senior women' was particularly interesting.

A woman interviewee (late 20s, April 2005) who was well settled in her marital home at the time of the interview described her early marriage years as '*dukha ko din*', days of hardship. She remarked that she was required to work the hard and conform to innumerable gendered restrictions during the early years of her marriage. Through personal observations, I found that newly married women were unwilling to talk about their homes openly. For instance, the senior family members were reluctant to leave their newly married daughter-in-laws alone with me in three out of the five interviews I conducted with newly married women. The other two interviewees circumvented all the questions I posed about their transitions from being an unmarried woman to a newly married one. Some of these women later revealed to me that because women did not have a say where they were getting married off to, newly married women perceived their marital home as a 'stranger's house'. Their marital household members also treated them with suspicion and scrutiny. As one of the women (married woman, mid-20s, with one child) recalled to me of her initial marital experiences:

*My mother-in-law and father-in-law kept a watchful eye on me as if I was not part of their family [during the first years of marriage]. My mother in law would give me clothes and dishes to wash and stand in front of me to make sure I was washing them well...I was not allowed to go to the storage room...I was told to ask for their permission to step outside of the house...They would not invite me into their important family meetings...One of my brother-in-laws had been away for sometime for work in India. They got news that he was turning into an alcoholic. They did not want to let me know what was going on with him for they feared I would run back to my natal home and/or other women in the village and defame them.*

Married women reported significant improvements in their position in the household once they had their first child and/or were separated from the joint household. The major

changes included - other family members no longer perceived them as being 'outsiders', and they experienced reduction in constraints on their mobility and voice. There was a unanimous consensus amongst my interviewees as well as informants alike that the transition to 'senior affinal' women was an even bigger leap. The following quotation is from an interview I conducted with a married woman (mid 30s, April 2005).

*Our "sasus" (senior affinal women) have the second most important position in the household, after the "sasura" (male household head)...Our sasus keep the key to the storage...they are called upon and listened to when there are big decisions to be made in the household...they supervise us [junior women] and work less than the junior members of the household...*

Senior women also openly admitted that to the benefits and freedom their position allowed them vis-à-vis other junior members of the household. Senior women often offloaded the more time consuming and labor-intensive work to junior members, and enjoyed greater voice in the intra household resource allocation and decision making processes. During interviews, senior women frequently evoked the tradition of 'respect for seniority and authority' as the justification for the observed gendered hierarchies in intra-household relations. Interestingly, some of the junior women interviewees said that they were willing to bear through the hardship in the initial years of marriage with the expectation that their position would improve significantly once they transitioned to a position of senior women. I would argue that the above responses show how women too had vested interest in perpetuating gendered hierarchies. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent discussion on caste and gender, these intra-household hierarchies were informed, influenced and sustained by caste-based ideologies which also permeated into gendered practices amongst the low-castes.

**7.3.2 Intertwining of Interests**

Division within the household and differential bargaining power between men and women, I would argue, alone does not capture intra-household dynamics in Gharmi. The ties of mutual interdependence and emotional relationships that bonded household members were equally important. Women's position and bargaining power was intertwined with the social and economic attributes and position of the household in the community. For instance, when I asked ordinary women in my household structured interviewees to list who they considered the most influential women in the village and provide reasons for why, the names and reasons put forth were rarely to do with the personal attributes of the chosen persons (although it was important). The primary selecting criteria included: the position of the husband in the society,



material wellbeing of the household, the contribution of male members to the community and so forth. In such a context, women, I would argue, were willing to overlook the inequalities in return for relational stabilities.

As part of my analysis on gender and resource allocation in the household, I asked 10 women (from all age groups with whom I could speak openly on controversial issues) why women did not hold independent land titles. All of them agreed that land was the most valuable resource in the village and that women lacked access and control over them. This reflects that women were conscious of the inequalities they were subjected to. But they also pointed out, unanimously, that women themselves would not agree to hold independent land titles. 8 out of 10 said they did not agree to women holding independent titles. There were variations in the reasons they gave me for why they maintained their stance.

Newly married women said that their links to their natal homes were crucial in helping them cope with the difficulties in the early years of their marital lives, and in providing support in case of marital breakdown. In such situations, they feared claiming titles to parental property (the most important resource to men) would jeopardize their relationships with their natal home. This must be seen, I would argue, in light of the need to not only sustain material well-being but, equally, to maintain the emotional bonds with their natal homes.

The two senior women (who were also two of the most highly regarded women in the village) said that their social position in the village was interlinked to those of their marital family's. Furthermore, they remarked having an independent land titles would not necessarily augment their position in the household or the broader community. One of them remarked the following in a separate, informal discussion I had with her:

*Even if one of my sons were to give me a piece of land and tell me mother this is for you to keep, I would consider it joint family property.*

I argue this need to be understood in the context of (a) the importance of land in the village, (b) importance of land to male identity<sup>92</sup>, and (c) the role of senior men in the allocation of resources in the household. One of my female informants (age 30, married with two children, living in nuclear family) explained to me that if women were to hold independent land titles, they would be directly questioning the basis for senior male authority in the household. Hence, women were willing to forgo their material well-being in return for

household stability while at the same time deriving benefits from joint household ownership to land. This I argue links to the bigger debate on gender and land in the gender literature. It would lend support to authors such as Cecile Jackson (2002) who suggest in spite of the importance of land to the rural economy and to material well-being, women themselves are divided when it comes to the question of holding independent land titles.

### 7.3.3 *Spaces within existing inequalities*

The current discussions on how women participate in the co-production of gender inequalities has focused on the structural factors that are at play—evolving nature of their positions and their household attributes. But in the endless interviews and informal discussions I had with women, a recurrent pattern I noted was how women used their agency to maneuver within existing inequalities.

For instance, throughout my study in Gharimi, I rarely found newly married women defying the prescribed codes of conduct. They worked the most, were the softest spoken, shied away from speaking publicly and in front of village elders. It appeared at the beginning that these codes of conduct were rigorously enforced by other household members and communities. While there was certainly an element of enforcement by outsiders, women also consciously abided by these principles. In an informal discussion I had with two recently married women and an unmarried one (March 2005), it was explained to me that their positions as daughter-in-law was the most cumbersome and dependent on the relationships they were able to create and maintain in the household. The more allies they were able to gather, the better the treatment they received. Therefore, it was commonplace for newly married women to consciously invest in the cultural logic of a ‘good housewife’ and ‘daughter-in-law’ in an effort to improve their position at the household.

At the same time, these women I spoke to also confided in me that there were significant differences between public and private appearances. In the public (in front of outsiders), women would observe to the rules of respect and humility. In private, however, they would deploy sexual and emotional intimacies to ensure themselves adequate support from their men. Similarly, after my first month of being in the field, I came to hear about several overt and covert fights and disagreements that the daughter-in-laws were having with one another and/or with the mother-in-law. It was usually related to one accusing the other side of deploying ‘private’ means to secure support from their men. For instance, a mother-in-

law accused the daughter-in-law of using 'private' means to receive part of her husband's income which was meant to be handed over to the male household head as joint household deposit. Similarly, two sister in-laws, in a different incident, claimed one had employed 'private' means to ensure her husband bargained on her behalf to not subdivide her dowry. Dowry was commonly divided between brothers when joint households fragmented into nuclear ones.

## **7.4 Gender and Caste in Gharimi**

The following two sections will demonstrate how the above discussed gender inequalities amongst the low-castes have their roots in the inter-linkages between caste and male out-migration. In this section, I will discuss how caste-based ideologies and politics in the village shaped low-caste practices. Despite the low-caste resistance to high-caste domination (as pointed out with reference to the discourses employed to resist against the caste-based domination in the village in 7.1), I argue caste-based ideologies informed gender relations in Gharimi. I examine this in the context of women's seclusion norms in Gharimi and how they were couched in caste-based ideologies of purity and pollution. I argue that the presence of these ideologies amongst the lower castes must not be understood in the context of low-castes emulating high-caste practices per se (as propagated by the 'sanskritization' theory) but the complex and contradictory ways in which caste hierarchy operated in Gharimi. Furthermore, I also demonstrate that gender division of labor, gender inequalities in allocation of resources were a product of and response to caste-based domination and resistance.

### **7.4.1 *Socio-Cultural Practices & Caste-Based Ideologies***

My field study demonstrates that there are many ways in which caste-based ideologies inform gender relations in Gharimi such as in the dual and contradictory treatment of women in her natal home and her marital one; marriage practices and the invisibilization of women's contributions to the household; the ambivalent treatment of menstrual blood and its implications for women's seclusion and others. Given the scope and space constraints of this thesis. I will focus on one of these practices only<sup>93</sup>. The most overt and predominant form of women's seclusion was in the treatment of menstruating women.

During the course of my field study, I observed that women in their first three days of menstruation were barred from entering the kitchen, sharing water with other members of the household, physical contacts with male members, slept in a secluded room and others. These

rules were particularly strict for newly married women. To take an example, in the family where I was staying in Gharmi, I witnessed that the daughter-in-law (a recently married woman) who had been menstruating accidentally touched her unmarried brother-in-law in passing. The senior family members reprimanded her for having 'polluted' the brother-in-law, and the man was ordered to go and take a shower to 're-purify' himself. Such practices were enforced very strictly by the community at large as well as observed by the menstruating women themselves.

When I asked women why they observed these practices, the most common response I received was a '*purkha ko dekhi chalan*' (tradition) and 'women were considered temporarily untouchable during this time'. However, a *Bamin* priest's wife (one of my key informants, mid 40s, March 2005), well-versed with the Hindu texts, traced these practices in caste-based ideologies of 'purity and pollution' and the ambivalent status of menstruating women. According to her, the people of Gharmi consider a woman to be at the peak of her 'sexuality' when she is menstruating. Menstruation blood represents 'destruction' and simultaneously, 'continuation' of the patriline'. It is thought that the potential for a woman to disrupt the purity of the patriline by having sexual relations with outsiders and/or other members of the household is at its height while she is menstruating. At the same time, women's menstruation also symbolizes the potential for a woman to conceive male offspring and continue the patriline. To minimize the destructive capacity of menstrual blood, women's interaction in the public and some private domain are effectively barred for the first three days of their period. Men are encouraged to sleep with women once women have completed their three days of seclusion, bathed, prayed and thereby 'purified' themselves. Unmarried women and women with children also have to observe their behavior when menstruating. But the rules they face are less stringent than those imposed on newly married women. The above explanation sheds light on the rationale for the prescribed treatment and behavior women experience during the first years of marriage.

I was also interested to find out how these seclusion practices differed, if it did, amongst the low-castes and high-castes, and for what reasons. The low-castes men and women alike said that the practice and ideologies underpinning them were comparable. Furthermore, such comparabilities in practices between the two castes were also confirmed to me by my high-caste informant (a second year student at the Institute of Forestry (IoF) who I knew while I was at IoF to conduct desk review of forestry literature). It is worth noting that Cameron

(1998) and Bennett (2002) also provide similar explanations for the caste-based, ideological underpinnings behind seclusion norms amongst the high caste communities they studied.

The potential similarities between high-caste and low-caste practices could be interpreted as the case of social mobility. M.N. Srinivas (1963) famously coined the term ‘sanskritization’ to introduce the possibilities of fluidity within caste relations and argued low-castes often mimic high-caste practices in an effort to move up the caste hierarchy. The theory of sanskritization has generated tremendous debate in the literature on caste in South Asia. For instance, Guneratne (1999; Guneratne 2002) argues, through his study of ‘*Tharus*’ of Terai region of Nepal, that instances of emulation need to be contextualized, and the ideological as well as material reasons behind them need to be understood. However, in Gharhi there was little evidence to suggest that the similarities were because of low-castes emulating high-caste practices, and doing so in an effort to improve their position. According to my low-caste informants (two married women, and one man), there had not been any case of the low-castes being accepted as and/or claiming to be high-castes on the basis of these practices.

Rather, I argue these similarities need to be understood in the context of complexities underlying caste hierarchy in the village. ‘Caste’, as Declan Quigley (1984) argues, must not be understood as uni-linear, but also as a complex set of hierarchy that exists within and amongst various groups. Relating this to the present discussion, there exists a hierarchy within the low-castes. Just as the high-castes observe the practice of ‘untouchability’ on the *Biswa-Karmas*, the *Biswa-Karmas* observe similar ones for the castes they deem lower to themselves. *Biswa-Karma*’s consider themselves at the apex of the *Dalit* hierarchy. For instance, I observed that the *Biswa-Karmas* took elaborate precautions to prevent incidental, physical contact with *Damais* (tailors) from other villages they considered to be of lower-castes than the *Biswa-Karmas*. My *Bamin* informant explained me that the *Biswa-Karma*’s practices of women seclusion norms during menstruation, for instance, was what distinguished them from other low-castes.

**7.4.2 Gender Relations as a Product of and Response to Caste-Based Politics**

Gender and caste also intersected through the historical patron-client relationship between higher and low-castes of Gharhi. The high-caste continued to be the major employers of low-caste labor in Gharhi. Low-castes men and women, to a varying extent,

continued to work in higher-caste lands as sharecroppers and/or daily wage workers. According to 7 high-caste employers, I conducted in-depth interviews with (4 *Poudyals* and 3 *K.C.s*), high-castes employed low castes because of shortages in labor supply within the high-caste population as well as to perform certain tasks that are barred to them. The following quotation, from one of the high caste interviewees (Feb 2005), demonstrates how caste-based norms of appropriate behavior influenced the nature of work for high-castes and low-castes respectively.

*Bahun and Chettris cannot plough the land. It is against our Jat. We have to hire low-caste, male agricultural workers for ploughing...Manuring is a woman's job, but our women are not allowed to put manure in the fields because it is not 'chokko' [ritually impure] and for that we hire low-caste women.*

As the quotation above suggests, agricultural work was often linked to gender and caste-based norms. The high-castes made a strict distinction between what was men's work and what was women's. For instance, ploughing was a man's work whereas manuring a woman's as the quote above demonstrates. Simultaneously, because of the sexual connotations attached to ploughing, high-castes were barred from conducting these activities themselves and had to hire low-caste male help. Organic manure made out of decomposing cow dung among other things was considered ritually impure for the high-castes women to perform and thus delegated to the low-castes women. Furthermore, as explained to me by another high caste interviewee (*Poudyal*, male, middle age, Feb 2005), low-caste men were paid more than women because of the higher value attached to male work vis-à-vis female ones. With particular reference to ploughing and manuring, he remarked the following in his interview:

*'Ploughing' is far more important than manuring. Ploughing is the marker of agricultural cycle and is also a much more labor intensive job than manuring is.*

In this respect, gender division of daily wage agricultural labor as well as the differential and unequal values attached to male and female labor discussed in the previous section (7.2.3) on gender division of labor was a product of caste-based ideologies.

Patron-client relationships continued to characterize high-caste and low-caste relations at the time of the field work. At the same time, low-caste resistance against caste-based exploitation as well as dependence on it had gained critical momentum in Gharmi. I argue that one of the unintended consequences of these forms of resistance had been to entrench gender inequalities at the intra *Biswa-Karma* level. Let me explain why and how through two main

examples of organizations of: (1) the community and (2) gender division of resources (particularly of land).

With regards to the organization of the community, I was able to discern that because of the nature of low-caste resistance against the high-castes, the positions of authority and influence within the *Biswa-Karma* community were gender exclusive and men had a higher stake in occupying these positions than women did. 'Experience of being relatively independent from caste-based relations' was the primary criteria for qualifying individuals to occupy positions of authority and influence. The following quotation from one of the *Biswa-Karma* men (middle age, occupying one of the leading positions in the village, March 2005) provided the rationale for the criteria:

*We wanted to reject the hereditary and rigid form of caste hierarchy that the Poudyals and K.C.s still adopt. We wanted to create a form of community governance that allowed for flexibility and mobility. Those who occupy the major decision-making positions in our community were not 'born' into those positions but had to earn it through their hard-work, economic and social independence from caste-based relations.*

Furthermore, the argument put forth by the low-caste leaders and ordinary members for employing the above criteria was that the leader would not be able to question caste-based dependency and domination if he was himself dependent on it.

My own study of ten men who played a leading role in the major, community-level decision making processes confirmed the above (March/April 2005). I found each had substantial experience migrating outside the village for employment purposes (to both *Tera*i and India); had accumulated considerable wealth which they in turn re-invested in productive enterprises within the village; and were relatively less dependent on caste-based relations than the average household in Bhatpole. Furthermore, I was informed by the above community decision-makers that their reputation of being less dependent on caste-based relations was what had enabled them to qualify to assume these positions.

In spite of such a conscious, built in flexibility, gender relations posed multiple constraints on women to occupy these positions. Even the women themselves, as the quotation demonstrates, pointed to the difficulties.

*We cannot migrate outside the village with the same ease as men can. We have to think about our families, and our reputation.*  
(Married woman, mid 30s, May 2005)

‘Community-decision making forums’ were strictly perceived as male domain and there existed overt resistance against women occupying these positions. For instance, one of the senior men publicly said “community decision-making positions were no place for women”.

Furthermore, men also had a greater stake in occupying these positions than women did. For instance, when I asked women how they would define a successful woman in the village, it was mainly to do with their cultural attributes e.g. ‘good wife’, ‘good mother’ along with the position of their households in the community. In comparison, for all the men I interviewed, successful man was one who was able to escape from the spirals of caste-based dependency. Such gender difference in incentives was also apparent when I analyzed the notion of male identity in relation to land ownership.

Due to the importance of land in the village political economy, the scarcity of land available to low-castes, and the ownership of land derived from male income, men both inherited and stated exclusive claims over land. In this respect, men’s material as well as social wellbeing derived from the prestige of owning land, as the quotation below illustrates (*Biswa-Karma* senior man, holding key community-level decision making position, March 2005).

*We do not view land as something we exploit to produce food...don't you see...through control over land the high-castes were able to exploit us and our forefathers for centuries...and for us and our struggle against the high-caste, getting independent control over land represents ending domination by the high-castes.*

Furthermore, *Biswa-Karma* women tended not to resist male claims over land because (a) land symbolized a community wide resistance; and (b) women’s material and social standing also came from belonging to a household that owned land.

**7.5 Gender and Male Out-Migration in Gharmi**

Male out-migration in Gharmi had been a prominent feature of low-caste livelihood since the 1960s when *Biswa-Karma* men started migrating to the Terai and to India in search of seasonal employment. At the time of the field study, however, migration was increasingly shifting into longer term ones and to countries of the Gulf and Southeast Asia. This section will demonstrate the major reasons for these shifts, and analyze their implications for gender relations. It will argue that whereas the first phase of migration served to further engrain



gender inequalities in the village, the newer forms of migration was instigating subsequent changes in gendered relationships.

**7.5.1 Evolution in Patterns of Male Out-Migration**

I carried out 20 interviews with men between the ages of 17-25, and 5 between the ages of 60-70 to find out how and why migration trends had changed as well as the social and economic reasons for why men chose to migrate (May 2005). The interviewees were from different age groups with varying experiences of migration. Out of the 20, 5 were aspiring migrants, 8 had experiences migrating to India, and 9 who were in the Gulf from which 4 had returned to the village from abroad in between contracts and 5 had returned for holidays. The following briefly summarizes the major reasons for changes in migration.

Seasonal migration to India and *Terai* are a prominent feature of rural livelihoods in Nepal (Thapa 1989.; Gill 2003), including in Gharmi. *Biswa-Karma* men started seasonally migrating in the 1960s to the *Terai* after the eradication of malaria and also to India once open border policies were negotiated between the governments of India and Nepal. They migrated to the *Terai* to take advantage of the demand for labor and the different agricultural cycles there and to various cities of India to work as construction workers, guards etc. The general pattern was to return to Gharmi during the peak agricultural seasons, in both types of out-migration.

Migration to the *Terai* and India had become increasingly unviable for the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi over the years. The initial (first and second wave of migrants) to the *Terai* and India took tremendous financial and emotional risks in migrating outside the village to seek employment. Such risks did pay off in terms of higher paying jobs and opportunity for greater savings, which were sources of re-invest in the village. A stratum of ‘political entrepreneurs’ emerged amongst this group who used their savings to purchase land, reduce dependence on caste-based relations, and invest in acquiring positions of influence and authority in the village. As labor out-migration had evolved, the risk associated with migrating also decreased. Networks of men from Gharmi and neighboring low-caste villages emerged to pool the risks of migrating, for instance. Nevertheless, the low skilled labor markets both in *Terai* and India had stagnated. As Gill (2003) reports, much of rural livelihoods are dependent on the same type of seasonal out-migration (as found in Gharmi) amidst lack of changes in the demand for these laborers. In other words, the supply

outstripped the demand for low-skilled labor in the *Terai* and in India. The *Biswa-Karma* men who had gone to India and the *Terai* said they confronted many difficulties finding low-skilled jobs. If and when they were employed, it was difficult to meet regular expenses incurred while outside the village and save for re-investment.

At the time of the field research, *Biswa-Karma* men were increasingly migrating to the Gulf and Malaysia. The first incident of migration to Malaysia was in 1998. According to household structured interviews, the total number of men abroad was 30 with 16 in Qatar, 10 in Saudi and 4 in Malaysia at the time of the field study. This number was also growing and many expressed their interests to migrate to these countries. In comparison, the numbers of migrants and interests in migrating to India and *Terai* was dwindling. According to interviews with 9 male migrants (Gulf and South East Asia) who had returned to the village for holidays and/or were awaiting renewal of their contracts, *Biswa-Karmas* preferred migrating to the countries in the Gulf and South East Asia for the following three main reasons: (1) greater profitability<sup>94</sup>, (2) greater job security, and (3) increasing affordability.

The terms of employment in India and *Terai* were based on arbitrary and informal contracts. In comparison, formal employment contracts in Gulf and Southeast Asia made jobs more secure. Migration to countries outside of India had been largely unaffordable to the low-castes. But, mushrooming of Gulf-centered man power agents, greater competition in airlines, decreases in bureaucratic red-tap, and an increasing number of village-based money lenders willing to take the risk to lend to aspiring migrants without sufficient collateral were some of the major factors that made migration to these countries increasingly affordable and feasible to medium and rich echelons of low-castes of Gharmi. Furthermore, as will be pointed out in the subsequent discussion on gender dimensions of out-migration, migrants to these countries earned substantial income in comparison to what they would make in the village, India and/or *Terai*. Migrants were able to pay off their loans within the first year and devote the rest of their earnings to improving their living standards. The following quotation from a senior married woman, with two sons in Qatar and Saudi Arabia (May 2005) expresses a common sentiment on the material implications that these forms of male out migration had in the village:

*You do not need go around asking all of us who has their husbands and sons abroad, you can tell by the appearance of the house. All of the houses with TV, bio-gas, new tin roofs...have sons or husbands in Qatar or Malaysia.*

Migration to the Gulf had come with its own sets of challenges for low-caste migrants of Gharmi, however. First and foremost, in spite of the reduction in overall costs of migration, the option to migrate remained limited to the richer echelons of the *Biswa-Karmas* community. I examined the economic status of all the men who had migrated and found that (1) the same household was sending multiple male members abroad, and (2) these households owned, comparatively, more land. With regards to experiences of those who had already migrated, the men who had returned for holidays and/or short break in between another contract spoke to me about the harsh working conditions, the difficulties in following instructions given in a different language, the problems adjusting into a new environment etc.<sup>95</sup> Notwithstanding these problems, male out-migration to the Gulf, on the one hand, had been making unprecedented material contributions to the village, and on the other hand, was leading to prolonged absence of working age men from the village. The next section will compare and contrast these two types of migration from a gender perspective.

### **7.5.2 Gender and Male Out-Migration: Similarities & Differences in Migration Patterns**

Migration to the Gulf and Malaysia was a relatively new phenomenon at the time of the field work and posed obvious difficulties to determine with confidence how it interacted with and impacted gender relations. Nevertheless, analysis of the trajectories so far demonstrates both similarities and differences between the two forms (Gulf/Malaysia and India/*Terai*) of migration. The major similarity was that both forms of migration were male-led. The major differences was that while the first form of migration served to further entrench gender inequalities, the latter type provided unprecedented opportunities for women in household with male members abroad.

I found through household structured interviews that migrants were male and between the ages of 17-45. Migrating for employment is considerably more difficult for women than for men in Nepal more generally. Recent reports from the Department of Labor and Foreign Employment demonstrate that the number of women migrating to urban areas and abroad is minuscule compared to that of men. In 2006 for instance, only 627 women out of a total of 182, 537 Nepali migrants went overseas for employment. In the economies of the Gulf countries and South East Asia (which together constitute 72% of the total migrant destinations), employers specifically demanded 'male' laborers as opposed to female ones.

Employment opportunities, if any, for women tends to be confined to the arena of 'domestic work'. The government of Nepal has also reacted to rampant cases of abuse of Nepali female migrants in the Gulf countries by discouraging female migrants (Bhattarai 2005).

However, in Gharmi, the major reason why *Biswa-Karma* men not women migrated for employment was because of gendered constraints inherent within the *Biswa-Karma* community. Low wages and unstable employment in the village prompted *Biswa-Karma* men to migrate in search of employment opportunity. But gender and caste were also crucial deciding factors. The discussion on gender division of labor is crucial in accounting for why men were more likely to migrate than women. As one female interviewee commented (unmarried, age 18, May 2005):

*Women in Gharmi cannot even go outside of Gharmi to seek employment how would we go all the way outside of the country.*

The interviewee above was alluding to the gender norms within the village that prevent women from seeking employment outside.

The incentives to migrate outside the village also tended to be stronger for men than for women. Both men and women said that migration was a lucrative option for *Biswa-Karma* reflected in the quotation below (unmarried, late teens, aspiring migrant worker, May 2005):

*The wages are low and most of the jobs are with the high-castes. We will never be able to extract ourselves from the spirals of poverty and oppression if we remain in the village.*

Most women I interviewed had not even considered migrating outside the household as an option. For example, three married women with children I interviewed said they were responsible for taking care of the children and the house. Without any substitute for their household role, they were disadvantaged from migrating. Unmarried and newly married ones stressed their families' reputation would be at stake if they were to migrate, as the quotation below from a newly married woman illustrates:

*I would never get permission from my husband to migrate outside the household even if I wanted to....If I went without telling anyone, they would think I have run away with another man.*

In comparison to women's responses, men viewed migration as the only way out of their dependence on high-castes and an opportunity to boost their household standard of living. As

one of my informants (male 21, unmarried, migrant worker in Qatar, returned home for marriage) remarked eloquently the differences in incentives to migrate for men and women:

*The familial pressures to migrate, earn a substantial income, and re-invest for benefit of the family and community is much stronger for men than for women.*

Decision to migrate outside the village for employment purposes was made in cooperation with other male members of the household. Women, especially junior ones, were rarely a part of the decision making process. For instance, I conducted interviews of 20 female, family members of migrants (with husbands or sons, already abroad and/or planning to go) on their role in the male out-migration process. Only 2 elderly women reported they were consulted; 12 said they were informed right away once the decision was made; the final 6 said they did not know anything until it was time for their husbands to leave. Furthermore, women informants complained they felt disconnected from their male kin who were away. The married women (with husbands abroad) I interviewed tended to have little knowledge about their husband's employment and experiences abroad. Men would rarely volunteer to share this information in their correspondences to their wives, for instance.

Aside from these similarities, the major differences between the two forms of migration were: (1) duration of migration, and (2) the material contribution made by migrants. As mentioned above, male out-migration to India and *Terai* were for shorter duration and/or seasonal. In contrast, because of the nature of contract and the cost of traveling, migration to the Gulf and South East Asia tended to be for longer duration. According to the 9 interviews with I conducted with men with experience working abroad, the contracts were typically for 3 to 5 years. Many returned once in 2-3 years for holidays and/or in between contracts. I found attempt to calculate remittance from India and *Terai* was futile. This was primarily because many could not recall that far ahead in time, there were many fluctuations between the time when men started migrating and to the time field work were being conducted. Nevertheless, there was a general consensus in the village that remittances brought back from male out-migration to the Gulf and South East Asia far outweighed those from India and *Terai*.

I found it easier to gather information from the detailed interviews with the 9 men with experience migrating abroad about wages, expenditures and remittances. The average monthly income was Rs. 10,000 to Rs 15,000 with very little variation between migrants from Gharmi. As the interviewees explained, there was low variation in the income earned as most

of the migrants from *Gharmi* occupied low skilled jobs. At the same time, their decision to migrate was subject to receiving a minimum wage that would cover their expenses, allow them to make savings and send remittance.

The men interviewees said most men from *Gharmi* would go to great lengths to ensure that their monthly expenditures were kept at a minimum. They shared accommodation with at least 10 others, but their total expenditures varied between Rs.3,000-5,000 depending on the nature of jobs they occupied. For instance, those who worked in restaurants as cooks and cleaners had their meals provided for. The interviewees said they remitted between Rs.40,000 to Rs.60,000 at a time at least two times a year. Majority of the money sent back in the first year was spent on paying back the loans they had taken out to cover their travel and other migration related expenses. 8 out of the 10 had taken out approximately 100,000 – 150,000 with 30% interest rates which took over a year to pay back. Furthermore, the men had brought back between Rs.100,000-150,000 upon their return to the village for holidays or in between jobs. Though my study could not calculate precisely the remittance for each migrant, I was informed that remittance formed a significant and unprecedented contribution to the household.

Earlier in the chapter I pointed out that male out-migration to *Terai* and India (the first phase of migration) served to entrench gender inequalities by enabling senior men to dominate decision making positions in the community. It was only men who migrated outside the village, accumulated sufficient income to reduce their dependence on the high-castes and thereby qualified to attain positions of influence and authority in the village. The subsequent analysis will discuss the changes that were being triggered by shifts in male out-migration.

### **7.5.3 *Changes in Male Out-Migration & Implications for Gender Relations***

The changes in male out-migration and the material contribution migrants were making to the household were influencing gendered relationships in *Gharmi*. It was difficult to decipher what the implications had been for the more entrenched gendered practices such as marriage practices. From what the 20 women with migrant male family members told me as well as what I could decipher from the differences in households with migrants abroad and those without, the implications of male out-migration was particularly pronounced in the intra-household allocation of resources and division of labor. Nevertheless, the ways in which

women experienced these changes varied, and were in turn mediated by gender dynamics within the household (such as organization of the household and life-cycle processes).

The women interviewees who had children and had set up nuclear household prior to their husbands migrating abroad (13 of the women interviewed) said they experienced greatest influence over the allocation of remittances. The following interview I conducted with a married, age of 40, and husband in Malaysia at the time of the interview illustrates this, and also serves to compare and contrast women’s experiences of the changes in male out-migration:

*When my husband was migrating to India, it was only for short periods of time. He would return to the village at least two or three times a year. And most often, a group of men in the village would leave together and return at the same time. The men would just safe keep a certain amount of income they earned and bring them back. My husband would then decide on what to do with the money with other members of the family...I did not have that much say in the process except for maybe things we had to pay on a regular basis...But now, the men are gone for long time, for two or three years at a time...and they send back money through other people...it is generally left to the women like myself to manage the remittances they send back.*

Similarly, other women living in nuclear households and receiving remittances from husbands abroad said that the remittances were often accompanied with detailed instructions. Their husbands would instruct them to spend majority of the remittance on paying debts (such as the loans taken to travel and outstanding loans) and familial obligations (such as marriage, death, allowances for old parents). The remaining amount would be labeled as ‘household regular expenses’ and left to the discretion of the women. Figure 4 below, a summary of an interview I conducted with a married woman - in her late 30s, with two young sons, living in nuclear family, and with husband abroad - helps elucidate the significance of the remittances left for women to manage.

**Figure 4: Case Study of Changes Triggered by Remittances**

Bindu Biswa-Karmas’s husband had been in Qatar for the last 7 years at the time of the field research. He was one of the first men in the village to have migrated outside the village - in Malyasia in 1998. Bindu and her husband had been married for several years, had two children, and were living in a house of their own when he first left.

Her husband had little land and savings to cover the costs of migrating, and was left with little choice but to ask for a big loan with a hefty 40% interest rate from the local money lender. All the money he was remitting home went straight to pay the money lender. It took them two and a half years to cover those loans.

During those two years, Bindhu had to manage the entire household with the little she earned from daily wage labor [agricultural and non-agricultural]. In peak seasons, she earned Rs.180 a day and worked 20 days a month. Her situation in off peak seasons was even dire.

But once the loan was covered, all of the money he was sending home, every six months, was for 'family'. They had many familial obligations. Her husband had to give money to his parents, brother's and sisters weddings, re-do our house amongst other obligations. Even then, there would be at least Rs. 5000 or more a month left over for Bindhu to manage as she wished. This was more money than Bindhu had imagined he would earn and allow her to manage.

Initially, she was scared and wanted him to instruct her on each Rupee. But once she got a hang of it, she realized she had the freedom for the first time in her life to improve her children's quality of life and reduce the amount of daily wage work she did.

With the additional income in the household, all of the 13 women said they were experiencing reduction in agricultural and non-agricultural daily wage work. Furthermore, as one of the women (early 40s, lived with in-laws and children, husband working in Qatar, May 2005) pointed to the wider benefits of receiving regular remittances:

*Our situation is not hand to mouth any more. We have the freedom to choose who we want to work with and when we want to work. We can now say no to those who do not pay us on time and mistreat us.*

There were also examples of women employing remittances to invest on labor saving technology in an effort to reduce their domestic workload. For instance, several women who were receiving remittances were installing bio-gas for the first time in the village. According to the interviews, the impetus behind their investment were to - reduce cooking time and save time required for collection of firewood for cooking purposes.

Not all women, with male migrants abroad, experienced similar changes however. In comparison to the women in nuclear households, women in extended households in general and newly married women in particular said the remittances were pooled and managed by the senior men of the household. Nevertheless, five such interviewees pointed to reduction in daily wage labor, which they attributed to male out-migration. This is illustrated by the following quotation from an interview with a women, age 19, recently married (May 2005):

*My father in law is a powerful man in the village. I have never had to work as hard as other women in the village. But the first year I got married I still had to do daily wage work. When my husband started remitting what he earned in Qatar regularly, my father-in-law told me that we had sufficient money and we no longer had to be dependent on the high-castes. And I have not had to do daily wage work since.*



Similarly, other newly married and unmarried women also commented during interviews that their senior family members also considered daily wage work for the high caste as being inferior. When remittances were flowing regularly to the household, senior family members opted to substitute daily wage work of junior female members with other forms of labor mainly domestic work, family farm production, and more leisure.

More importantly, the underlying feature of male out-migration to the Gulf and South East Asia was that it was selective. Most men I met in Gharimi had migrated at least once in their life time. But only some had been able to accumulate sufficient income, and benefit economically and socially from male out-migration. Although migration to the Gulf and South East Asia was increasingly affordable to a wider range of households, it still remained confined to the already wealthy echelons of *Biswa-Karma* society. Hence, the major implications of male out-migration was that it created inequality amongst women—between those who had male family members who had migrated outside and those without.

### 7.6 Summary

This chapter has argued that gender relations were inherently unequal in Gharimi. Caste and male out migration played a central role in constituting and re-constituting gender relations. Households, family and community were centralized and monopolized by the head of the household. Men held exclusive control over land, the most valuable property in the village. ‘Dowry’ was given to women to secure their position in the household, but women lacked control over its content once it entered their marital household. Income was pooled, centralized, and decided by the male head of the household with little input from other members. Gender division of labor was demarcated along gender lines, with little in-built flexibility, and was maintained by gendered norms and ideologies. Marriage practices prevented women from exercising the same level of voice and choice as men could to enter and exit marriage contracts.

Women played an active role in the reproduction of these inequalities. Women’s position in the household evolved and changed as per their life-cycle processes such that certain women had vested interest in perpetuating gender inequalities. Women rarely questioned the basis for gender inequalities for their material and social wellbeing rested on household stability. Women’s social and material well-being was also linked to how well they were able to conform to gendered norms. Many opted to covertly secure support from more

powerful members of the household and improve their position without questioning the basis of gender inequalities at the intra-household level.

Caste-based politics and ideologies shaped the observed gender relations in Gharhi. On the one hand, in spite of the political discourse against caste-based domination, caste-based ideologies informed gendered practices such as the ambivalent treatment of menstrual blood and associated women's seclusion practices. *Biswa-Karma* observed these practices to maintain their status within the low-caste hierarchy. On the other hand, gender division of labor, allocation of land, and organization of the community were a product of and response to caste-based relations and politics.

Finally, male out-migration for employment was a prominent feature of low-caste livelihood since the 1960s. The initial phases of male out-migration to the *Terai* and India secured gender exclusive community wide decision making structures. Changes in migration, increasingly to the countries of South East Asia and the Gulf, were triggering subsequent changes in gendered relationships. Migration trends remained male-led, nevertheless, it had also altered gender division of labor and resources for the women receiving regular remittances.

The next chapter will discuss how gendered socio-cultural practices, caste, and male out-migration that together constituted the gender relations in Gharhi were heavily 'borrowed' in the process of community forestry institutional formation, functioning and change at the local level. As such, men and women's entry, interaction and influence in these institutional processes were informed, shaped and demarcated by these prevailing gendered relations.

## ~ Chapter Eight ~

### 8 Gender Relations & Institutions of Forest Governance in Gharmi Village

The history of community forestry in Gharmi was characterized by competing claims and struggles over the usufruct rights to Bhumipujnee-Teesdhung forests - between the low-caste (*Biswa-Karmas*) and their high-caste patrons of Gharmi. Lack of access to forest products together with gender ideologies of 'ijjat' or honor formed the primary reasons the low-castes sought usufruct rights over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge forests. But when the high-castes contested against the handover of the forest to the *Biswa-Karmas*, struggle to gain access to forest products transformed into struggle against caste-based domination. Once the District Forest Office – Kaski (DFO-KI) mediated the struggle and officially handed over usufruct rights to Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge forests to the low-caste *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi, the symbolism behind community forestry for the low-castes had gone beyond merely securing access to forest products. Moreover, the decision-making positions in the Community Forestry User Group (CFUG) came to represent and legitimize male authority and influence in the village context. The institutions that were thus formulated and functioned systematically excluded women from the CF process.

The intuitions established to govern community forests were undergoing significant changes since community forestry was handed over to the low-castes *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi in 1997. Most notable was more gender inclusive changes, which was a product of the 'interface' between Federation of Community Forestry User Groups (FECOFUN) (external organization facilitating the revision of institutions) extension agents and the local users. Women's experiences with these institutional changes were re-shaped by internal negotiations within the *Biswa-Karma* community as well as mediated by male out-migration and the socio-economic changes occupying in the village context.

This chapter discusses the formation, functioning and change in institutions established to govern Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge Community Forests in Gharmi. It demonstrates how gender, caste, and the changing context of male out-migration which together constituted gender relations amongst the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi mapped into these institutional

processes. The chapter will also discuss how external agents (DFO-KI and FECOFUN) interacted with and influenced these institutional processes and gender dynamics.

This chapter will be divided into four major parts. I will begin by first, introducing the Users and the Forests of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest; the history of the struggle for community forest by the *Biswa-Karmas* against the high-castes; and outline the material, normative and historical basis for the struggle. This will be followed by analysis of the gendered inequalities in both the struggle and the resulting processes of institutional formation and functioning. The chapter will then discuss the institutional changes happening in Gharmi, the sources of these changes, and women’s experiences with them. The final section will summarize the chapter and its implication for the central research questions of this thesis.

### 8.1 Introducing the Users and the Forests of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge Community Forest

Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest (community forest) is located in Gharmi, Ward No. 8-9, Lamachaur Village Development Committee (VDC), Kaski District of Western Nepal. The Department of Forestry—Kaski (DFO - KI) handed over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest to the *Biswa-Karmas*, a *Dalit* group (low caste), in 1997 after three years of fierce fighting between high-castes and *Dalits* over the forest. The Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest user group (CFUG) was predominantly governed by *Biswa-Karmas*. The CFUGs incorporated a total of 65 households of which 62 were *Biswa-Karmas*, 3 were high-caste *Bahun*s and *K.C.s*, 165 were male and 169 were female.

The total area of the forest was 9.5 hectare, and *Katus* (*Pinus roxburghii*), *Chilaune* (*Schima wallichii*), and *Uttis* (*Alnus nepalensis*) were the main forest products found. The forest was divided into three blocks: Bhumipujnee, Bhirpani, and Teesdhunge, as demonstrated in the table below. A limited amount of forest products were made available to users although there was talk of providing more regular supply of forest products towards the end of my field work. The following table provides a brief description of these blocks:

**Figure 5:** Overview of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge Community Forestry

Name of Block	Area	Direction	Slope	Soil Type	Type of Forest	3 Main Types	Age	Forest Density
Bhumipujnee	2.54	East-	Flat	Black	Plantation,	Katus,	10-	Dense

	HA	South			natural & mixed	Chilaune, Uttis	20 years	
Bhirpani	3.28 HA	North-West	Downhill	Black	Plantation, natural & mixed	Katus, Chilaune, Uttis	10-20 years	Middle
Teesdhunge	3.3. HA	West	Downhill	Black	Plantation	Katus, Chilaune, Uttis	6-7 years	Thin

*Source: Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge Operational Plan, 2004*

The Constitution and Operational Plan, the major formal institutions governing the forests, defined the rights of the users, outlined the major plans for forest development and management, and were closely followed by the CFUG in practice. The ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ both had been renewed a few months before I started my field work (Feb 2005).

The DFO-KI and FECOFUN were the major external actors facilitating the Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest user groups. FECOFUN is an NGO established to safeguard the rights of user groups (Britt 2002; Timisina 2003), but is increasingly working in partnership with District Forest Offices around the country to facilitate community forestry user groups. In Gharimi, the DFO-KI delegated its major responsibilities to FECOFUN in Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest in 2001. FECOFUN facilitated in the revision of ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’, and was actively involved in community forest-related development efforts in Gharimi.

## 8.2 The History of Community Forestry in Gharimi

*“The problem of exploitation and rebellion is...not just a problem of calories and income but a question of peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations and of reciprocity”.*

James C. Scott 1976

The formation of institutions governing Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest—formal and informal rules and norms describing and prescribing human behavior on the commons—cannot be understood without first attending to the history of how community forestry started in Gharimi. The meaning of community forest and the institutions that were created henceforth were embedded in these historical processes. This section will begin by briefly summarizing the events leading up to the establishment of community forests. These will be followed by discussions on how prevailing gender relations in Gharimi mapped into the material, symbolic, and historical (or caste-based) basis for institutional formation.<sup>96</sup>

### 8.2.1 History of Struggle for Bhumipujnee and Teesdhunge Forest

The history of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest was fraught with struggle and contestations. Competing claims on the forest of Bhumipujnee as well as Teesdhunge were made by two different communities. On the one hand, the *Poudyals*<sup>97</sup> argued that the forest was their ancestral property and that their clan goddess resided in the land<sup>98</sup>. On the other hand, the *Dalits* posited that there were no formal owners of the property; the land was barren and the *Biswa-Karmass* had helped plant trees in it; they had no other legitimate access to forests whereas the *Poudyals* had controlled multiple; the forest was closer to their settlement and hence under the 1993 and 1995 community forestry laws they had legitimate claims over the forests; and finally to deny them usufruct rights over the forest was an extension of the historical exploitation of *Dalits* at the hands of the high-castes.

Just as there were competing claims over the forest, there were multiple narratives of the struggle over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge. Nevertheless, one of the more widely subscribed to versions (as relayed by the *Dalits* of Gharmi, DFO-KI staff who were involved, and independent observers) Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge was formally registered as government land, but informally claimed as ancestral property by *Poudyals*. The *Poudyals* had alternative mediums to access forest products through trees in private forests and/or the five jointly protected forests. The Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge forest was therefore kept relatively barren and left as a place for worship of the high-caste clan goddess. In 1987, the DFO-KI commissioned the *Dalits* living nearby the forest to begin plantation work and paid them Rs.0.50 per tree planted. For the next 5 years, the forest was administered by the DFO-KI and a forest guard was hired to monitor it.

In 1994, the *Dalits* of Gharmi, through a formal communiqué (letter), requested the DFO-KI to grant them usufruct rights when they learnt of user group oriented community forest being implemented in other parts of Kaski district. Two Forest Rangers from the DFO-KI came to inspect the forest. They decided to initiate handover process on the condition that *Dalits* begin to manage the forest while their request was being processed. The *Dalits* were given the responsibility of monitoring the forest and conducting siviculture activities every six months. The forest officials of the DFO-KI also encouraged the *Biswa-Karmass* to begin plantation work in Teesdhunge as there were possibilities of including Teesdhunge in the handover. When the high-caste came to find out of the above developments, they filed a

counter claim at the DFO-KI against the hand-over of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest to the *Dalits*.

Physical violence broke out between the two parties several times. The *Poudyals* wanted to halt any work on the forest until the issue of handover was legally decided. The *Dalits*, in contrast, wanted to continue with their assigned responsibilities so as to increase their chances of a more favorable hand over decision. The DFO-KI, after three years of relentless struggle between the two parties, decided that the *Biswa-Karmass* claim was more legitimate and in line with government forest policies. Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge was finally handed over to the *Dalits* in 1996. The struggle over community forest had far reaching and extra-local consequences. This also percolated to the historical patron-client relationship between the high and low-castes. Numerous external actors such as the DFO-KI and the Police were involved. Interviews with members of both the castes stated that the situation between the two remained tense ever since the struggle broke out. Even at the time of the field study, the struggle over the forests was fresh in the minds of both parties.

The low caste framed the impetus for the struggle over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest in the following manner: (1) Material – lack of access to forest products and dependence on high-caste controlled forests; (2) Normative – preserve women’s honor; and (3) Historical – caste based discrimination. Gender ideologies and caste-based politics were, therefore, crucial in driving the struggle over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest.

### 8.2.2 *Material Basis for the Struggle*

When I began my field work and learnt about the struggle for the community forest in Gharmi, both *Biswa-Karma* men and women commonly said that ‘secure access to forest products’ were the primary reasons for requesting the handover. The quotation below from a *Biswa-Karma* man (early 40s, March 2005) who was in the village and involved in community forestry reflects this:

*We requested the ‘sarkar’ [government, implying the DFO –KI] for the handover of the forest. We needed forest product for cooking, for feeding our livestock, to make organic manure and for building houses....But we are poor and have very little land of our own...We thought having the ‘samudayak ban’ [community forest] would help us meet our needs.*

As part of my field work on community forestry, I examined the nature and extent of 'dependence on' and 'access to forest products' amongst the *Biswa-Karma* households. I found prevailing material differences within the *Biswa-Karma* households mediated households' relative dependence on and access to forest products. The discussion below is from a total of 50 households I interviewed. For analytical clarity, I have divided the households into three main groups: rich (12 out of the interviewees), medium (33 out of 50), and poor (5 out of 50).

According to the 50 household structured interviews I conducted, all the households said they required firewood (for cooking), fodder (for livestock and organic manuring for agricultural production), and timber (for construction purposes). A few households also said they needed forest products for medicinal purposes.

All of the households I interviewed reported that they were 'heavily dependent' on forest products. There were some variations in relative dependence between the wealthier strata of *Biswa-Karma* population and the others. The medium and poor households suggested they were more dependent on forest products than the richer ones for firewood, fodder and timber. The richer households had comparatively more land and were using chemical fertilizers instead of organic ones. They were increasingly investing on alternative sources of energy and particularly bio-gas at the time of the field work to reduce their dependence on firewood. Biogas was largely unaffordable to average *Biswa-Karma* household because of the high initial cost of setting up bio-gas (approximately Rs.10,000).

In spite of these differences, the richer households still remained dependent on forest products in different ways than the medium and poor households. For example, all of the 12 rich households interviewed owned at least one if not more buffaloes. Livestock in the village context was considered a 'luxury' that only those with substantial income and large amount of grazing land could afford. These households were large land owners and recipients of regular remittances from male household members abroad. Interviewees of household members representing the richer echelons of B.K. society said they preferred to use traditional stove for cooking '*kudo*' for feeding their livestock which still required large amounts of firewood, collected from the forest.



*Biswa-Karmas* of Gharimi accessed forest products through the following means: (1) private land, (2) purchase from local markets, (3) public land, (4) patron-client relationship, and (5) community forests. These means of accessing forest products were in also heavily mediated by inter-community differences in material well-being. The 'richer' households, 12 out of the 50 interviewed, said they had sufficient firewood and fodder for 8-12 months of the year from 'private land' and/or 'local markets'. These households were also the ones with the most amount of land (between 8-14 *ropanis*) and/or with one or more male migrants sending regular supply of remittances back. The major concern, according to the 8 of the 12 interviewees in this category of household, was timber. Timber was largely inaccessible through their private land and market rate for timber exuberantly high.

The vast majority of the households in Gharimi fell under the 'medium' category, 33 out of the 50 interviewed. These households could depend on their land (between 3-7 *ropanis*) for no more than 2-6 months a year. Most of the interviewees also said purchasing forest products from the market would be unaffordable. The last category, 5 out of 50 interviewed, had even less access to land (1/2 to 2 *ropanis*), which severely constrained their access to forest products through private land. These households' relied solely on daily wage agricultural and non-agricultural work for their livelihood and struggled to make ends meet.

It is worth noting here the limitations of the above analysis of access and demand for forest products. I gathered the information documented above to capture the state of demand for and access to forest products at the time of the field work (Feb 2005). I could not carry out a more detailed, time series study. It was difficult to make interviewees state precisely the changes in forest product demand since community forest was officially handed over to the low-castes in 1997. A more detailed time-series data would have been particularly useful in surveying the changes in demand and access to forest products. Nevertheless, there are reasons to argue that the dependence on forest products was even more acute before community forestry was handed over.

It was generally reported to me in the village, confirmed by VDC-level records, that Improved Cooking Stove (ICS) was widely adopted in the village since 1995. Interviewees added their demand for forest products and particularly of firewood reduced significantly once they started using ICS. Furthermore, as pointed out in the previous chapter, male out-migration to the countries of the Gulf and South East Asia started booming since 1999. Even

the members of the 'richest' households in the village with male migrants in South East Asia or Qatar reported that their abilities to purchase forest products increased substantially once they received regular flow of remittances.

With regards to public land, interviews as well as personal observation confirmed that there was little scope for regular supply of forest products from the grass and small branches available in 'public land'. I was told by *Biswa-Karmas* that supply of forest products from the high-castes, through patron-client relationship, was at best arbitrary and at the discretion of the high-castes. This made relying on patron-client relationship for forest products unreliable.

Access to forest products through community forests was an important source of forest product for vast majority of the low-caste households although there was limited amount of forest products available to users at the time of the field research. The community forest committee members were discussing the possibilities of increasing its availability. At the time of the field research, the community forest was open four times a year for the users to collect grass, and two times a year (during sivicultural activities) for firewood. Timber was only available in special occasions. Depending on the size of households, household structured interviews revealed the amount of fodder and firewood allowed to be collected was sufficient for a total of two to four months. Medium and poor households therefore, had a particularly difficult time meeting their demand for firewood and fodder through community forests.

Initially, the interviewees were reluctant to disclose to me how they addressed shortages in forest products. After gaining trust and confidence, some interviewees as well as key informants (male and four female) confided in me that the *Biswa-Karmas* had historically extracted forest products 'illegally' from the 5 forests controlled by the high caste. According to the low-castes as well as my high-caste informants (2 high-caste men, 1 high-caste male studying at the Institute of Forestry), the high-castes would sell the forest products to the *Biswa-Karmas* but refused to make alternative arrangements for the low-castes to access forest products on a regular basis. They also monitored the forests rigorously and reprimanded any 'illegal' extraction of forest products. However, most of the community forest controlled by the high-castes, adjoined the low-caste village, were dense and difficult to monitor. Hence, as I was informed, the low-castes were able to 'illegally' access the forest products from the high-caste controlled forests. The vast majority of the households relied, to varying extents, on such 'illegal forms of accesses'.

8.2.3 *Normative Impetus behind the Struggle*

The *Biswa-Karma*'s also put forth a normative argument for their struggle over the legal usufruct rights to Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest which were borrowed from pre-existing gender relations, and from gender ideologies of '*ijjat*' or honor.

At the inter-community level, access to private land and disposable income were crucial in mediating households' relative dependence on forest products. Poor and medium households that comprised majority of the households in the village were particularly dependent on forest products. There was a further disaggregation based on gender lines at the intra-household level.

As discussed in the previous chapter on gender relations, the *Biswa-Karmas* associated different forms of work within and outside the household with masculine and feminine connotations; demarcated work within and outside household along gender lines; and enforced these demarcations in practice through gendered norms prescribing 'appropriate behavior' for men and women. The *Biswa-Karmas* perceived 'collecting forest products', particularly firewood and fodder, with local interpretations of femininity and as women's domain of work. As two of my interviewees explained to me (male early 30s, married with children; female 27, married with children; March 2005) with reference to the logic behind the division of labor for forest products, firewood was used for cooking purposes and fodder for feeding livestock. The *Biswa-Karmas* defined cooking and feeding as 'nurturing' roles that were under women's responsibilities.

The extent to which these divisions in 'forest product collection' responsibilities were enforced became particularly visible when I conducted a total of 25 daily activities schedule with 10 men and 15 women, a cross-section of *Biswa-Karma* society. 9 of the women indicated 'collecting forest products' as a regular activity whereas none of the male respondents mentioned it as part of their work. Similarly, in household structured interviews, male interviewees could not answer my question of how much forest products the household consumed whereas women were more likely to provide answers. Some men even took offence at my question, as is illustrated below from an interview with a senior, *Biswa-Karma* male (54 years old man, community leader, and former chairperson of community forestry, Feb 2005)

*Why are you asking us? How would we know about fuel wood? You have to ask those who are in charge of the kitchen—the women.*

The above differences in men and women's responses were a product of pre-existing gender division of labor – the practice of demarcating gender division of labor along norms of what was 'appropriate behavior' for men and women.

Furthermore, the daily activities exercise also revealed that it was primarily the 'junior' women in households who were in charge of collecting forest products. Women interviewees ranked collecting forest products as the most difficult and time-consuming work. In addition, having to illegally extract forest products from neighboring high-castes' forests made the collection of forest products an even less desirable task. Such perceptions formed the underlying logic, according to women informants (two junior women living in joint families), why senior women offloaded the forest product collecting duties to the junior women in the household (Refer to discussion on gender hierarching and division of labor in Chapter Seven).

I learnt through women interviewees that 'stealing' from high-caste forests was one of the main ways in which low-castes gained access to forest products. It was primarily the women who were responsible for stealing and at least one female member of each household had/or continued to participate in stealing forest products at the time of the field research. Women would form small groups of four or five and steal in the late hours of the night to minimize their chances of being caught.

I was also interested to find out women's experiences of stealing. However, individual women were less willing to admit and/or give names of other women who participated in organized forms of stealing for fear that it may be leaked to the high-castes. Only four women (all junior women, two living in joint families and one in nuclear) volunteered to share their experiences with me. These women informants said that the high-castes used verbal and physical threats of 'dishonoring' women to discourage them from entering the high-caste forests, as the quotation below illustrates. I have discussed in Chapter Seven that the low-castes interpreted 'honor' as avoiding local idioms of 'sexuality' and 'inappropriate behavior'. Maintaining 'honor' was crucial for women's position in the household and the community. I was explained by one of my low caste informants (wife of the local *Bamin* in the village, in

her mid 40s, living in joint family) that a woman's honor was at stake when she had extra-marital sexual interactions with men, both voluntarily and involuntarily.

*"We have to take many precautions every time we go to the high-caste forest to replenish our stocks...We cannot have a predictable time for when to go to the forest; we cannot go in big groups; we cannot take more than what we can carry and run; there are so many of these precautions. We are in constant fear of being caught especially because what they are going to do to us is always so unpredictable. In good days, they just snatch our equipments and let us go; in other days, they snatch our equipments and scream at us, call us randi [prostitute]; in the worst days, they are even more ruthless, they do all of what I said and also snatch our clothes. We feel so humiliated you see like someone has just stripped us off our ijjat [honor]. But what can we do, we need to eat, we need to feed our families, we need to feed the livestock, and that means we have to go back to the forest every time and in constant fear!"*

The threat of sexual humiliation and abuse that women faced at the hands of the high-castes formed the normative basis for the low-castes to request the handover of community forests. The six men who formed the low-caste delegation to request the handover of community forests stated in interviews that 'secure access to forest resources' along with the 'preserving women's honor' were the primary reasons for approaching the DFO.

*We requested the handover of community forests on behalf of our cheli-beti...to protect their ijjat [honor]. (Community leaders, late 50s, March 2005)*

Interestingly, the very strategy that the high-castes used to discourage the low-castes from stealing the forest products formed one of the major reasons why the low-castes requested the hand over of community forests. Furthermore, the deployment of 'ijjat' from both sides also helps elucidate my argument in the previous chapter of the similarities between high and low caste practices and how caste ideologies of "purity" of the patriline influenced and informed gendered practices.

#### **8.2.4 Historical Basis for the Struggle**

The material and normative grievances formed the basis for the *Biswa-Karmas's* to request for the handover of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest. But when the high caste filed counter claims and opposed the handover of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest, the struggle for community forest that ensued took a life of its own and was enmeshed into the on-going caste based struggle in the village. Furthermore, the low-caste 'political entrepreneurs' who had requested the DFO – KI, on behalf of the *Biswa-Karma* community, for the handover Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge were instrumental in politicizing the struggle for community forest along caste-based lines.

The quotation below serve to illustrate how political discourses of ‘justice’, ‘fairness’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘rights’ to resist against caste-based discrimination<sup>99</sup> were also extended to mobilize support for the struggle for legal, usufruct rights over community forests. The quotations below are from the two of the major leaders leading the community forests as well ordinary villages supporting the struggle for community forests<sup>100</sup>.

*The high-castes had no legitimate claim over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge. The Poudyals had not raised a voice when the forest was left barren or when the forest for decades was being protected by the DFO-KI as national forest. But when we asked for the forest to be transferred as community forests to us, the forests suddenly became their ancestral property. There still is no legal proof that Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge was their ancestral land.*

*(An elderly Biswa-Karma man, one of the community leaders who also held community forest committee positions a number of times)*

*According to Forest Act 1993 and Forest Regulation 1995, hand-over of forests are prioritized for those communities living closest to national forest. Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge surrounds our settlement and is much more accessible to us than to the Poudyals. We had more rights over the forests than they did.”*

*(Youth community leader who went to become a member in the Village Development Committee, from a FECOFUN documentary made on the caste-based struggle for community forestry in Gharmi, 2001)*

*The high-caste did not need Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge to meet their needs for forest products. They have always had sufficient access to forest products from their private lands and/or 5 of their commonly managed forests. It was not fair of them to constantly deny us access.*

*(Middle aged Biswa-Karma woman, March 2005)*

Majority of the *Biswa-Karma* men and women I spoke to during the course of the study vouched for overwhelming support for the struggle in the village. The third quotation above illustrates that the impetus behind participating in the struggle for ordinary women and men were also couched in and subscribed to the larger political discourses employed by the community leaders.

Mobilizing support for the struggle, however, did not only exist at the discursive level. Low-caste informants who had observed the entire struggle also said that the community leaders went to great length to ensure there was a unified voice and commitment amongst the *Biswa-Karmas*, and against the high-caste. One of the main ways was through a low-caste labor strike against working for the high-castes (in the capacity share-croppers, daily wage agricultural worker, and other forms of employment). They also monitored all the villagers

who worked for the high castes on a regular basis to ensure everyone cooperated with the strike.

*We had widespread support from our brothers in the struggle, but there were also certain individuals and households who did not understand what our movement was about and would not follow our general strike against working for the high-castes. The high-castes, to cripple our movement from its roots, would take back to work all the Dalits who approached them. We would stay up the entire night if necessary in those households we were suspicious of not adhering by the strike. We would also publicly defame shirking households to discourage them in the future.*

*(Biswa-Karma man, early 30s, returned from Qatar in between contracts, heavily involved in struggle for community forest).*

When I further inquired on this issue and interviewed two household who had allegedly shirked, I came to find out, as I had suspected, that it was not ‘lack of awareness of the movement’ as much as the necessities of everyday livelihood that forced individuals and households to shirk. In other words, the households who depended more on patron-client relationship had difficulties in conforming to the strike as it would mean loss of daily wage. This problematizes the concept of a unified low-caste struggle against the high-caste, as was frequently relayed to me during the field study. Furthermore, it shows that nuanced coercive means were deployed to iron out contradictions within the struggle. Such contradictions within the struggle also maps into my argument in the previous chapter that in spite of a seemingly unified *Biswa-Karma* identity as shaped by resistance against caste-discrimination, there existed differences within the *Biswa-Karma* society based on material well-being and gender. The next section will discuss the gendered dimensions of the struggle and its outcomes.

### **8.3 Gender Dimensions of the Struggle & Implications for Institutional Formation & Functioning**

There were considerable differences in men and women’s roles and responsibilities in the struggle. While men were at the forefront of the struggle—physically battling; mobilizing other *Biswa-Karma* support; negotiating with high-castes and other external actors—women’s roles and responsibilities were limited to supporting men at best. Gender division of labor and gender ideologies of women’s seclusion and ‘appropriate for women behavior’ had prevented women from making a ‘visible’ contribution to the movement. However, when community forestry was handed over in 1997, ‘community’ at large used ‘visibility’ as the main criteria to nominate individuals hold decision making power and help formulate institutions for governing the community forests. The institutions that were formed to manage community

forests therefore reflected these underlying gender-based inequalities and were maintained through lack of concerted effort on the part of women to contest against these institutional configurations. This section will therefore, discuss how prevailing gender inequalities and women's roles in the reproduction of these inequalities (as discussed in Chapter Seven) informed and shaped the formation and functioning of institutions.

### **8.3.1 *Gender Differences in the Roles & Responsibilities in the Struggle for community forest***

Vast majority of the *Biswa-Karmas* I spoke to in the village said that the struggle for Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest was the biggest struggle they had personally been involved in. But I was equally interested to find out about the gender differences, if any, in the struggle for community forests. As part of my analysis, I asked ordinary *Biswa-Karmas*—10 men and 10 women—who said they were present in and participated throughout the struggle what their major roles and responsibilities were (March 2005). Interestingly, there were clear differences in responses along gender lines.

Male interviewees spoke of their trips to the DFO-KI and the police to launch complaints against the high-castes; how the high-castes had the 'police in their pocket' and had them arrested several times; how they lead and/or participated in the labor strike against the high-castes; how they had gotten into verbal and physical struggle with the high-castes and others. Women, in comparison, told me they had suffered increases in verbal abuse by the high-castes, gotten the courage together to yell back at the high-caste forest guard, and supported the labor strike by not going to work for the high-castes. The quotation below from a low-caste woman (late 40s, March 2005) poignantly illustrates the underlying difference in men and women's participation in the struggle:

*My husband fought and was beaten in the struggle to get our forests from the Bahuns. But I also fought. We were like back stage and front stage actors in theatre. I provided the necessary ammunition and support, and my husband represented both of us in the struggle.*

When I asked women why they had not participated in the same way that the men had, the interviewees gave varying responses which included some of the following:

*I had my house and children to take care of. I could not have left everything the same way that men did. (Biswa-Karmas woman, married with children living in nuclear household, in her mid-20s at the time of the struggle)*



*The senior members of my family fought on our behalf. I was told to follow their instructions. And, I stopped working for the high-castes when they told me to. We could not be the face of the struggle as much as men could. So we did what we were asked to. I stopped working for the high-castes. I was part of a woman's group who went to the forest frequently...more than we had ever done...to steal forest products.*

*(Biswa-Karmas woman, had recently been married and living in joint family during the struggle)*

I argue these responses suggest existing gender relations between men and women shaped the terms under which men and women participated in the struggle. For instance, the first quotation suggests the gender division of labor and view of women as 'care-takers' and 'men as breadwinners' defined men and women's roles and responsibilities in the struggle.

### **8.3.2 Gender Dynamics in the Formation of community forest Institutions**

The community forestry was finally handed over to the *Biswa-Karmas* after three years of relentless struggle with the high-castes, and the involvement of numerous external actors such as the DFO – KI, and the police. The story of 'struggle of powerless low-caste community for their rights to access forest' made news throughout the district. The Federation of Community Forestry User Group (FECOFUN) in Kaski District has also made a short documentary on the caste-based struggle for community forestry in Gharni. In spite of the conflict over community forestry in Bhatpole epitomizing struggle against oppression, women were systematically excluded from the decision-making and institutional building processes.

The community forestry committee was the body responsible for establishing the formal and informal rules governing community forests. According to interviewees with 8 of the first 11 community forest committee members (all male), once the forest was handed over, the forest officials from the DFO – KI had instructed the village to hold a General Assembly of all the *Biswa-Karmas*, and elect a forest committee of 11-members. The committee would be responsible for drafting the 'constitution' and 'operation plan' (the major formal institutions to govern the forests); monitoring and enforcing these formal institutions; and resolving the disputes along the way. Given the level of authority that the committee members would have, the major positions in the committee (those of the chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer and secretary) would be occupied to the five community leaders who had also played a prominent role throughout the community forest struggle. Furthermore, a number of village wide assemblies were held to carefully discuss, debate, and nominate the remaining committee members. The debates about who had the legitimacy to occupy committee positions were framed in terms of 'who had contributed most to the community forest processes'.

*We all came together in front of the Middle school [adjoins the Biswa-Karmas settlement and a major community-level meeting point] to decide on the committee members. The senior community leaders had already decided that five of them would assume the major community forest committee positions...As for the rest of the committee members; one of the senior village leaders had a list of 15 candidates. He read out the names of each of the members, and gave a detailed description of how they had contributed to the struggle. He instructed us that he will call out the name of each of the members, and we should vote on the basis of who we thought had contributed most to the struggle and had the right to occupy these positions.*

*(Biswa-Karmas man, age 31, struggled in the community forest process, and was present in the first GA)*

I also asked ordinary users (10 men and 10 women) as well as the first committee members in the CFUG (9 of the 11) how and why each of the committee members qualified for their respective positions. The table below summarizes the composition of the first committee members. These interviewees unanimously pointed out that relative ‘contribution to the struggle’ was the primary criteria for village leaders to assume the major community forest committee positions as well as for electing the remaining committee members.

**Figure 6: Composition of the First community forest Committee**

No.	Gender of the Committee Member	Position held	Criteria for Nominating
1.	Male	Chairperson	Leading role in the struggle. Community decision-maker.
2.	Male	Vice-Chairperson	Leading role in the struggle. Senior, community decision-making position.
3.	Male	Treasurer	Leading role in the struggle. Senior, community decision making position.
4.	Male	Secretary	Leading role in the struggle. Senior, community decision making position.
5.	Male	Vice-Secretary	Leading role in the struggle
6.	Male	Committee member	‘Visible’ contribution in the struggle.
7.	Male	Committee member	‘Visible’ contribution in the struggle.
8.	Male	Committee member	‘Visible’ contribution in the struggle.
9.	Male	Committee member	‘Visible’ contribution in the struggle.
10.	Male	Committee member	‘Visible’ contribution in the struggle.
11.	Female	Committee member	Husband had fought in the struggle.

The table above demonstrates that there was only one female amongst the 11 member first committee. The first vice-chairperson of the community forest committee responsible for advocating for the woman to be a part of the community forest committee said she was

nominated and elected as a tribute to her husband. Her husband was the only *Poudyal* who had sympathized with the *Biswa-Karmas*, contributed to the *Biswa-Karma's* struggle, but had fallen ill and could not participate in the committee himself. Furthermore, the woman committee member also stated in an interview that she was elected to symbolically represent her husband in the committee and not because she stood as a woman candidate.

I argue the male domination of the community forest committee was a product of: (a) the committee replicating pre-existing organization of the household and community in Gharmi; and (b) the gender exclusivity embedded in the criteria used to nominate and elect the committee members.

When I asked three of the five major committee position holders why they had chosen to participate in the committee, the responses I received were comparable to the quotation below:

*Our samudayak [community] needed people like me...I had sacrificed everything for the struggle. I had experiences representing our community and the struggle to outsiders, managing accounts, and had built a reputation as a community leader....Our struggle for the forest had received much attention and appraisal. People like you came to us regularly to speak to us to learn about the struggle. The DFO had given us a big grant to start the plantation work. We recognized that not just anyone could manage this...But we also held elections and made sure that those who the samudayak chose were also in the committee.*

*(First Treasurer of the CF committee, male, one of the most well known community leaders)*

As the quotation above suggests, the governance of the 'community forestry' was not only about securing access to forest products, but had transformed into a village wide public affair. Consequently, pre-existing structures of 'community' decision-making were also extended and reinforced. Senior community leaders had vested interest in ensuring the material and social resources generated through community forestry was managed by the community leaders themselves. I also learnt through two of my informants who were in the community forest committee at the time of the field work (male 23 committee member; newly married woman living in nuclear household, ordinary committee member; and first, female Vice-chairperson, early 40s, living in nuclear household) that the first Vice-Chairperson of the committee later became the first low-caste to be represented in the Lamachaur Village Development Committee (VDC level decision making body). He used his involvement in the struggle as a platform to launch his political career.

The logic behind employing ‘visibility of contribution to the struggle’ as the primary criterion, as I was told by the major committee members (Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer), was to ensure ‘free-riders’ were not included in the community forest committee. I argue parallels could be drawn between the logic of qualifying individuals to assume community level decision making positions (see: Chapter Seven) and those in the community forest committee. Just as individuals had to ‘earn’ the right to assume community-level positions based on the extent of their ‘independence from caste-based relations’, individuals had to ‘earn’ the right to assume community forest committee members based on the ‘visibility’ of their contribution to the struggle. The implication of such a criterion, at both the community and committee levels, was that women were prevented from taking community level decision making roles. As in the case of the ‘community’, gendered practices such as gender division of labor and the norms enforcing them meant women could not contribute to the struggle in the same way as men could. There was also a pre-defined understanding of what counted as ‘contribution’. Just as women’s contribution to the household, albeit materially less than men’s, were ‘invisibilized’ in intra-household allocation of resources, women’s contribution to the struggle, albeit more as ‘back stage actors’, were also discounted.

The community forest committee, with support from the DFO-KI extension officials, formulated the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’, the formal institutions to govern community forests in Gharmi. According to interviews with committee members as well as with one the forest guard responsible for overseeing Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest, the forest ranger and guard provided the following support (in the initial phases of post hand-over): instructed the users and committee members of the community forest process; divided the forest into blocks and carried out forest inventory surveys; provided material and financial support to start plantation in the various blocks; helped draft the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’; instructed the committee of the major government related community forest provisions (such as those specified in the Forest Act 1993 and Forest Regulation 1995); and lobbied the DFO-KI for the quick approval of the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ . However, as the Secretary of the first community forest committee worded it, the forest officials did not ‘interfere’ with the following types of rules: criteria for membership, forest protection, forest development, distribution of benefits from community forest, and dispute resolution related rules. He added that:

*The committee sat together and decided on the major rules for forest management to be included in the 'constitution' and 'operation plan'. We then called for a General Assembly of all the users and got the 'constitution' and 'operation plan' approved.*

The quotation above suggests that the DFO-KI was complicit in the reproduction of gender inequalities.

I interviewed 30 women (of varying ages, marital status, and socio-economic backgrounds) who were present in the village at the time of the struggle about their roles and responsibilities in the institutional formation processes. As the quotations from interviews suggests, women either did not attend the community forest related events (including the General Assembly) and/or rarely voiced their concerns and interests. These interviews further reflect that community forestry decision-making processes had transformed into a 'village-wide' affair which were usurped by men and/or where gendered norms prescribing 'appropriate behavior' for women were reproduced.

*I did not go because I was not told that we [women] could come and participate.*

*(Biswa-Karma elderly woman, living in joint household with her youngest son at the time of the first GA)*

*I was one of the few women who had attended the validation meeting. The forest ranger simply read out what was written in the 'constitution' and 'operation plan'. I did not even understand what were the differences between the two documents...But how could I have said anything. My in-laws, village elders and even outsiders [referring to the DFO officials] were there.*

*(Biswa-Karma woman, recently married and living in joint household at the time of the first GA)*

Similarly, the only woman member (*Poudyal*) of the community forest committee had the following to say about the quality of her participation in the community forest process:

*I was there as a tribute to my husband's role in the struggle. Even if I had wanted to participate, I would not have gotten far. Half the time I did not understand anything that the rest of the committee members were discussing. If I ever said something...like ask a question about a particular issue they raised in the meeting. I would be told to keep quiet. It was not a place for a woman.*

### **8.3.3 Institutions as Reflection of Gender Inequalities**

As part of my field analysis, I examined the first 'constitution' and 'operation plan' which together constituted the formal institutions governing community forests in Gharmi. I combined analysis of these documents with interviews of committee members to understand the logic behind formulating the rules stated in the documents, and ordinary men and women

to understand how they experienced these institutions in practice (informal rules). I found the following rules stated in the CO and OP, and the ways in which they were being implemented in practice systematically marginalized women's entry, voice and influence in the community forest process: criteria for membership, forest protection, forest development, distribution of benefits from community forest, and dispute resolution related rules. Because of space constraints, I cannot go through the details of my findings. I will therefore focus on the following major formal and informal rules: criteria for membership and the distribution of benefits and costs. My analysis will demonstrate that the institutions and the resulting gender-based exclusions were a product of women's lack of voice in the institutional formation processes as well as 'borrowed' from gender inequalities between men and women at the intra and extra-household levels (institutional bricolage).

The first 'constitution' of *Birawtapakha-Teesdhunge* Community Forestry User Group stated that because all *Biswa-Karmas* settlements adjoin the community forests, all households are eligible for membership provided: each household pay an annual membership fee of Rs.200, volunteer their labor for forest protection and management purposes, and adhere to rules stated in the 'constitution' and 'operation plan' more generally. However, in other parts of the documents, it is implied that there can be only one community forest member per household. The end of the 'constitution', for instance, lists the names of 64 'users' and their respective addresses. Except for six names of women (widow and unmarried women-headed households) all the other names were of men's.

The 'constitution' goes on to state that only 'recognized users' are entitled to attend General Assemblies and stand for elections in and be a part of the community forestry committee. In other words, only recognized users had the right to have a voice in major community forest related issues and decision making processes. Given the nature of the organization of the household (refer to section 7.2.1), it was the senior men in the household who were recognized as users, as is reflected and legitimized in the quotations below.

*The rules of membership allowed only one member per household and it was my husband who was able to participate in community forest-related decisions more than I. (Elderly Biswa-Karma woman)*

*We thought that if we had recognized more than one household member as user then the user would have had to make membership fee chargeable to each user and not each household. We had decided that would not have been a fair system for the poorest households in the village. (First Treasurer of the community forest committee, and a community leader)*

With regards to the distribution of costs and benefits in participating in community forestry, the ‘operation plan’ states that each user-household must contribute towards guarding and protecting the forests on a rotation basis.

*Community forestry was about joint efforts. Each user-household got its share of forest products. And in return, each user-household had to contribute its labor for community forest related activities. (First Vice-Chairperson of the community forest committee, and a community leader)*

In practice, although women were not recognized as the ‘formal users’, they still, as members of user households, had to contribute their labor for forest protection activities. According to the men and women I interviewed, it was mostly women who were tasked with community forest protection duties. Because collecting forest products were demarcated as women’s responsibility at the household level, women by de-facto were prescribed majority of the forestry related duties.

Furthermore, according to interviews with the first CFUG committee members, women were viewed as ‘thieves’ of forest products, and assumed to be in a better position to monitor and convince each other not to steal. However, most women interviewees complained *Bahuns* who would enter the forests for retaliation purposes. The *Bahuns* would often cut young trees, destroy recently planted trees, and/or leave their goats to feed on fodder. The women responsible for forest production would be left with little ammunition to confront and/or fight back. The quotation below from a low-caste woman (married with one child at the time of the field work) illustrates this.

*My husband would inform me every few months when it was my turn to protect the forest. I had to stay awake the whole night and make sure there were no trespassers...In one incident, the Bahuns had sneaked to our forest at night and destroyed our plantations while I was on duty...I was blamed for stealing the forest products and not looking after the forest properly by the committee members.*

The ‘operation plan’ states that sivicultural activities such as pruning, weeding and others be conducted every six months as part of the CFUG’s forest development efforts. This was also the time when users would be able to gather forest products (mainly firewood and fodder) from the community forest. Households would have to contribute labor—1 man or 2 women in the absence of men. With regards to the mechanism for distribution of forest products, the forests would be divided into three blocks (Bhumipujnee, Bhirpani and Teesdhunge) and particular number of users (depending on the size and availability of forest

products of the block) would be allocated to conduct siviculture activities per block. All the dried wood, fodder and grass would then be collected and divided in relatively equal bundles. A draw system would be used to distribute the bundles to ensure there was no favoritism.

*We had to use a distribution system based on equality to minimize conflicts. If we started saying one household could access more forest products than another one, there would be far too many disputes. (Biswa-Karmas man, early 40s, first community forest committee member)*

While the system of distributing forest products was premised on ‘equality’, it was heavily criticized by women from poorer households for disregarding the differential needs for forest products within the CFUG. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the wealthier households had greater means of accessing forest products than the poorer ones.

Furthermore, women interviewees viewed the need to contribute more female labor in the absence of male labor for siviculture activities as ‘unjust’. Women had to contribute more labor without any security of formal rights as users. Such a rule further served to undervalue women’s labor in the *Biswa-Karma* community, and reinforced inequalities in gender division of labor.

**8.3.4 Women’s Role in Maintaining Institutional Exclusions**

There tended to be a general agreement amongst my informants and women interviewees that women were systematically excluded from community forest institutions. Some interviewees were vocal in their criticism of the male dominated nature of community forest institutions as is demonstrated by the quotation below:

*The struggle was launched under our name...to secure us access to forest products...but we had little to say in what kind of rules we the user group would implement...our interests were not represented in the community forestry committee...we were not called upon to discuss what we wanted out of the community forestry...we were merely told that the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ was ready and that we would have to be present at the GA to get it passed...and when some of us I [women] got the courage to complain later that the rules did not consider our interest, we were told that we had passed the rules and the time to make changes had passed.*  
*(Biswa-Karmas woman in her early 30s, married living in nuclear household when community forest first ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ were being implemented)*

However, most women interviewees suggested that they either ‘keeping quiet’ or employed ‘covert’ means to work around lack of access – i.e. did little to confront the gender biases in the CF rules. The latter is illustrated by the quotation below.



*I hated it when I had forest protection duties. It would be so tiring and frightening to walk around aimlessly in the forest at the night time. So I would request my husband...both verbally and through other means...to get his friends in the committee to skip my protection duty. (Biswa-Karmas woman, newly married and living in joint household at the time of the first 'constitution' and 'operation plan' were implemented)*

The interviewees suggested there was little basis for collective action amongst women to contest against the CF rules, as is depicted by the quotation below.

*I had shared my idea of getting a group of village women together to demand for changes in the community forest rules with my mother-in-law. She scolded me for trying to bring shame to my father-in-law...My father-in-law was a member of the committee and she feared that I would gang up on him and he would lose his face amongst the other committee members. But she could have helped me if she had wanted to...She commands a lot of respect amongst women in the community... But she did not care because I am the one who is responsible for collecting forest products and all the community forest-related work, not her.*

*(Biswa-Karmas woman, married with children, living in nuclear household but adjacent to in-laws when 'constitution' and 'operation plan' were first implemented)*

I argue the above three quotations need to be understood in the context of the multiple and contradictory ways in which women were contributing to the reproduction of gender inequalities in Gharhi (see: section 7.3).

The first and third quotation above underlines the gendered hierarchies between junior and senior women at the intra-household level, and how these in turn, shaped women's experiences with and interests in community forestry. The senior women's resistance against collective action, as shown on the third quotation, reflects the ways in which women's social positions were intertwined with those of their husbands' and household's more generally. The quotation suggests the mother-in-law (a senior woman in the household) feared that by collectively confronting the community forestry committee, she would risk jeopardizing the authority and influence of her husband, a member of the community forest committee. Finally, the second quotation alludes to the various overt and 'private' strategies women employed in their everyday relations to secure support from men, but without questioning the basis of gender biases in institutions.

#### **8.4 Gendered Institutional Changes, External Intervention & Women's Experiences**

The institutions established to govern community forest and the prevailing gender relations at the intra and extra-household levels were intricately intertwined in Gharhi.

Gender relations were constantly ‘borrowed’ in the formation, functioning and change of local institutions. Chapter seven outlined how gender relations were constituted and re-constituted through the interplay between socio-cultural practices, caste, and the changing context of male out-migration. The sections in this chapter have so far focused on evidence of ‘institutional bricolage’ and how the prevailing gender relations mapped into the formation and functioning of institutions of community forest governance.

The community forestry institutions in Gharhi were undergoing both incremental and radical changes since the community forestry was handed over to the *Biswa-Karmas* in 1997. In particular, there were many rules in the CO and OP that were aimed at promoting women in the governance of the community forest.

This section argues the gender inclusive institutional changes in CO and OP were a product of shifts in community forestry policies, external intervention and outcome of the interface between FECOFUN and the *Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge* CFUG. However, I will also argue the extent and nature of gender inclusivity of these institutional changes were in turn, explicitly and implicitly re-negotiated by the powerful agents and interests within the *Biswa-Karma* community. The ways in which male out-migration were impacting on the gender relations in Gharhi (as discussed in section 7.5) also mapped into gender dynamics in community forestry institutions and shaped women’s experiences of institutional changes.

#### **8.4.1 Gender & Institutional Change**

In sharp contrast to the first Constitution and Operational Plans, there were a number of changes in the second CO and OP, revised and released in 2003, aimed at promoting women in community forestry.

The revised ‘operation plan’ explicitly states that one of the most important objective of the *Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge* community forest is the ‘empowerment of women, poor and deprived’. This was a noticeable change from the first ‘operation plan’ which mentioned ‘sustainable forest management’ and ‘community development’ as the objectives. The revised CO and OP go further and includes four, major ways of ‘empowering’ women in community forestry. Below, I outline these changes, and also include quotation from interviews with CF committee members at the time of the field research to reflect the underlying logic behind

these changes. The quotation serve to highlight how these changes documented in the CO and OP were interpreted in practice by the CFUGs in Gharimi.

First, names of both men and women of the same household are listed as ‘formal users’ in the revised constitution, and stands as a sharp contrast to the first constitution which recognized only men as the formal users of community forestry. The underlying rationale behind including both men and women as users is depicted in the quotation below.

*The names of both men and women are included in order to highlight that men and women are users and can exercise equal voice and rights conferred to all community forest users. (Biswa-Karmas man, late 40s, community forest committee member at the time of the field work but had occupied the positions of community forest chairperson and Vice-Chairperson)*

Second, the revised ‘constitution’ also states there must be equal representation of men and women in the CF committee and in the major positions within the CF committee (Chairperson, Vice-chairperson, Secretary, Vice-Secretary, and Treasurer).

Towards the end of my field work, a formal amendment was made to the ‘constitution’ to nominate equal number of men and women from each of the six ‘toles’ (settlement hamlets) in the *Biswa-Karma* settlement. According to the community forest chairperson and the secretary, having at least one representative from each of the six *toles* in the village would better increase the chances of getting a fair representation of the various interests in the village. Furthermore, having *tole* level representatives would make it easier to disseminate information about meetings, General Assembly (GA), community forest related activities etc. to the rest of the users. And, *tole* level representatives would also better accumulate specific issues and concerns of their fellow *tole* residents and raise them in community forestry meetings.

Third, the revised ‘operation plan’ amended the forest protection rule and states that resources would be pooled from each user household to hire a forest guard with the full time responsibility of overseeing the forest.

*We realized that our women were getting overburdened with forest protection duties. One of the poorest women in the village has been hired as forest guard to protect and monitor the forests. A total of Rs.1000 per month is collected from all user households and given as monthly salary to the guard. Except for random checks by the committee to make sure that the forest is well monitored and the Forest Guard adequately performs her duties, there is no longer a need to volunteer women’s unpaid labor for forest protection purposes.*

*(Biswa-Karma senior woman, ordinary committee member at the time of the field work)*

Finally, the ‘constitution’ and ‘operation plan’ both state that community development projects launched through the CFUG and with support from external agents such as FECOFUN will be aimed at benefiting women.

*Community forestry is the main development project in the village. We have to make sure that the weakest members of the community benefit from these projects.*

*(Biswa-Karma man, early 50s, committee chairperson)*

I argue the above institutional changes must be explained in light of changes in external agents, and the outcome of ‘interface’ between FECOFUN and local users.

- ***Interface Between External Agents & Local Users in Institutional Changes:***

External agents (DFO – KI and FECOFUN) were playing a key albeit changing role throughout the community forestry process in Gharhi. The DFO – KI were instrumental in mediating the conflict between the high and low-castes while FECOFUN played a critical role in negotiating for gender inclusive changes in the governance of the community forests. I argue the changes in external intervention were a product of the dual relationships of the external agents with the organizations they represented (DFO-KI and FECOFUN) and the CFUG, and an outcome of the interface between external agents and CFUGs.

The DFO-KI was involved in arbitrating the conflict between the high and low-castes in Gharhi and handed over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge forests to the low-castes. The DFO-KI’s decision must be understood in nature of relationship between forest officials and local users. The forest officials were ‘embedded’ in the caste-based struggle for community forests in Gharhi. Senior forest officials of the DFO-KI were involved throughout the struggle, demonstrated a keen interest in understanding the caste-based context of the struggle, and were ‘willing’ and ‘able’ to make the final decision to handover the forests to the low-castes. In spite of such ‘embedddness’ of the forest officials in the power relations within Gharhi, the senior officials were also bounded by their roles and responsibilities to the DFO-KI and Department of Forestry in Kathmandu. The focus of most DFOs during this period was on handing over community forests to the “right users” as per the national level rules and regulations set out for community forestry handover. According to the *Forest Regulations* and *Community Forestry Guidelines* (CPFD 1995; HMG/N 1995), the ‘right users’ are those who

live closest to the forests. In the case of Gharmi, the low-caste *Biswa-Karmas* settlements were the closest to Bhumipujnee and Teesdhunge forests (personal communication with the District Forest Officer and Assistant Forest Officer, Kaski, May 2005).

But once community forestry was handed over, the DFO – KI left the responsibilities of formulating the formal institutions (constitution and operation plan) to govern community forests to the ‘low-caste community’ with guidance as and when necessary. The forest officials disregarded the hierarchy and inequality existing within the *Biswa-Karma* “community” (personal communication with four FECOFUN extension agents responsible for facilitating Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge CFUG). In this respect, the nature and extent of the relationship between forest officials and local users were in turn re-shaped by the organizational context in which the DFO-KI officials were operating. In this regards, the forest officials mediated to the extent they were allowed to through the boundaries set out by the organizations they represented. I argue the role of forest officials in the community forestry process also help explicate, to a certain extent, the gender exclusivity of the first Constitution and Operational plan.

In 2001, the DFO – KI devolved its responsibilities for renewing Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forestry’s Constitution and Operational Plan and facilitating the user group more generally to Federation of Community Forestry User Group (FECOFUN) (Bhumipujnee-TeesdhungeCFUG, FECOFUN et al. 2002; Bhumipujnee-TeesdhungeCFUG, FECOFUN et al. 2002). There were marked differences in the organizational context between FECOFUN and DFO-KI. Very briefly, FECOFUN is an NGO established in 1995 to represent and advocate the rights of forest users at the national and district levels (Britt 2002). Under the rubric of advocating for the rights of the weakest members of CFUGs, FECOFUN had started working in partnership with the Department of Forestry (and its district offices) to facilitate CFUGs and improve the ‘governance’ of community forestry institutions in the process. The organization had been taking a lead role in promoting gender and social equity issues in CFUGs that it facilitates (Koirala and Gurung 2004). FECOFUN had an organizational mandate to focus on a small number of CFUGs, and advocate for gender (women) and social inclusivity (ethnic minorities and low-castes) within them. Furthermore, FECOFUN was also receiving considerable support from donors precisely to promote gender and social equity at the CFUG level (Interviews with two NARMSAP staff in Kaski, March

2005, NARMSAP is a DANIDA-funded community forestry project and at the time of the field study, the biggest donor).

Through discussions with four FECOFUN members at the national level as well as consultation of the organizations' policies on gender and social equity, I found its understanding of gender and social equity mirrored that at the national level (Refer to Chapter Four on the increasing focus on gender and social equity in community forestry). Gender was understood as 'women' and social inclusion as promoting 'low-caste and ethnic minorities'. According the FECOFUN coordinator for Kaski District (Krishna Lamichane, April 2005), one of the major reasons why FECOFUN had accepted the DFO – KI's proposal to oversee Gharmi was because the CFUG was a '*Dalit*-run' community forestry with little inclusion of women in the community forestry process.

At the district level, however, FECOFUN only focused on a limited number of CFUGs. Its approach was to target and address 'gender and social exclusion' in community forestry through informed understanding of the power relations within the local context<sup>101</sup>. In Gharmi, such an organizational policy combined with the context-specific interactions and dynamics at the 'interface point' between FECOFUN extension agents and local users proved to be critical in realizing the above outlined gender inclusive institutional changes.

I found in interviews that all of the four FECOFUN field workers who were involved in renewing the Constitution and Operation Plan of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest recalled details of *Biswa-Karmas* and community forestry in Gharmi (such as names of villagers (men and women alike), composition of committee member, history of the community forestry, caste-based relations in the village, differences between the first and second set of Constitution and Operation Plan, and others). I had met one of the FECOFUN field workers after my second visit to Gharmi. She was able to provide me an invaluable overview of caste-based relations in Gharmi village, gender relations in CFUGs, and gender relations between men and women in the village more generally.

The field workers suggested in interviews (March 2005) they were able to understand the power dynamics in the village because they had devoted time and energy into 'embedding' themselves in everyday lives of the village. They had spent over two months living in the village, visiting each household under the pretext of carrying out a field survey,

observing committee meetings and being a part of everyday life in the village. This also provided them ample time and space to build working relationships with different members of the *Biswa-Karmas* community, and strategically negotiate with the powerful elements to include women in the community forestry process.

I also interviewed 15 *Biswa-Karmas* men and women in Gharmi on FECOFUN's role in community forestry process. I found most of the men in the community forestry committee were unwilling to discuss openly the role that FECOFUN had played in negotiating the inclusion of women in community forestry. For instance, the community forestry chairperson (April 2005) said that the users had themselves decided to ensure women participated in the community forestry process. This is reflected in the quotation below:

*Our CF has from the very beginning stood for principles of 'justice', 'fairness' and 'rights'. These are the reasons reason why we fought so hard and so long with high-castes for our CF. And we have realized that by promoting women we will continue abiding by these principles.*

Nevertheless, all of the interviewees verified to FECOFUN's 'embedded' approach in Gharmi. Majority of the interviewees compared their experiences with the DFO-KI and said they felt more at a level playing field with FECOFUN extension workers as opposed to DFO ones. Personality traits and compatibilities aside, four of the male interviewees pointed out the FECOFUN field workers were themselves users in other CFUGs in Kaski district and could better understand and relate to the challenges that Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forestry users faced. Women interviewees suggested that because two of the field workers were women (one of whom was a low-caste woman), women did not have to observe the same level of modesty and gender-based norms of seclusion that they would have had to in the presence of male DFO-KI officials. This helped them converse and interact more freely with the women field workers.

Furthermore, I was told by my informants (male mid 20s, secretary of the committee at the time of the field work, who was present in the FECOFUN and committee meetings) that the ways in which the FECOFUN extension agents negotiated women's participation in the CFUG was by convincing the powerful elements within the community that incorporating women would continue to attract outside, positive attention and benefits to the community, and also draw attention and sympathy on their caste-based struggles. In my field study, I was able to discern that the community leaders had internalized the arguments put forth by the FECOFUN extension agents, as is reflected in the quotation below:

*Our community forestry was famous for the struggle we launched against the high-castes. Now it will be famous for how we have improved the lives of our women.*

*(Former Chairperson of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge CFUG who was continuing to work in the capacity of advisor in the CFUG)*

*While sustainable forest management was our most important goal in the previous constitution and operational plan, we are giving more importance to the commitment for gender equality.*

*(Chairperson of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge CFUG at the time of the field study)*

#### **8.4.2 Re-Negotiations of Institutional Changes & Reproduction of Gender Inequalities**

The above institutional changes had the potential to alter the balance of power between men and women. However, the process of institutional change were molded and re-shaped by the existing power relations within the *Biswa-Karma* society. I will discuss this in light of the institutional changes aimed at increasing women's representation and participation in community forestry.

The organization of the household were centralized and monopolized by the senior men (Refer to Chapter Seven). The criteria (independence from caste-based relations) for qualifying individuals to assume community level decision making positions, in interaction with gender division of labor, prevented women from assuming these positions. These gendered inequalities were in turn reproduced and reinforced in the formation and functioning of community forest as discussed earlier. Institutional changes aimed at increasing women's representation in community forest committee—the major decision making body—could have questioned and problematized the existing gendered inequalities within the community forest committee as well as the household and community. By providing spaces for women to participate in decision-making process, it would have empowered women to challenge existing gendered constraints and propose new ways of organizing gender relations. However, these possibilities were consciously and subconsciously molded and re-shaped by the powerful elements within *Biswa-Karma* society.

When the requirement for having more equal (at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup>) representation of women in the community forest committee was first introduced, female family members (wives and daughter-in-laws) of the male committee members were 'nominated' to the committee. This



was to ensure authority and influence of these male members was not undermined. When further requirements for regular elections as well as *tole* level representation were made, new ways of circumventing the 'voice' and 'influence' of women were introduced.

'Consensus' and 'unanimous decisions' in the General Assembly (GA) were some of the words employed to characterize the ways in which the fate of the committee and its members were decided upon. While the GA did attract the entire village, who was appointed to occupy community forest positions were all shaped by these existing spheres of influence. 15 out of 20 women who had served as committee members since the inception of community forest user groups up to the time of the field study stated they were 'nominated' by the users and did not volunteer to participate themselves. 4 out of these 15 pointed out that they were not even present at the time of GA where the nomination process was taking place. Community forest registry where a list of all the users and committee members meeting attendees were listed verifies of their absence in the specified GAs.

Key informants and personal observation revealed the common processes of 'electing' individuals entailed the reading out the name(s) of the committee member(s) to be elected and asking the meeting attendees to put his/her hand up if they agree or disagree to elect him/her in the committee. Rampant instances existed where those who did not receive majority vote were still appointed.

The two criteria that are used to nominate individuals (gender and settlement) were also problematic. Just as having 'women' representatives would not ensure the various experiences and challenges confronted by women in the village would be represented, having *tole* level representatives rarely represented the many interests existing within the community. There was no discernible pattern how *toles* were divided. It was common for the land rich, for instance, to live in one *tole* and own land in another. Similarly, majority of the male respondents in the household structured interviews reported that they did not live in the same *tole* as their brothers. In this respect, employing *tole* appeared to be a simple way of capturing the geographic variability of the village and of facilitating dissemination and accumulation of information. It was not however a medium through which the diverse economic and political interests of the users in community forestry and beyond could be represented.

While attempts were made to ‘accommodate’ women in committee membership, the major decision-making positions of Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer were limited to former male committee members and those holding positions of authority and influence in the village. The chairperson was responsible for overseeing the entire functioning of the community forest; the treasurer was responsible for keeping community forest related records as well as maintaining liaisons with external actors; and the treasurer was to keep community forest accounts. The three position holders together also exercised the most decisive voices pertaining to the major decisions relating to community forest. Women’s decision-making power was limited to token representation as ‘Vice Chairperson’ and ‘Vice Secretary’. While ‘constitution’ states for instance that Vice chairperson is meant to take on the responsibilities of the Chairperson in the latter’s absence, these responsibilities were largely usurped by the secretary, treasurer or other committee members.

Even in cases where the veteran male committee members had to change to allow room for others to assume decision making positions, these three positions were only available to a set number of men. For instance, the same man who was a Chairperson would go on to becoming the Treasurer and come back as Chairperson at a later stage. Even when men of traditional sources of influence were completely outside of the committee, they were able to exercise considerable power and authority. One of the longest serving committee member for instance, openly admitted that he saw little difference between being a committee member and an ordinary user. Major decisions pertaining to forests would still require his ‘advice’.

#### ***8.4.3 Women’s Experiences with Institutional Changes & The Role of Remittances***

Following on the above discussion, I interviewed 25 women (a cross-section of *Biswa-Karma* society, May 2005) on their experiences with institutional changes and with particular reference to access to resources; participation in community forest decision making; and wider community development efforts initiated through community forest. However, women’s experiences varied considerably depending on whom I spoke with. Some said that they had benefited tremendously whereas others felt that community forestry had failed to meet their expectations. There were a number of pre-existing relationships such as organization of the household and levels of seniority that shaped these myriad forms of experiences. However, I argue male out-migration and the wider implications it was having for gender relations played a more prominent role in shaping women’s experiences.

I had argued in the previous chapter on gender relations in Gharimi that changes in male out-migration were having subsequent and unprecedented implications for gender relations. Women in households receiving regular flow of remittances from male migrants working in the Gulf and South East Asia had remarked in interviews and informal discussions that their standard of living had improved dramatically. Their work burden had decreased substantially because daily wage work for the high-castes was substituted for other forms of domestic work and more leisure. Women in nuclear households, in particular, also found more control over allocation of income (remittance). However, these experiences were limited to women with male migrants abroad and in this respect male out-migration had exacerbated material differences within women in Gharimi.

Interestingly, amongst the 25 women I interviewed with regards to their experiences in community forestry, there were marked differences amongst those receiving remittances and those without. In comparison to the responses I received from vast majority of the women interviewees who were not receiving regular flow of remittances, the ones receiving remittances, as shown on the table below, said their experiences with the above discussed institutional changes were largely positive.

**Figure 7: Women’s Experiences with community forest Institutional Changes**

No.	User	Committee Member	Generation	Migration (Sons or husbands)	Experience
1.		Vice Chairperson	Married with children	X	Positive
2.		Vice-Secretary	Recently married	X	Positive
3.		X	Middle aged woman with married children	X	Positive
4.		X	Married with children	X	Positive
5.		X	Not married		Positive
6.		X	Newly married		Negative
7.		X	Elderly, divorced		Negative
8.		X	Middle aged, widow		Negative
9.	X		Newly married	X	Positive
10.	X		Newly married	X	Negative

11.	X		Newly married		Negative
12.	X		Newly married		Negative
13.	X		Newly married		Negative
14.	X		Married with children	X	Positive
15.	X		Married with children	X	Positive
16.	X		Married with children		Negative
17.	X		Married with children		Negative
18.	X		Married with children		Positive
19.	X		Elderly	X	Positive
20.	X		Elderly	X	Negative
21.	X		Elderly		Negative
22.	X		Elderly		Negative
23.	X		Widow		Negative
24.	X		Widow		Negative
25.	X		Widow		Negative

(Source: The author)

Note: x denotes the particular characteristic of the interviewee.

8 out of the 10 women receiving remittances said they purchased forest products from the local market on a regular basis and were satisfied with any additional access they were able to get from community forest.

*Before my husband left for Qatar, I also had to go along with the rest of the women in the village to steal from the high-castes or scavenge what I could find from public land. But now that he has started sending quite a lot of money for household expenses, I make sure I keep a little aside to purchase forest product from the local markets.*

*(Biswa-Karmas woman, mid 30s, married with children living in nuclear household, May 2005)*

In comparison, vast majority of women (who were not receiving remittances) complained that the forest distribution rules, with its emphasis on 'equal distribution', had remained intact in spite of institutional changes.

As for participation in community forest governance, many women felt they lacked voice to decide when meetings and GAs would be held and how long they would last. The timing of the meeting (early mornings) and the pressure to remain until the meeting had finished did not consider the interests of those women who had to rush to complete their domestic responsibilities and make it for their daily wage work. Instead of understanding their

situation, these women felt penalized by a new rule (implemented at the end of my field work) that had started fining Rs.5/day for those absent in community forest related meetings. This was a significant amount for those earning Rs.100/day for agricultural work and even that only seasonally. As one of the women (mid 20s, married with children, living in joint household, May 2005) stated:

*Participating in community forestry...and in community development work in general...is a luxury. Those of us who have to juggle between our multiple responsibilities cannot afford to participate as much as we would like to.*

Most of the women receiving regular remittances said they had experienced subsequent changes in work burden, which is also verified by the above quotation. For instance, all of the four women in the community forest committee, who were receiving regular remittances, said they were better able to devote time and energy into community forestry than women not receiving regular remittances. As Figure 8 below illustrates, having access to remittances gave women the space to participate in what was widely perceived as a crucial community development work and increased the ‘visibility’ of women’s contribution to the household and beyond.

**Figure 8: Wider Benefits of Participating in community forest**

Bhagwati Biswa-Karmas lived in a nuclear family two sons. Her husband had been working in Qatar for more than five years. In the absence of her husband, her in-laws (and particularly her father-in-law) maintained tremendous influence over her and her children. Until recently, she did not have the confidence to directly converse with her father in law.

During the time of the field work, Bhagwati was a part of the same CF committee as her father in law for the past year and a half. Bhagwati felt that for the first year of her membership, she was merely a ‘silent spectator’ in all the CF meetings.

But in one of the meetings, in her second year as a committee member, a verbal dispute broke out between one of the users and a committee member. The committee member accused the user of illegally entering the CF, and the user accused the committee member of unfairly prosecuting him. None of the other committee members were able to arbitrate the dispute. Bhagwati got the courage to intervene, and helped to successfully resolve the conflict.

Since then, the other community forest committee members ask her to help resolve disputes. Her father in law had been so impressed by her input to resolve the conflict and the role she had been playing in the CF that he sometimes calls her and asks her for advice on household issues.

Women were more direct about the implications of male out-migration on their experiences with institutional changes when I inquired about their experiences with ‘women targeted’ development initiatives. The following table lists the major development projects in the CFUG at the time of field research, and demonstrates the extent of focus of women.

**Figure 9: Community Development Initiatives Under Community Forest**

Main Development Projects Launched through B-T community forest	Male Beneficiaries	Female Beneficiaries
Ghar-Dailo Program for revising the 'constitution' and 'operation plan'	All male and female users of community forest	
Sewing training		5
Women's literacy courses (two terms)		Teacher and students
Potato farming	Male and Female Users	
Bee keeping		4
Governance and Institutional Training	1	1
Accounts training		1
Siviculture training	All male and female users of community forest	
Micro credit	Male and Female Users	

Many women in the village viewed the development initiatives that were launched through community forestry with the aim of targeting women were only benefiting the 'richer women' with 'time on their hands'. For instance, sewing training, bee-keeping, adult literacy courses and others were implemented by FECOFUN. In order to 'increase local ownership' (personal interview with the FECOFUN, Kaski District coordinator) towards the project, women beneficiaries had to contribute a certain percentage of the total cost and/or their labor to be involved in the project. Just as 'time' was a major constraint that women (not receiving regular remittances) faced, the material pre-conditions attached made these projects less feasible for them.

This was in contrast to the responses I received from women receiving regular remittances. Women receiving regular remittances expressed in interviews that the initial contribution they had to make to benefit of these projects was 'small' and 'worthwhile'. Women from households with male migrants had greater access to remittances and were more able to make contributions to the requirements of the development projects. Similarly, these women depended less on daily wage labor and could contribute more 'time' to be involved in these projects and in community forest more generally. As a consequence, male out migration was resulting in unequal experiences of institutional changes amongst women.

## 8.5 Summary

This thesis sets out to examine and explicate the interrelationship between gender relations and local level institutions of community forestry. It also analyzes the role of external agents in influencing institutional processes and gender dynamics. This chapter has explained how prevailing gender inequalities and changes taking place in Gharimi were constantly ‘borrowed’ to define men and women’s entry, voice and involvement in the community forestry institutional processes. Gender relations, as pointed out in Chapter Seven, was constituted and re-constituted through the complex interplay between gender, caste, and the changing context of male out-migration. The chapter also examined the ‘interface’ between external agents and local users, and discussed the ‘embedded and autonomous’ role that these agents were playing in handing over the forests to the local users and in realizing gender inclusive institutional changes.

I began the chapter by discussing gender inequalities at the intra and extra-household level in Gharimi informed and shaped the struggle over community forestry and the subsequent formation and functioning of community forestry institutions. The history of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest was fraught with struggles over legal usufruct rights between the high and low-castes, which in turn transformed into caste-based struggle. Lack of access to forest products, and concerns over women’s honor being compromised because of dependence on high-caste forests were the primary reasons for the low-castes to request for the official hand over of Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest. But as the high-castes continued to contest against the hand over and a three year struggle ensued, community forest increasingly transformed into a vehicle and platform for low-caste struggle against caste-based discrimination. The caste-based political discourses that were employed to mobilize and maintain support for the movement masked the inequalities at the intra-*Biswa-Karmas* level, however. These contradictions in the struggle became particularly visible when I analyzed it from a gender perspective. And in particular, how both gender division of labor and norms enforcing them were drawn upon to influence men and women’s relative contributions to the struggle.

When the community forest was finally handed over to the low-castes, community forest decision making structures became male-led public domain. Existing community structures and the ‘visibility’ of men’s contribution to the struggle were employed to qualify

men and not women in community forest decision-making structures (entry). The resulting institutions reflected and 'borrowed' from gender inequalities within the *Biswa-Karma* community. I discussed these forms of institutional exclusion with reference to the following institutions: rules of entry as well as distribution of benefits and costs of participating in community forest. Gendered hierarchies amongst women and the 'private' strategies to maneuver served to further reinforce these gendered-based exclusions in institutional functioning.

External agents had played a key role throughout the CF process in Gharmi. I argue the role of external agents needs to be understood in the context of the dual relationship of external agents to the organizations they represent (DFO-KI and FECOFUN) and CFUGs. I demonstrate the DFO-KI had a clear mandate to handover forests to the local users who were residing closest to the forests and were 'embedded' in the caste-based politics in the village. Consequently, they arbitrated the conflict over community forestry and handed over the community forests to the low-castes. In institutional change, I demonstrate that FECOFUN, sub-contracted by the DFO – KI to facilitate the users of Gharmi, had a policy to prioritize gender and social equity issues in the CFUGs it facilitated. Furthermore, the FECOFUN extension agents were 'embedded' in the gendered context in Gharmi and strategically negotiated with the powerful, senior men to initiate gender inclusive changes in institutions of community forestry. These external interventions were in turn, re-negotiated at the local level and re-shaped by prevailing gender relations.

In this respect, the role of FECOFUN in institutional change highlights how multiple and overlapping institutions influenced community forestry governance in Gharmi. In other words, parallel social institutions were drawn upon to mediate institutions which in turn were influenced by existing 'distribution of power' amongst genders and the field-level agent's dual relationship between the organizations they represent (i.e., District Forest Offices and FECOFUN) and the CFUGs.

In the following Chapter Nine, I will further compare and contrast my research findings in Gharmi and Bhatpole, how these findings serve to address my research questions and objectives. The chapter will also highlight how my research findings inform the theoretical debates and the ongoing attempts to formulate gender and social equity sensitive community forestry policies in the middle hills of Nepal.



## ~ Chapter Nine ~

### 9 Conclusion

My research has investigated the interrelationship between gender relations and local institutions of community forestry governance. Because these institutions are often created and sustained by external actors (the government and development organizations), my research has also examined and explicated how these actors have interacted with institutions and gender relations. My research findings posit institutions governing community forestry user groups (CFGUGs) are ‘embedded’ in existing gender relations. Intra and extra-household relations define the terms under which men and women enter, interact and influence institutions governing CFUGs. Multiple and overlapping institutions influence natural resource governance at the local level. In other words, parallel social institutions are drawn upon to mediate the governance of resources which in turn are influenced by existing ‘distribution of power’ amongst the genders, and field level extension agent’s dual relationship with the organizations (government and/or development organizations) they represent and the CFUGs.

In order to address these research concerns and present my arguments, this thesis has considered: (1) the theoretical debates and insights on gender and natural resource governance that this study has drawn from and built on; (2) evolution of community forestry policies and increasing attention to issues of gender and social inclusion; (3) the research design and analysis of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘positionality’ research process; and (4) empirical research findings on gender, institutions and development intervention.

In concluding this thesis, I will discuss how my empirical findings addresses the research questions and objectives; contributes to the ongoing debates and understandings in the theoretical literature on gender, institutions and natural resource governance; and informs the ongoing attempts to address gender and social equity issues in community forestry policies in Nepal.

#### 9.1 Research Questions & Findings

In order to investigate my research question on the interrelationships between gender relations and community forestry institutions at the local level, I conducted empirical research

on the *Tamangs* in the village of Bhatpole and *Biswa-Karmas* in the village of Gharmi, middle hills of Nepal. I focused on the following: gender relations at the household and extra-household levels to decipher how gender relations were constituted in these communities; traced the formation, functioning and change in institutions to examine and explicate the interrelationship between gender relations and these institutional processes; and finally, examined the role of external actors in institutional processes through analysis of the ‘interface point’.

My research findings point out that institutions governing CFUGs are ‘embedded’ in existing gender relations, intra and extra-household relations define the terms under which men and women enter, interact and influence institutions governing CFUGs. Furthermore, multiple and overlapping institutions influence natural resource governance at the local level through two major means: first, field level extension agent’s dual relationship with the organizations (government and/or development organizations) they represent and the CFUGs; second, the existing distribution of power between the genders. Below I summarize my research findings and analysis of gender, institutions and external intervention in Bhatpole and Gharmi and how these serve to address my research questions.

- ***Gender, Institutions and External Intervention in Bhatpole:***

In Chapter Five on gender relations amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole, I argued gender relations were constituted through socio-cultural autonomy, market-transmitted inequalities, and the collective agency in re-defining gender relations. These gender relations at the intra-household and community levels embodied many gender equalitarian norms and values, and enabled women considerable autonomy in their lives. Gender inequalities between men and women were in this regards not inherent within the *Tamang* community of Bhatpole. Rather, gender biases emanated from markets for *Tamang* labor which in turn, were transmitted at the intra-household level. Far from being passive victims, women had also collaborated with one another to mitigate their dependence on men and collectively re-define gender relations.

In Chapter Six on gender and community forestry in Bhatpole, I traced the formation, functioning and change in institutions established to govern community forests of Bhatpole. I demonstrated how gender relations, in the way they were constituted in Bhatpole, were constantly ‘borrowed’ to define the terms and conditions under which *Tamang* men and women entered, interacted and influenced institutional processes. For instance, in institutional

formation (informal), I demonstrated gender-based inequalities in access to resources and structure of incentives were such that women had more incentives to promote, support and collectively formulate informal institutions to govern community forests.

The disembedded and asymmetric relations that together characterized the ‘interface point’ between DFO-K extension officials and local users played a crucial role in shaping institutional processes. The DFO-K formulated, imposed, and monitored performance of the CFUG on the basis of a set of formal institutions that were largely disjointed from the informal ones women had collectively agreed upon. These relations carried on and did little to alter the underlying inequalities between *Tamang* women users and forest officials, even when there was an explicit focus on gender issues in the DFO-K. I explained these in terms of the DFO-K forest official’s dual relationship with the District Forest Office and the CFUG in Bhatpole. The forest officials lacked gender sensitivity, were over-burdened by the number of users they had to facilitate, and deprioritized CFUG in Bhatpole in the process.

- ***Gender, Institutions and External Intervention in Gharmi:***

In Chapter Seven on gender relations amongst the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmi, I argued that gender relations were constituted through the complex interplay between socio-cultural practices, caste, and changing context of male out-migration. Socio-cultural practices, in interaction with caste and male out-migration (seasonal), rendered gender relations inherently unequal within the *Biswa-Karmas*. Women also participated in the reproduction of gender inequalities in various, active and covert ways. Seasonal migration of men had further entrenched these gender inequalities. However, recent changes in male out-migration (from seasonal to longer-term migration to the Gulf and South East Asia) were shifting gendered relationship in migrant sending households and generating new form of hierarchies within women of Gharmi.

In Chapter Eight on gender and community forestry institutions in Gharmi, I traced the formation, functioning and change in institutions. I argued the ways in which gender relations were constituted in Gharmi, were constantly borrowed to define men and women’s entry, interaction and influence on community forestry institutions. The history of community forestry was marred by caste-based conflict. When community forestry was finally handed over to the low-castes of Gharmi, the structure of incentives in community forestry for senior and powerful men represented and legitimized authority and influence at the village level, and

women were largely excluded from the institutional formation process. Consequently, the institutions that were formulated mirrored gender inequalities, and in institutional functioning, these gender inequalities were re-enforced.

External actors played a key role throughout the community forestry process. In institutional formation, the District of Forest Office - Kaski (DFO-KI) mediated the conflict between the high and low-castes over the forests and successfully handed over the forests to the low-castes. In institutional change, Federation of Community Forestry User Groups (FECOFUN) negotiated with the powerful interests within the *Biswa-Karma* community for more gender inclusive changes in institutions. The interface between the forest officials and low-castes at the 'interface point' were 'embedded' in caste-based politics and gender relations and yet 'autonomous' from the power brokers. I explained the above in terms of the dual relationship between the organizations and CFUG.

## **9.2 Contributions to Theory: Gender, Institutions and Environmental Governance**

This section discusses how my research has engaged with, complemented, questioned and built on the debates and understandings within the literature on: gender and environment, gender and intra and extra-household analysis, and local institutions of natural resource governance.

- ***Gender and Environment:***

As I had pointed out in Chapter Two, both WED and Ecofeminist discourses, despite differences in origin, assume women have a special relationship with the environment and women's interests are synonymous to the sustainable management of natural resources. My research findings suggest that gender relations are constantly drawn upon to mediate men and women's entry, voice and influence in the processes of natural resource governance.

In Bhatpole, for instance, I found that women were at the forefront of promoting community forestry. Women's interests in community forestry emerged from common experiences and constraints imposed by gender biases in markets for *Tamang* labor, on the one hand, and a history of collective action amongst women to mitigate their dependence on men, on the other hand. In Gharmi, in comparison, the pre-existing divisions within women had also differentiated women's interests with regards to forest products and forest

governance. Gender and caste intersected and played out in such a way as to make it in the interest of powerful men to assume the decision-making roles when forests were first handed over to the Dalits of Gharmi.

These research findings therefore, question and problematize the WED and Ecofeminist arguments that women have a special relationship with nature and women's interest are akin with that of environmental protection. In addition, these findings reinforce the GED literature, and further strengthen my decision to locate this research within the GED scholarship.

This research draws on insights from multiple feminists within the GED scholarship. In line with Bina Agarwal (2001), I argue the terms and conditions under which women enter, interact and influence community forestry governance are crucially dependent on their relative bargaining power within and outside the household. My analysis is complemented by insights from feminist anthropologists such as Melissa Leach (1992) and Cecile Jackson (1993a; 1993b) who advocate for contextualizing gender relations and focusing on myriad of social relationships that together influence men and women's relation to each other and to resource use. Similarly, in my research, I found interlocking practices and ideologies within the household (such as gender division of labor, intra-household allocation of resources, marriage practices) and extra-household relations (such as caste-based politics, market relations) influenced gender relations and natural resource governance in Gharmi and Bhatpole.

In addition to the above, my research also highlights the importance of tracing the evolution of community forestry policies at the macro level and how policy changes influence the nature of external intervention and outcomes of community forestry at the local level. The study draws on insights from Catherine Locke (1999) and Joekes, Green et al (1996) and emphasizes the importance of employing a gender lens to unpack the evolution of discourses that have informed environmental policies. For instance, in Chapter 3, I discussed the evolution of community forestry policies in Nepal, identified the major actors, and the varying national and international discourses (such as doomsday, Ecofeminist, and increasing rights-based) that have informed these policies. But following Cecile Jackson (1997), my research also suggests that policies are never implemented as envisaged. Outcomes of policies are re-defined by the interactions and relationships between local users and extra-local actors at the 'interface' point. Similarly, the varying experiences of extra-local intervention in community

forestry in Bhatpole and in Gharmi demonstrate the differences in outcomes of seemingly comparable national level community forestry policies.

Notwithstanding the above, this study also addresses gaps within the current GED scholarship. Lack of engagement of the GED and institutions literature is a critical gap given the tremendous contribution a complementary approach to these two bodies of work would have on theories and policies of environmental governance. My research therefore, serves to bridge this gap by examining and explicating how gender relations interact with and influence institutional processes. Furthermore, much of the GED scholarship focuses on how environmental outcomes and processes affect gender relations. This research has also looked at how gender relations are 'embedded' in and influence community forestry governance. But drawing on insights from Arun Agrawal (2005) and Goetz (1997), the research has gone beyond the realm of the GED literature thus far and considered how women's involvement in community forestry in turn influences gendered subjectivities (Refer to the discussion below on local institutions).

- ***Gender & Power within and beyond Household:***

This research draws on multiple, social and political theories on gender and power, - from structuralist to post-structuralist approaches. Following James C. Scott, the research highlights the importance of conceptualizing women as purposeful actors, and points to the various strategies that differently situated women adopt to cooperate and contest against their marginalization. For instance, in Chapter Seven, I discussed the gendered constraints that newly married women face in Gharmi and the implicit and explicit strategies women employ to negotiate and enhance their positions.

Drawing on post-structural feminists, my research findings point to considerable differences in how men and women were situated within and between Bhatpole and Gharmi, and the ways in which 'gender' was cross-cut by caste, ethnicity, life-cycle process, and socio-economic change. By balancing structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to gender and power, my research also identifies the broader structures of power (such as gender norms and biases within and outside the household) which systematically marginalized women vis-à-vis men in both Gharmi and Bhatpole. Such multiple conceptualizations of power have enriched my understanding and explanations for how gender relations are constituted in Gharmi and in Bhatpole.

I engage with and build on a number of scholarships on gender and household - from bargaining models to those calling for post-bargaining conceptualization of intra-household relations. The comparison between my research findings in Gharmi and Bhatpole, in many ways, lends support to Deniz Kandiyoti's(1988) 'patriarchal bargain'. The findings demonstrate suggest distinct set of 'rules of the game' existed in Bhatpole and Gharmi, differences in constraints that women in Gharmi and those in Bhatpole faced, and the varying ways in which women of Bhatpole and Gharmi adopted strategies to maximize security and optimize life options. But in line with Kandiyoti's later reflection, my research in Gharmi and Bhatpole also highlights the need for historical and context specific analysis of if and how 'patriarchal bargain' plays out within and between men and women, on the one hand. On the other hand, my research also highlights the limitations of the 'bargaining' approaches and the importance of understanding households as a 'site of cooperation and conflict' and 'shared and separate interests between unequals'. The following discussion on gender and land, a heated debate within the feminist literature on gender and development, further clarifies the latter point.

My study points to the importance of understanding and explicating gender relations through a multitude of socio-cultural practices and ideologies. In the literature review, I identified the importance of examining 'intra-household allocation of resources' and within it, the issue of gender and land. The academic discussion on gender and land is one of the most important issues in contemporary feminist literature but remains deeply contested.

On the one hand, Bina Agarwal maintains that 'land' is the single most important factor that determines women's position within the household and beyond in rural South Asia. On the other hand, notable scholars such as Rao (2005), Razavi (2003) and Jackson (2002; Jackson 2004), question Bina Agarwal (Agarwal 1994a; Agarwal 1994b; Agarwal 2003; Agarwal 2003) in various ways. Razavi argues that given the changing context of rural livelihoods, women's bargaining power depends on access to a number of resources such as credit, employment opportunities in addition to land. Both Rao and Jackson suggest that women are situated in multiple ways vis-à-vis land such that certain women's material and social well-being is interlinked with maintaining unequal access to land.

My research findings suggest discounting the importance of 'land' is highly problematic. Even in a rapidly changing socio-economic context of Gharmi where vast majority of the low-castes do not own sufficient land, and remittances from male out-migration is becoming an important facet of village life and well-being, land remained critical. For instance, I pointed out in Chapter Seven, that 'access to land' symbolized and legitimized economic and social authority in Gharmi. I also found, through interviews with male migrants as well as their female household members, investment in land from male remittances was prioritized over all other long-term investments. Furthermore, unequal distribution of land along gender lines remained pervasive in communities with as contrasting gender relations as I found in Gharmi and Bhatpole. In both Gharmi and Bhatpole, women pointed to the importance they placed on land for their marital well-being and fall-back options, and how men vehemently supported male monopoly over land. In this respect, I argue evading or discounting the 'land' question would be problematic from a gender perspective.

My research also suggests, in line with Rao's and Jackson's arguments, land remained a divisive issue within and beyond the household. Women were themselves implicated in supporting and perpetuating gender inequalities in access and control over land (as in the context of Gharmi). In this respect, I would argue employing a blanket approach to advocate all women should assert their rights over land may risk exacerbating gendered conflict. Nevertheless, by assuming policies that entitle women equal access to land would jeopardize 'conjugal creativity', as Jackson risks implying in her argument for re-visiting the land question, may prevent women from claiming access to an integral resource in rural contexts such as middle hills of Nepal.

- ***Qualifying the Use of Agrawal and Gibson's Framework for Institutional Analysis:***

My research visits the major debates within the institutional literature on natural resource governance from a gender perspective. It refutes the premise of the common property resource literature for being incompatible with gender concerns. Instead, it draws on and builds on Agrawal and Gibson's (1999) framework for institutional analysis to understand the gender politics behind institutional processes and external intervention at the local level. This framework has been largely sidelined in light of Arun Agrawal's (2005) recent work on 'environmentality'. Agrawal's (2005) approach has much to add to any study on environmental governance.



Agrawal (2005) traces the historical mechanisms through which 'subjects' were transformed in Kumaon - from those who did not care about the environment to those for whom 'environment' represents a critical aspect of consciousness and action. His central argument is that changes in technologies of government (knowledge and power driving policy change from centralization to decentralization), the establishment of 'intimate government' (incorporation of rural localities in the wider net of political relations), and the participation of individuals in regulation at the local level were critical in bringing about shifts in environmental subjectivities. At the same time, changes in environmental subjectivities - the emergence of an increasing number of people who came to care about the environment - was also crucial for the success in decentralization of governance in Kumaon.

*Regimes of regulation and enforcement transmit the nature of incentives that users face. But the involvement in the creation of new incentives and social practices related to an institutionalized structure of incentives also transform what users think and say about the environment...the varying forms of regulation and the practices through which people get involved in them are the basis for making environmental subjects.*

Agrawal's study has crucial implications for both policy and theory on environmental governance, and including my research on Nepal.

Because Kumaon is one of the first examples of decentralization of forest governance at the local level, it has important lessons for other countries and contexts where similar initiatives will/are taking place. As such, Agrawal suggests:

*Success of decentralized effects to govern environment depends on the simultaneous implementation of three strategies: the creation of governmentalized localities that can undertake regulation in specified domains, the opening of territorial and administrative spaces in which new regulatory communities can function, and the production of environmental subjects whose thoughts bear some reference to the environment.*

(Agrawal 2005: pp.14)

Following his analysis, the widespread demand for and acceptance of community forestry at the local level in Nepal can aptly be explained in terms of: (a) changes in government policies from nationalization to user oriented community forestry, (b) populist and environmental discourses that framed these policies, (c) establishment of community forestry user group committees or 'intimate government', and (d) subsequent changes in environmental subjectivities amongst ordinary villagers participating regulating forests. Changes in attitudes towards those participating in community forestry have in turn reified the success of

community forestry in the country. My research findings also document how shifts in forest governance at the national level translated into incentives for the Dalits of Gharimi and the Tamangs of Bhatpole to demand and strive for collective forest governance at the local level, on the one hand. On the other hand, participation in regulation of forests was critical in reinforcing the importance individual men and women placed on forests and forest governance.

Theoretically, Agrawal (2005) surveys the most prominent literature on environmental politics – political ecology, common property resource governance, and feminist environmentalism – and provides a commendable avenue for bridging the gaps between them. Agrawal notes each of the strands of literature examines how politics, institutions and subjectivities affect institutional processes and outcomes in isolation. Insufficient attention is paid to how these concepts shape each other and are themselves constituted. For instance, the common property resource literature focuses on institutions as rules but does not acknowledge the politics embedded in institutions, and the role of ‘environmental governments’ in promoting institutions and shaping environmental subjectivities.

Similarly, Agrawal (2005) argues that feminist environmentalist have placed far too much emphasis on environmental processes and outcomes for gender relations, and inadequately studied how participating in forest governance also shapes gender and environmental subjectivities. My research on community forestry amongst the Tamangs of Bhatpole in Chapter Six, for instance, demonstrates that in the process of interaction with extra-local actors, community forestry transformed from a women’s led initiative to one that was increasingly dependent on men. In other words, while gender relations were constantly drawn upon to shape men and women’s entry, involvement and influence on community forestry, men and women’s participation in institutional processes also produced distinct gendered outcomes and experiences.

Drawing on Foucault’s conceptualization of power and governmentality, Agrawal argues that the production of ‘knowledge’ (and the use of statistics) in colonial India was critical in shaping colonial and post-colonial governance of forests. Statistics was used in colonial Kumaon to maintain central control over the forests. In post-colonial Kumaon, it was used to legitimize the delegation of responsibilities for and benefits from forest governance to local communities. At the same time, the use of statistics and what constituted as ‘knowledge’

about the forests was also used to consolidate centralized power and make legible the myriad of ways in which forests were governed at the local level. I argue such an understanding can also aid in explaining formal institutions and the unequal power relations between the state and local women users I reported in Bhatpole, in particular. The District Forest Office's used formal institutions – Constitution and Operational Plan – to facilitate local users to govern forests. At the same time, by determining what constituted as 'efficient' and 'equitable' governance of forests, it maintained control over forests and unequal power relations between Tamangs and officials at the District Forest Office – Kavre (See Chapter Six).

In spite of these commendable contributions, Agrawal's framework of 'Environmentality' suffers from the following three limitations for looking into the gender politics in natural resource governance, the objectives of this research.

First, Agrawal acknowledges that there are distributional implications of regulations with women, low-castes and the poor bearing majority of the costs of regulation. However, the focus of his study is on changes in environmental subjectivities. He argues participation in regulation has a greater effect on transforming environmental subjectivities than pre-existing social divisions along gender, caste and class lines.

*"Reading the politics of subject formation off the social categories of gender, class, occupation, and caste serves at best to ignore how power works to create subjects who fill these categories...categories based on gender, wealth, income, and caste turned out to be less relevant as indicators of whether a particular person is likely to be interested in protecting village forests.*

(Agrawal 2005: pp.9)

My empirical research also suggests that participation in regulation was critical in shaping environmental subjectivities in both Gharmi and Bhatpole. But the empirical research findings of this thesis posit gender and other social relations define who can participate and who cannot, in what capacity, and with what outcomes. Negating these contextual details would therefore, limit understanding of environmental subjectivities. For instance, the discussions on the establishment of community forestry in Bhatpole (See Chapter Six) demonstrated that men cared less about forests than women did. Community forestry was conceptualized as women led initiative and men's roles and responsibilities in forest regulation were limited to aiding women. But, such gendered differences in participation cannot be understood outside of the context of pre-existing gender relations amongst Tamang men and women, and the symbolic representation of 'community forestry' as collectively

overcoming gender-based inequalities in everyday lives for women. Similarly, in Chapter Eight, I discussed Dalit women of Gharmi reacted to exclusion from high-caste forests by stealing and undermining sustainable governance of forests. When Birawta-Pakha and Koldana CF were later handed over to Dalits, there was a clear difference in attitude towards the forests and the Dalits transformed from ‘forest destroyers’ to ‘forest protectors’. However, my research also suggests that such shifts existed within the context of historical caste-based politics in the village and the ways in these had percolated to the governance of forests.

Second, Agrawal (2005) analyzes changes in the involvement of local people in the governance of resources, and implications for how people come to perceive the environment. However, contemporary policy debates surrounding decentralized forest governance in South Asia has moved beyond just the issue of delegating responsibilities of natural resources to local people (Refer to Chapter 3). Concerns over distributional implications of institutions and how to ensure greater institutional inclusion are pertinent features of ‘second generation’ forestry policy debates. This is increasingly the case for community forestry policies in Nepal where the rise of the Maoist movement and the subsequent incorporation of the Maoist party in mainstream political processes have made gender, caste and ethnicity based inclusions a key priority for the development of the country. Agrawal’s (2005) insinuation that questions of gender, caste and class may not matter for environmental governance risks underplaying these important and timely developments.

Finally, Agrawal’s (2005) study of forest policies in Kumaon suggests that changes in government policies, establishment of intimate government are critical in transforming individuals to environmental subjects. His argument rests brilliantly on tracing changes and continuities in ‘technologies of government’ from colonial to post-colonial Kumaon. Nevertheless, Agrawal does not detail how such changes are articulated in particular historical contexts. This research on community forestry in Nepal instead suggest that changes in macro-level policies, the dual role of external agents to local people and organizations they represent, and broader social processes together play a critical role in shaping attitudes towards the forests. For instance, in Chapter 8, I discussed demand for community forestry amongst the Dalits of Gharmi, if understood as a proxy for favorable attitudes towards the ‘environment’, sprung from material constraints, historical caste-based conflict, community forestry policy changes, and the political commitment on the part of District Forest Office –

Kaski to mediate caste-based politics and handover forests to the Dalits. Concerns over the 'environment' therefore, cannot be understood outside these contextual details.

In comparison to the above, as the empirical chapters suggest, this research has profited tremendously from drawing on Agrawal and Gibson's (1999) framework for institutional analysis to understand and explicate gender politics in institutional processes in Gharimi and Bhatpole. By broadening Agrawal and Gibson's framework, the research has examined the 'embeddedness of institutions' in pre-existing gender relations, the evolution of community forestry policies from a gender perspective, and the role of external intervention in shaping institutions and gender dynamics.

- ***Gender, Institutions and External Intervention:***

This research has highlighted the importance of 'interface point' between external actors and local users. I have argued the relationships formed at the interface point in turn, influence institutional processes and gender dynamics at the local level. For instance, in Gharimi, I discussed how and why FECOFUN (external actor in Gharimi) was able to negotiate for gender inclusive change. In comparison, the DFO-Kaski (external actor in Bhatpole) was incognizant of the gendered realities amongst the Tamangs and transformed community forestry from a women's led initiative to one that became increasingly dependent on men. I argue such interface point needs to be analyzed with regards to the dual relationship for the external agents between the organizations they represent and the CFUGs.

These research findings contribute to the ongoing academic debate on state-society relationships in natural resource governance. It points to the importance of understanding the local context in which policies are translated, and supports scholars such as Siviramakrishnam (1999) and Robbins (2000) who have argued that much depends upon the relationships that develop between local users and forest officials at the interface point and context of the interface. At the same time, this study also suggests that broader policy lessons can be learnt from comparisons between different interface points. In this spirit, by drawing on theoretical issues of accountability (Ribot 2002; Ribot, Agrawal et al. 2006) and embedded autonomy (Evans 1996) in natural resource governance, the next section will discuss how my findings on the interface point can inform the ongoing attempts to formulate gender and social equity policies in community forestry in Nepal (refer to Chapter Four).

### 9.3 Informing Policy through Research

In Chapter Four on the evolution of community forestry policies in the middle hills of Nepal, I outlined the major, ongoing changes taking place in community forestry. The national workshop of community forestry in 2003, marking the 25<sup>th</sup> year of community forestry, officially launched the ‘second generation of community issues’ in community forestry with the following three mandates: sustainable management, livelihood and good governance. ‘Gender and social equity’ was established as an overarching theme.

Following from the workshop, two working groups have been established (GSELG and GSEWG) with the task to formulate a ‘gender and social equity’ policy to be incorporated in the Master Plan for the Forestry Sector II, scheduled to be released in 2018. The focus of this group has been on identifying ‘change areas’ to serve as a framework for promoting gender and social equity in the forestry sector, ensuring all the actors involved in promoting community forestry re-align their programs and projects according to these change areas, and monitoring the implementation of these objectives to provide feedback to the national level.

When I completed my last phase of field study in Nepal (May 2006), the working groups had agreed on a set of 4 ‘change areas’: equitable access to resources and benefits from the forestry sector, equitable governances, equity sensitive organizational development, and equity sensitive policy and strategy (see Figure 2). The first two change areas were aimed at promoting gender and social equity in community forestry institutions at the local level whereas the last two were on ensuring the major actors involved in promoting community forestry were themselves gender and social equity sensitive.

Given the political landscape and the importance of forestry sector to rural livelihoods in the country, I argue the current attempts to formulate gender and social equity policies in the forestry sector as well as in community forestry is timely and important. Nevertheless, the following discussions will highlight facets unproblematicized and overlooked thus far in the current conceptualizations for how to integrate gender and social equity at the local and national levels. In particular, (1) I problematize the conceptualization of ‘gender and social equity’ in the change areas which serve as a framework for ‘targeting’ excluded groups in Community Forestry; (2) I examine central assumptions underlying the change areas and

indicators—the issue of voice and accountability; (3) I identify a crucial facet overlooked thus far—politics of implementation.

In discussing the above, I draw heavily from my research findings (as well as plethora of the contextual literature on gender, caste, and ethnicity in Nepal). This is by no means an exhaustive and condemning assessment of the ongoing attempts to formulate gender and social equity policies. Rather, my objective is to generate academic and policy debate by highlighting how my research can inform these ongoing policy developments.

### **9.3.1 Identification of Targeted Groups:**

The ‘change areas’ emphasizes promoting low-castes, ethnic minorities and women in both CFUGs at the local level as well as in the organizations supporting CFUGs. The change areas also include corresponding indicators to promote and monitor the inclusion of these groups in the forestry sector. I argue that the current, national approach to explicitly recognize and redress historical forms of exclusion along caste, gender and ethnic lines is important and timely. Focusing too explicitly on local level realities would deny the existence of broader level inequalities along gender, caste and ethnic lines (see the discussions in section 4.2.2 on the Socio-Political Landscape of Nepal).

I found the low-castes of Gharmi and the *Tamangs* of Bhaptole had been historically marginalized, in specific ways, by their high-caste neighbors. Relying exclusively on ‘local level’ realities may also exacerbate the ‘uneven geographies’<sup>102</sup> of Nepal’s development patterns. Because of Nepal’s geography and its rugged terrain, development aid has not been able to deliver services evenly throughout the country. This has been further compounded by the ongoing conflict in the country which has left many rural areas out of the reach of governments and development organizations. I argue the differences in support provided by the DFOs in community forestry in Bhatpole vis-à-vis that in Gharmi provides a glaring example of such unevenness.

Nevertheless, targeting groups at the national level needs to be complemented with and informed by analysis of how gender and social exclusion manifests itself at the local level.

This is because relying exclusively on such pre-categorization at the national level reduces the complex history of Nepal into the ‘oppressed’ and ‘oppressor’ dichotomy by

pitting high-caste against *Dalits*, *Bahun/Chettris* against *Tamangs/Magars/Limbus/Chepangs/Thamis* and other ethnic minorities, and women against men. As I suggested through the overview of Nepal's modern history in Chapter Four, the process of state formation has been dominated by the high-caste Ranas and Shahs and political contestations that have followed have also been largely confined to elite factions (high-caste, male, of *Bahun/Chettri* ethnic groups). Nevertheless, the plethora of anthropological literature in Nepal since the 1960s and my own research findings point to the considerable inter and intra-diversity within these groups, and suggest that 'ethnicity', 'gender' and 'caste' are more fluid and complex than allowed for by the unproblematic acceptance of these categories.

In Chapter Five, I pointed out that the *Tamangs* are the largest ethnic minority in Nepal, encapsulating groups with varying linguistic and socio-cultural practices, and who were labeled as *Tamangs* during the state-formation processes to incorporate a diverse populace within the state machinery. Those who qualified to be *Tamangs* also welcomed the opportunity to be elevated into a higher position than their former status, as *Bhotiyas* or Tibetans, would have allowed them to be<sup>103</sup>. In Chapter Seven, I argued that the '*Dalit*' identity amongst the *Biswa-Karmas* of Gharmpi was formed in opposition to the high-castes. However, the practices of untouchability that served to socially marginalize the low-castes were also adopted and reinforced through the existing hierarchy within the *Biswa-Karmas*.

Solely targeting groups along gender, caste, and ethnic lines can also be problematic in light of the political conflicts in Nepal. The Communist Party Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M) employed the 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' dichotomy to politicize caste and ethnic relations in Nepal and mobilize support from the myriad of groups in the country. During the ten years of the conflict, the CPN-M functioned as a broader umbrella for numerous sub-ethnic groups that were militarized and demanded greater autonomy along caste and ethnic lines (Thapa and Sijapati 2003). In 2006, the CPN-M signed a comprehensive peace agreement with the major political parties, and established an interim government with the aim of holding an election for the constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. At present, while the nation prepares for a new constitution, many of these sub-groups have expressed discontent by voicing concerns against the spirit of the comprehensive peace agreement. These groups argue that the CPN-M and the major political parties have failed to represent their specific interests (mostly along ethnic lines) in the ongoing political negotiations. In such a situation, I argue that



unproblematically employing these categories as posited by the framework and basing development interventions in community forestry accordingly may exacerbate the ongoing identity-based conflict in Nepal.

In light of the difficulties of relying exclusively on national level indicators or on local level realities, I advocate that such approach should be delicate mixture of both targeting of specific groups at the national level combined and informed with more context-specific analysis of how power and exclusion manifests at the intervening level.

### ***9.3.2 Issues of Accountability and Voice in the Era of 'Governance':***

The gender and social equity framework is also premised on the importance of promoting 'voice' and 'accountability' within the CFUGs as well as between CFUGs and external organizations promoting community forestry. As I pointed out in section 4.2, the rationale for stressing 'accountability' and 'voice' at the CFUG level is to ensure those governing the CFUGs are responsive and answerable to the multiple and competing interests within the CFUG in general and the excluded groups in particular. At development organizational level, the assumption is that having greater representation of socially excluded groups in external/development organizations would make these organizations more responsive to the excluded groups at the CFUG level. In this respect, the latter is aimed at promoting 'voice' and 'accountability' between the CFUGs and the organizations facilitating them.

My research findings also support the above emphasis on 'voice' and 'accountability' in CFUGs, and organizations. However, I argue that reforming organizations and making them more gender and equity sensitive needs to be complimented with establishing direct channels/mechanisms for CFUGs to hold these organizations accountable. Such channels/mechanisms have not been included in the change areas and framework for promoting gender and social equity.

At the CFUG level, my analysis of institutional formation processes in community forestry in Gharmi suggests that women were excluded because the elites governing the community forestry were not accountable to the women, and women did not have a voice in the decision-making processes. Nevertheless, I would argue caution must be exercised in assuming that the above is the case in every CFUG. My analysis of institutional formation and

functioning in Bhatpole, for instance, suggested that gender-based institutional exclusion was a product of external intervention (disembeddedness of forest officials) as opposed to inherent to the gender dynamics within the *Tamang* community. In this respect, I argue these indicators must allow for context specific analysis of how gender-based exclusion exhibits in CFUGs. But more importantly, a comparison between Bhatpole and Gharmi also points to the importance of focusing on ‘voice’ and ‘accountability’ between CFUGs and those ‘facilitating’ them.

A comparison between external interventions in Bhatpole and Gharmi, the two empirical studies, highlights the importance of gender sensitive organizational reforms for making organizations more responsive to socially excluded groups at the local level. Both the DFO-K in Bhatpole and FECOFUN in Gharmi were increasingly promoting ‘gender’ issues in community forestry. But the DFO-K in Bhatpole was given the mandate to focus on gender issues by the Department of Forestry (central level) without accompanying guidelines and resources to address them at the local level. In comparison, in Kaski, the DFO-KI had sub-contracted the responsibilities of revising and facilitating a limited number of CFUGs in the district to FECFOUN. FECOFUN in turn had received considerable funding from donors to focus precisely on gender issues in community forestry. It had in turn, appointed and trained field workers to promote and negotiate greater gender inclusion in community forestry user groups.

Nevertheless, I argue reforming organizations to make them more gender and social equity sensitive is an indirect way for CFUGs to hold the external actors promoting community forestry accountable. These reforms cannot replace direct channels for CFUGs to hold external agents accountable. When community forestry was first introduced in the country, the Department of Forestry was the only organization ‘facilitating’ users at the local level. In theory, mechanisms were in place to hold the Rangers and Forest Guards directly facilitating the users accountable. For instance, the District Forest Officer could arbitrate conflicts between forest officials and local users. Further, the Regional Director also had the authority should the CFUGs be unsatisfied with the arbitration of the District Forest Officers (Pokharel 1997). To what extent this was accessible to the users is an issue on itself. For instance, in Bhatpole, I found most of the Tamangs were unable and unwilling to access these channels to hold the forest officials facilitating them accountable. However, I found the District Forest Officers were increasingly devolving responsibilities for facilitating local users

to a number of non-state actors (as in the case of FECOFUN in Gharmi). In addition, most of the donors were no longer channeling support solely through the state and are employing NGOs and CBOs to facilitate the community forestry process at the local level. In such a context of the ‘fanning out and spanning out of the state’, it was difficult to decipher how CFUGs and those who were socially marginalized in particular could hold external agents facilitating them accountable<sup>104</sup>.

Currently, there are little direct mechanisms/channels for the CFUGs to hold the various actors supporting community forestry accountable. With regards to lack of accountability of donors, for instance, when I was finishing up my field studies, NARCLMP (Australian Community forestry Project) was phasing out not because AUSAID was ‘satisfied’ with the performance of community forestry and its support to the program but because Australia had decided to divert its resources to the countries in the Pacific for geo-political reasons (personal communication with NARCLMP staff at the national level, March 2005)<sup>105</sup>. According to the Assistant Forest Officer of Kavre as well as the former NARCLMP staff in Kavre, NARCLMP had a strong focus on ‘women’s empowerment’ in its projects which were implemented primarily through Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and some through the DFO-K. These projects came to an end when NARCLMP phased out.

Similarly, NARMSAP (the DANIDA community forestry project and the largest donor in community forestry) decided to ‘suspend’ the project after the royal coup in Nepal in Feb. 2005<sup>106</sup>. NARMSAP staff in its regional office in Kaski District said they were expecting the project to move into its next phase, and had no say in DANIDA’s decision to suspend the project (Personal discussion with three NARMSAP staff, Kaski District). Because NARMSAP was channeling its funds primarily through the DFO and FECOFUN in Kaski, I also found the budget for FECOFUN and DFO-KI had decreased. This in turn had hampered the gender and social equity projects NARMSAP had been funding FECOFUN to carry out in Gharmi village. Many of these activities were being reduced and the women members of the CFUG (who the initiatives were targeting) had little knowledge of the reasons why.

Going beyond these specific examples, the frequent changes in donor approaches to community forestry governance, as I have discussed through analysis of the evolution of community forestry policies, also puts into question the accountability of donors to the CFUGs they are supporting at the local level.

### ***9.3.3 Politics of Promoting Gender and Social Equity in CF: Lessons from the Interface between Forest Users and External Agents in Bhatpole & Gharmi***

The ‘politics of implementation’ is inadequately reflected in the current framework for promoting gender and social equity in community forestry. I argue that targeting ‘socially excluded’ groups and ensuring that they participate and benefit from the community forestry process is an inherently political process. Apart from formulating indicators for how to include them in the community forestry process and identifying the ‘targeted groups’ along gender, caste, and ethnic lines (which I have problematized above), there is not much focus on how external agents (state and non-state actors involved in community forestry) can negotiate for the inclusion of the socially excluded amongst multiple actors, interests, and distribution of power at the local level.

The contrasting experiences with external intervention in community forestry in Bhatpole and in Gharmi points to the importance of external agents to be both ‘embedded’ in the intervening context - to better understand the power relations and take strategic cues from ongoing negotiations and change - and simultaneously be ‘autonomous’ from the powerful interests within the intervening context - to identify and promote the marginalized groups. In Chapter Seven on gender and community forestry in Gharmi, I highlighted how the DFO-KI played a crucial role in mediating the conflict between the high and low-castes over Bhumipujnee-Teesdhunge community forest. This required the DFO-KI to be ‘embedded’ in the caste-based politics surrounding the forest, and ‘autonomous’ from the high-castes who had historically dominated village politics and monopolized extra-local reach. Similarly, when FECOFUN took over, I discussed how the field agents were able to strategically negotiate with the powerful, male figures within *Biswa-Karma* society for greater gender inclusivity in institutions. In Bhatpole, in comparison, the forest officials of the DFO-K were both ‘disembedded’ and ‘autonomous’ from the gendered context in Bhatpole. As a consequence, what was meant to be a women’s led community forestry initiative transformed into one that was dependent on men. The change in DFO-K’s support to community forestry that prioritized and targeted women users further attenuated the disjuncture between formal and informal institutions. The gender related support provided by the forest officials in Bhatpole remained disembedded from the gendered context and did little to alter the nature of relationship between forest officials and local users.

In comparing and contrasting the ‘politics of implementation’ in Bhatpole and Gharmi, I am in no way suggesting that the experiences of Gharmi and/or approach taken by FECOFUN should be replicated elsewhere and that this would guarantee gender inclusive results. For example, I pointed out in Chapter Eight that institutional changes negotiated by FECOFUN were re-negotiated and re-molded by powerful elements within *Biswa-Karma* society and mediated by existing gender differences amongst women. Nevertheless, I argue the comparison between the two empirical studies of Bhatpole and Gharmi does serve to highlight the ‘politics of implementation’ and possibly the importance of ‘embedded autonomy’ in identifying and strategically promoting gender-based exclusions that could have lessons for external intervention beyond the particular cases of Gharmi and Bhatpole(Kanel 2004).

In concluding, this research has presented and discussed the interrelationship between gender, institutions and external agents in the context of community forestry in the middle hills of Nepal. It has also discussed how the research findings inform the theoretical debates in the gender and institutions literature, and the ongoing attempts to formulate gender and social equity sensitive community forestry policies in Nepal.

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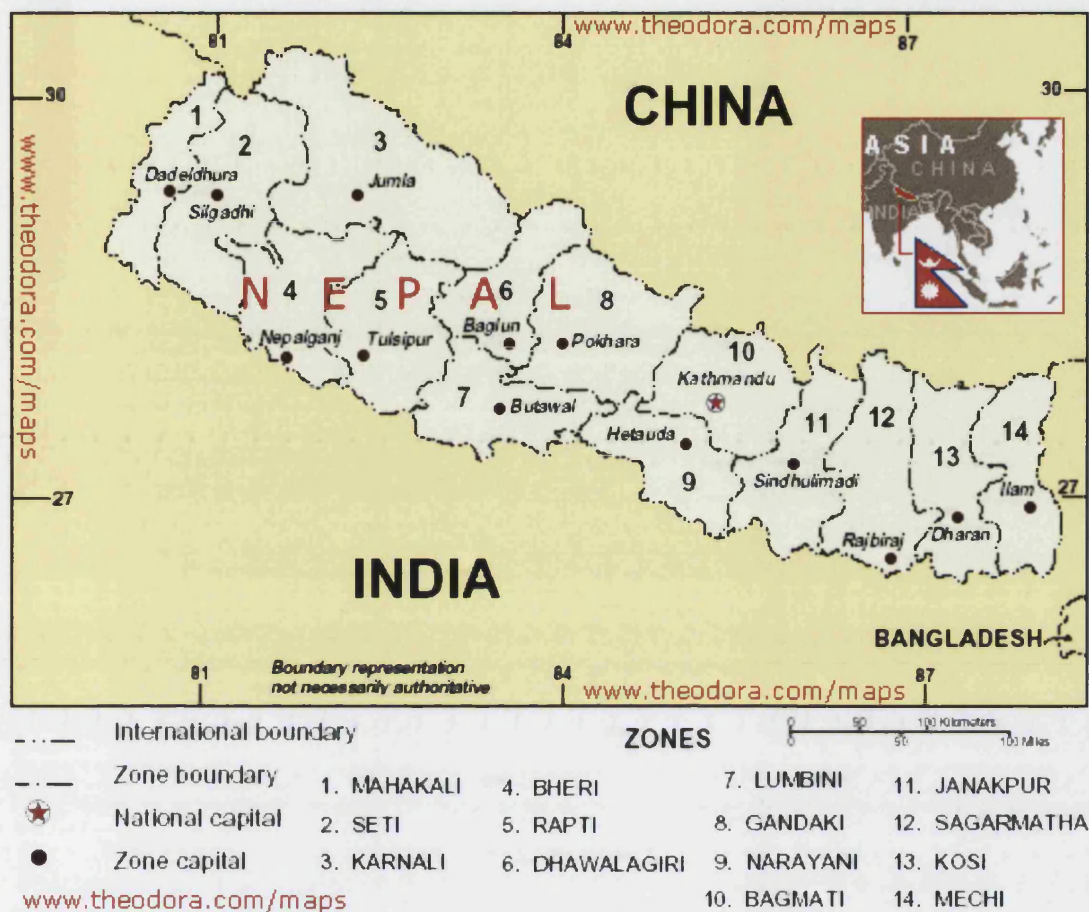
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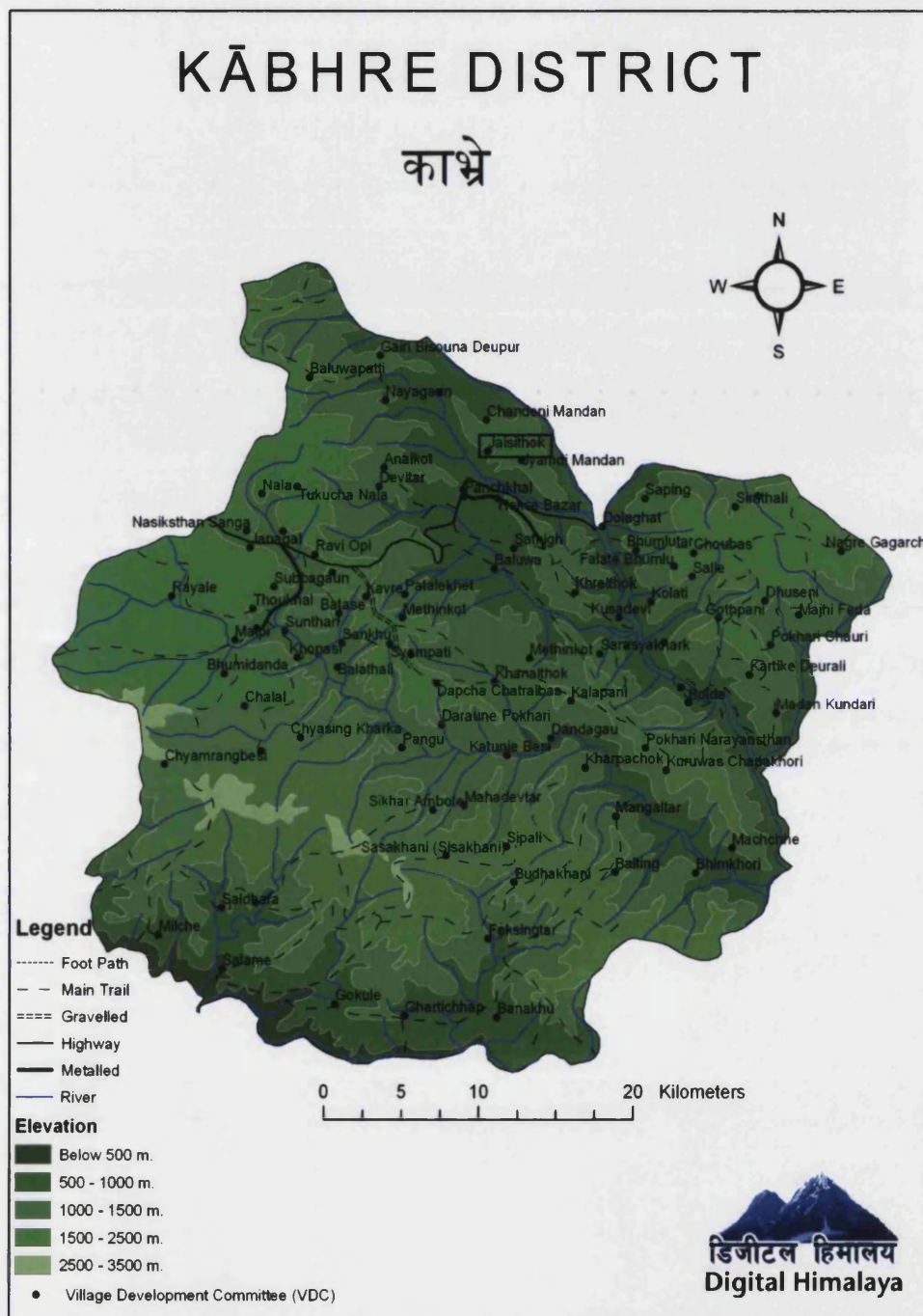
## 11 Appendix 1: Map of Nepal



Note:

- The District of Kavre is in Zone 10 seen above. Further, Jaisithok VDC (the field site) is located in the District of Kavre.
- The District of Kaski is in Zone 8 seen above. Further, Lamacahuar VDC (the field site) is located in the District of Kaski.

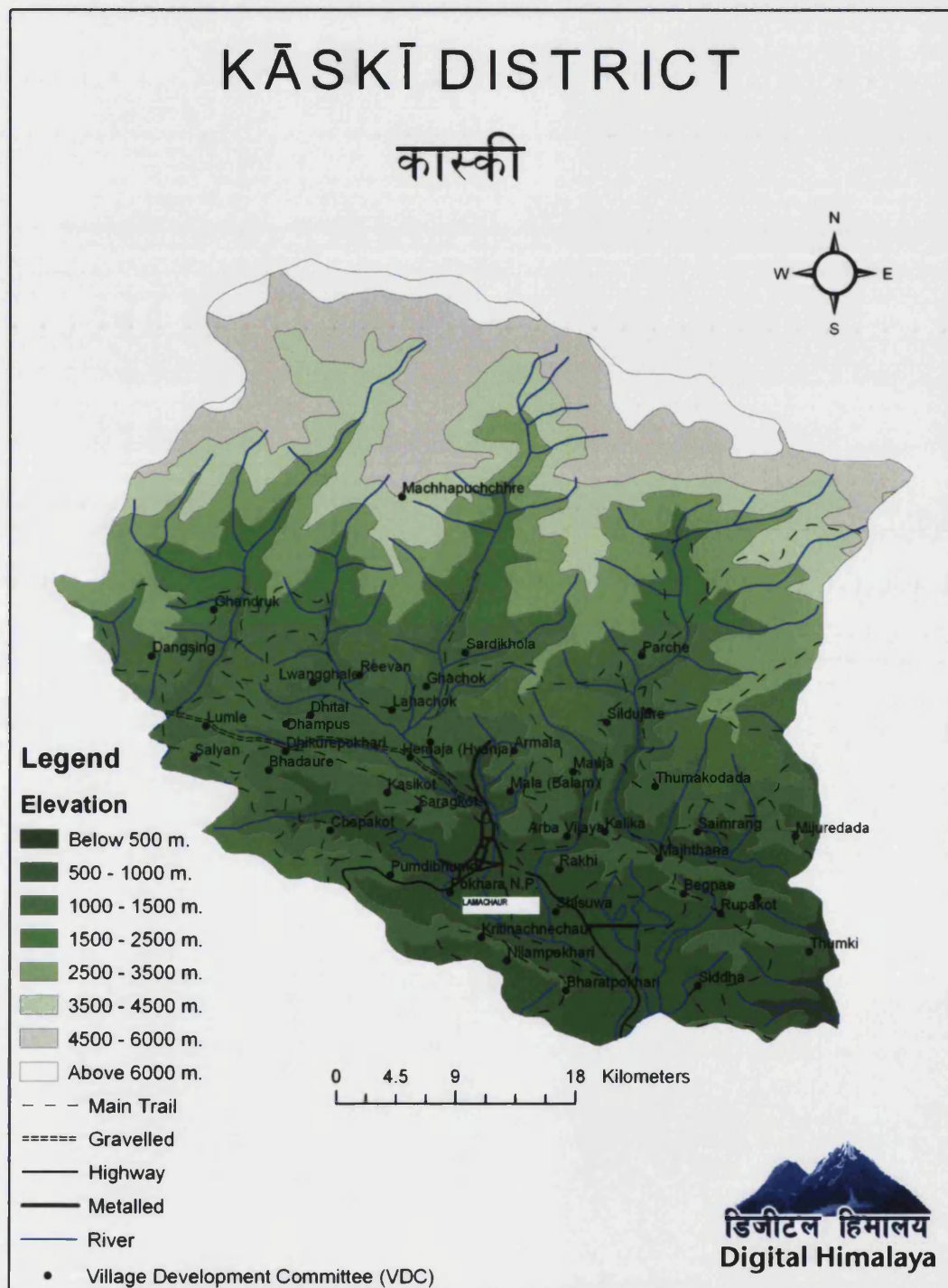
## 12 Appendix 1: Map of Kavre District



Source: Digital Himalaya ([www.digitalhimalaya.com](http://www.digitalhimalaya.com))



## 13 Appendix 1: Map of Kaski District



Source: Digital Himalaya ([www.digitalhimalaya.com](http://www.digitalhimalaya.com))

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## 14 Notes

<sup>1</sup> Notable exceptions include the following:

Hobley, M. (1996b). Participatory forestry : the process of change in India and Nepal.

London, Rural Development Forestry Network, Overseas Development Institute.

, Agarwal, B. (2001). "Participatory Exclusions, Community Forestry, and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework." World Development 29(10): 1623-1648.

, Nightingale, A. (2002). "Participating or Just Sitting in? The Dynamics of Gender and Caste in Community Forestry." Journal of Forest and Livelihood 2(1): 17-24.

<sup>2</sup> The role of external actors in community forestry processes are explored by Bharat Pokharel (Department of Forestry) and Charla Britt (FECOFUN). However, from a gender perspective, Pokharel's focus is limited to the relationship between state and society and its implications on the sustainable management of community forests. He barely touches on gender-related issues, and does not consider how the multiple actors involved in community forestry impact on and shape local level processes. Similarly, Britt is concerned with social movements and portrays the FECOFUN in opposition to the government. However, recently and increasingly, the government is sub-contracting its responsibilities to FECOFUN, as I have discussed in the case of community forestry in Gharimi village in Chapter Eight. Hence, the 'blurriness' between state-civil society relations in the present context of community forestry governance in Nepal is not adequately reflected in Britt's analysis.

<sup>3</sup> She challenges the argument that women's roles in traditional societies were confined to the domestic sector and their status was inferior to those of men. Instead, she argues that women in traditional African societies played a significant role in agricultural production, which in turn, gave them equal status with men. Agricultural policies, through their productivity-enhancing interventions and dominant western notions of what constituted appropriate female tasks, led to men's monopoly over modern cash-cropping sector. Relegated to the subsistence sector, women lost their income, status and power relative to men. WID employed these arguments to suggest that women's role is not confined to the domestic sector. Re-establishing and enhancing women's historical role in the productive sector will lead to development equity and efficiency.

<sup>4</sup> For a good discussion on the differences between WID and GAD, and the evolution of discourses on gender issues in development; see: Razavi, S. and C. Miller (1995). From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse. Geneva, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

<sup>5</sup> NHE assumptions does not rule out welfare differentials within the household (i.e. those who produce more may have greater claim over household resources). It rules out welfare inequities in the sense of unequal weighting given to individual utilities within the aggregated welfare function. See the contentious study by Rosenwig and Shutz (1982) for an illustration of this argument and its criticisms by Folbre (1984)

Rosenwig, M. and P. T. Schultz (1982). "Market Opportunities, Genetic Endowments and Intrafamily allocation of Resources: Child Survival in Rural India." American Economic Review 74(4): 803-815.

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, Folbre, N. (1984). "Market Opportunities, Genetic Endowments and the Intrafamily Resource Distribution: Comment." American Economic Review 74(3): 518-20.

<sup>6</sup> In my analysis of gender relations amongst the low-caste/*Dalits* of Gharmi and the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole, I found material and ideological differences in bargaining power at the household and extra-household levels were crucial for understanding gender inequalities between men and women. Access to employment, which remained limited for women in both contexts, was one of the central means through gender inequalities were sustained. In Gharmi, women's lack of access was sustained by gender ideologies (i.e. through caste and gender-based norms that limited women's mobility and prevented them from conducting more 'lucrative' tasks). In Bhatpole, in comparison, lack of access to equal opportunities between men and women was more to do with gender biases in markets for *Tamang* labor, both within and outside of Jaisithok VDC. Notwithstanding the importance of employment, there were also other factors that both enabled and limited women's bargaining power and fall back options which I have discussed in greater length in the Chapters Five and Seven.

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in my research on the *Tamang* women of Bhatpole (refer to Chapter 5) *Tamang* women placed considerable importance on cooperating within the household to maintain access to male income and land. Nevertheless, women were often critical in their views on intra-household allocation of male income. In Gharmi (refer to Chapter 7), 'cooperation' was important for material well-being, and maintaining status and privilege within the household.

<sup>8</sup> Notable exceptions include:

Cleaver, F. and D. Elson (1995). Women and Water Resources: Continued Marginalization and New Policies, International Institute for Environment & Development.

, Adams, W., M. Elizabeth, et al. (1997). "Water, Rules and Gender: Water Rights in an Indigenous System, Marakwet, Kenya." Development and Change 20(4): 707-730.

, Cleaver, F. (1998). "Incentives and Informal Institutions: Gender and Management of Water." Agriculture and Human Values 15: 347-360.

, Cleaver, F. (2002). "Reinventing Institutions: Bricolage and the Social Embeddedness of Natural Resource Management." European Journal of Development Research 14(2): 11-30.

, Mosse, D. (1997). "The Symbolic Making of a Common Property Resource: History, Ecology and Locality in a Tank-Irrigated Landscape in South India." Development and Change 28(3): 467-504.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, 'community forestry' policies such as the Forest Act 1993 and Forest Regulation 1995 in Nepal focus on the nature of rules necessary for local communities to manage resources efficiently. Recent changes in policy discourses surrounding community forestry in Nepal focus on how to ensure these institutions are also gender and socially inclusive (See Chapter Three).

<sup>10</sup> Such a classification of the institutions and the commons is inspired by the work of Craig Johnson. Johnson provides a powerful argument for classifying the vast literature conducted on the commons and institutions into two schools of thought—dominant and alternative. As Johnson argues, the CPR literature represents dominant approach that has hegemonized scholarship on the commons, and concentrates on examining the link between 'institutions' and 'resource efficiency'. In comparison, alternative approaches focus on historically situated institutions and broader development concerns of poverty and entitlement. Johnson, C.

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(2004). "Uncommon Ground: The 'Poverty of History' in Common Property Discourse." Development and Change 35(3): 407-433.

<sup>11</sup> With respect to nationalization and the prominence of 'rolling back of the state' in the CPR literature, for instance, Ostrom (1990, pp.17) argues: "it is difficult for a central authority to have sufficient time-and-place information to estimate accurately both the carrying capacity of a CPR and the appropriate fines to induce cooperative outcomes". Uphoff (1998) argues nationalization was frequently counterproductive because it disrupted the indigenous institutions that were present to overcome the tragedy of the commons.

Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

, Uphoff, N. (1998). Community-based Natural Resource Management: Connecting Micro and Macro Processes, and People within their Environments. International Workshop on 'Community-Based Natural Resource Management', Washington D.C.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Ostrom (1990) translates these into 8 design principles (such as well-defined communities of eligible user-managers and clear, easily enforced and environmentally cautious rules to constrain resource use etc.) on the basis of institutional arrangements found in the long-enduring CPR institutions she studied.

Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Through an extensive review of literature aimed at identifying conditions for local self-management of resources, Agrawal (2001) finds two main problems with developing a grand theory on the commons. First, scholars have narrowly focused on institutions around common pool resource without giving due consideration to some of the following, pertinent questions: how aspects of resource system, some aspects of user group membership, and the external social, physical and institutional environment affect institutional durability and long-term management at the local level. The second criticism relates to the methods employed. Single case studies or even comparative ones for that matter suffer from omission of key variables thereby making the conclusions drawn relevant only for the sample under consideration rather than applying more generally.

Agrawal, A. and E. Ostrom (2001). "Collective Action, Property Rights, and Decentralization in Resource Use in India and Nepal." Politics and Society 29(4): 485-514.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, through a comparative study of numerous CPR regimes, Gibson et al. (2005) find monitoring and evaluation arrangements integral for sustainable resource management. Gibson, C. C., John T. Williams, et al. (2005). "Local Enforcement and Better Forests." World Development 33(2): 273-284.

<sup>15</sup> Note that conservation-related issues are beyond the scope of my research. But it is worth noting that a common criticism of the CPR literature is that it does not consider the politics behind resource conservation. Not only are multiple actors with multiple interests involved in resource use and management, but these actors' perceptions towards resource degradation/regeneration also differ. Moreover, the question of who should be entrusted with the responsibility of measuring and assessing is largely ignored. The political ecology literature points to the differences in perceptions of 'regeneration' and 'degradation' that local people and development interventionists hold, for instance.

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Thompson, M., M. Warburton, et al. (1986). Uncertainty on a Himalayan scale : an institutional theory of environmental perception and a strategic framework for the sustainable development of the Himalaya. London, Milton Ash Editions/Ethnographica.

, Tiffin, M. (1995). "Population Density, Economic Growth and Societies in Transition: Boserup Reconsidered in a Kenyan Case-Study." Development and Change 26(31-65).

, Guthman, J. (1997). "Representing Crisis: The Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation and the Project of Development in Post-Rana Nepal." Development and Change 28(1): 45-69.

, Leach, M., R. Mearns, et al. (1999). "Environmental Entitlements: Dynamics and Institutions in Community-Based Natural Resource Management." World Development 27(2): 225-47.

, Nygren, A. (2000). "Development Discourses and Peasant-Forest Relations: Natural Resource Utilization as Social Process." Development and Change 31(1): 11-34.

<sup>16</sup> The emphasis on promoting 'accountable' institutions emerges from a separate research on state-society relations in natural resource governance that Arun Agrawal has been conducting along side Jesse Ribot. Let me begin by first putting this research into context. The role of the 'state' in natural resource governance remains contested at best. Scholars, informed by competing theoretical perspectives within natural resource governance, have argued for 'rolling back of the state'<sup>16</sup>. Recently and increasingly, a plethora of literature, championed by Jesse Ribot, point to the importance of bringing back the state in natural resource governance and revising the state vs. society thesis. They advocate that 'equitable and efficient governance of natural resources' will require for the devolution of 'discretionary powers' from the centralized state to the local level authorities which are in turn, democratically elected and downwardly accountable to the multiple interests of their constituents. Jesse Ribot and Arun Agrawal's paper on *Accountability and Decentralization: A Framework with South Asian and West African Cases* serves as a good example.

Agrawal, A. A. and J. C. Ribot (1999). "Accountability in Decentralization: A Framework with South Asian and African Cases." Journal of Developing Areas 33: 473-502.

, Ribot, J. C. (2002). Democratic Decentralization of Natural Resources: Institutionalizing Popular Participation. Washington, D.C., World Resources Institute.

, Ribot, J. C., A. Agrawal, et al. (2006). "Recentralizing While Decentralizing: How National Governments Reappropriate Forest Resources." World Development 34(11): 1864-1886.

<sup>17</sup> VDCs are the main administrative regions of Nepal at the local levels.

<sup>18</sup> Nepal is divided into three major geographical regions: middle hills, *Terai* and the high-mountains. The Nepal government's forestry policies have historically been distinct in these two areas. Community forestry is championed primarily in the middle hills. It is not the scope of this chapter to discuss how and why community forestry policies were implemented in the middle hills and not *Terai*. Nevertheless, for good discussions on forestry issues in the *Terai*, see the following:

Bampton, J. F. R. (2003). "District Forest Coordination Committee; An Emerging Multistakeholder Platform For Collaborative Forest Management In Nepal's Terai " Journal of Forest and Livelihood 2(2): 35-47.

, Chhetry, B., P. Francis, et al. (2005). "A Framework For The Analysis Of Community Forestry Performance In The Terai." Journal of Forest and Livelihood 4(2): 1-16.

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<sup>19</sup> Denzin (1989) defines ‘non-schedule standardized’ interviews in which a list of information is required from all respondents but the particular phrasing of the questions and their order are re-defined to fit the characteristics of each respondent. The ‘nonstandardized interviews’ are those with no prescribed set of questions employed, and questions not asked in a specified order.

Denzin, N. K. (1989). The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods. New Jersey, Prentice Hall.

<sup>20</sup> Refer to the literature on community forestry in Nepal that was discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>21</sup> Refer to discussions in Chapter Five on Gender Relations Amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole.

<sup>22</sup> A good example of (1) was a school teacher in Bhatpole who became one of my key informants not because he was the most educated in the village, but because he was able to communicate (in a ‘language’ accessible) to me many social, cultural and political dimensions of village life. I found the Tamangs to be the most difficult to comprehend (literally and metaphorically) on multiple levels. Most of the Tamangs of Bhatpole (men and women alike) spoke ‘Nepali’ very well because of the location of Bhatpole, history of migration (male and female alike) to towns and cities, and dependence on the Jaisi-Bahun (Nepali speakers) for daily wage and non-agricultural work. Nevertheless, in their every day life they conversed in a Tamang dialect which was incomprehensible to a ‘Nepali’ speaker like myself. Tamangs also practiced a variation of shamanic Buddhism I was not accustomed to. Many of their socio-cultural practices (such as marriage practices, transactions, initiation ceremonies and more) were new to me. All of these differences posed significant challenges for understanding gender dynamics in the village. And in such a context, the school teacher was an important and crucial resource to have to ‘translate’ (literally and metaphorically) many dimensions of Tamang life and culture.

In comparison, there were many dimensions of socio-cultural practices I could resonate with in Gharmi. I found my personal background and orientations proved to be important for understanding how caste and gender relations intersected in the village. Having said that, during the course of my study, I also found that the *Biswa-Karmas* leaders and community at large were particularly concerned about portraying a unified *Biswa-Karmas* community to me (the outside researcher). This must be understood in the context of caste-based politics in the *Biswa-Karmas* community, which I discuss at length in Chapter Seven and Eight. Intra *Biswa-Karmas* divisions and conflicts were difficult to find about and understand. And therefore, it was important for me to get ‘inside’ opinion into the various contradictions within *Biswa-Karmas* society and in this regard, I found it was important to draw from the relationship of trust and confidence I built with my informants.

<sup>23</sup> See Pokharel for in-depth discussion on the organization politics and culture of the Department of Forestry.

Pokharel, B. K. (1997). Foresters and Villagers in Contention and Compact: The Case of Community Forestry in Nepal. PhD Thesis, University of East Anglia.

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<sup>24</sup> I was interested in exploring the theoretical frameworks championed by the larger literature on policy processes in general and those in environment and development in particular.

Examples included:

Fisher, F. and J. Forester (1993). The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis. NC and London, Duke University Press.

, Hajer, M. A. (1995). The Politics of Environmental Discourse. Oxford, Clarendon.

, Fisher, F. (1998). "Beyond Empiricism: Policy Inquiry and Post-Postivist Perspective." Policy Studies 26(1): 129-145.

, Keeley, J. and I. Scoones (1999). Understanding Environmental Policy Process: A Review. IDS Working Paper 89. University of Sussex, Environment Group, Institute of Development Studies.

, Holmes, T. and I. Scoones (2000). Participatory Environmental Policy Process: Experiences from North and South. IDS Working Paper 113, Institute of Development Studies.

, Keeley, J. and I. Scoones (2000). Environmental Policymaking in Zimbabwe: Discourses, Science and Politics. IDS Working Paper 116, Institute of Development Studies.

, Leach, M. and J. Fairhead (2000). "Fashioned Forest Pasts, Occluded Histories? International Environmental Analysis in West African Locales." Development and Change 31(1): 35-59.

, Hajer, M. A. (2003). A Frame in the Fields: Policymaking and Reinvention of Politics. Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society. M.

A. Hajer and H. Wagenaar. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Cape Town, Cambridge University Press.

, Hajer, M. A. and W. Henderick, Eds. (2003). Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

, Fisher, F. (2006). "Participatory Governance as Deliberative Empowerment: The Cultural Politics of Discursive Space." The American Review of Public Administration 36(1): 19-40.

<sup>25</sup> Many development organizations had to find ways of working in and around the conflict. Pokharel, B. K., H. Ojha, et al. (2005). Assessing Development Space and Outcomes in Conflict Situation; A Reflection from Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project. Kathmandu, Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project.

<sup>26</sup> For more discussion and updates on Nepali's politics, see [www.nepalnews.com](http://www.nepalnews.com), and [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com).

<sup>27</sup> To my knowledge, there has been little independent research conducted on how the conflict was affecting gender relations and institutions. Donors and particularly the Nepal-Swiss Community Forestry Project had recognized the importance of factoring in the conflict and had developed various ways of working in and around the conflict. See:

Pokharel, B. K., H. Ojha, et al. (2005). Assessing Development Space and Outcomes in Conflict Situation; A Reflection from Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project. Kathmandu, Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project.

, Nightingale, A. (2006). Gender And Equity Report. Kathmandu, Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project.

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<sup>28</sup> These commitments are informed by and reflected in the government's Tenth Development Plan (2002-2007) as well as the field experiences of gender and social exclusion in community forest user groups.

<sup>29</sup> The distinction between forestry policies in Nepal, in general, and those in the Middle Hills are important to make because a different set of settlement history, importance of forest resources, and government policies have existed in these two areas. Community forestry is mainly confined to the Middle Hills of the country while a different set of model for co-management of forests is being envisioned for the *Terai*.

<sup>30</sup> This is referred to the massacre that took place where different governing elites (the Bhardars) were killed by Juna Bahadur Rana and his thirteen brothers.

<sup>31</sup> For detailed discussion see:

Regmi, M. C. (1978). Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal. Kathmandu Ratna Pushtak Bhanda.

, Regmi, M. C. (1988). An Economic History of Nepal: 1846-1901. Varanasi, Nath Publishing House.

<sup>32</sup> Having recently emerged out of the clutches of Rana Oligarchy, the Monarchy pursued policies to strengthen the institution of monarchy, while uprooting the remnants of the Rana Oligarchy policies and power base. Therefore, the King pursued nationalization of the forest to regain power and control over land distribution.

<sup>33</sup> Whelpton suggests that the Ranas 'closed' Nepal to the rest of the world to prevent foreign interference.

Whelpton, J. (2005). A History of Nepal. Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>34</sup> The National Planning Commission has been developing a series of five year development plans since 1962 to outline the medium-term development plans of the country. All the Ministries of the government have to plan around the development plans. The Master Plan for the Forestry Sector 1988 was a product of the Seventh Development Plan (1985-1990), for instance.

<sup>35</sup> For further discussions on the rise and prominence of populist discourses in development practice in 1970s and 1980s and their implications for community forestry in Nepal, see:

Hobley, M. (1996b). Participatory forestry : the process of change in India and Nepal. London, Rural Development Forestry Network, Overseas Development Institute.

<sup>36</sup> The Forest Regulation (1995) is the procedural guidelines for how to implement the Forest Act 1993.

<sup>37</sup> As reflected in the number of academics and policy literature quoted in the sections above.

<sup>38</sup> NRM sector is not limited to the forestry sector and includes buffer zone developments, leasehold forestry groups, soil and conservation groups, wetlands groups etc.

<sup>39</sup> It has been working in community forest in three districts since 1990.



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<sup>40</sup> I interviewed a total of 30 key actors (national and local levels) working in and around gender issues (including those in the GPSE indicators) in bi-lateral organizations (such as the LFP, NARMSAP, NARCLMP, NFSCP), government (Ministry of Forestry and Conservation and Department of Women, both in Kaski and Kavre districts), NGOs (FECOFUN). Because of time constraints I cannot list nor conduct a detailed analysis of the gender-related reports, manuals and publications I consulted as part of my research.

<sup>41</sup> For greater coverage on these Nepal's political developments in English, refer to [www.nepalnews.com](http://www.nepalnews.com), which includes daily and weekly newspapers such as Nepali Times and the Himalayan Times.

<sup>42</sup> I refer to the village where *Tamangs* live as 'Bhatpole' instead of Ward 2 and 5. As with the case of majority of the VDCs in the middle hills of Nepal, there was a lack of congruence between the administrative divisions of Jaisithok and what people refer to as their 'villages' in local parlance. Villages such as 'Bhatpole' refer to unilateral descent group in the male line that are typically clustered together in settlement (see: Okada 1976). Similarly, ward 2 and 5 meant little in the everyday lives of its dwellers except in dealing with the state bureaucracy. It was common for individuals to live in Ward 2 and have fields in Ward 5 and vice-versa for those settled in Ward 5.

<sup>43</sup> Refer to annex 1 to see the geographic location of the village. While Map 1 locates Jaisithok VDC within Nepal, the Map 2 locates Bhatpole within Jaisithok VDC.

<sup>44</sup> There is a small population of *Newars* that continue to reside in the village and could trace their roots.

<sup>45</sup> It is not the scope of this chapter to unravel the complexities behind the meanings, hierarchy and kinship relations within these divisions. Very briefly, the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole are of 'Waiba' castes and follow the 'Patring' form of Shamanic Buddhism. See Holmberg (1989) for a detailed discussion on Tamang social structure and Shamanic Buddhism. Holmberg, D. (1989). Order in Paradox: Myth, Ritual and Exchange among Nepal's Tamang. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

<sup>46</sup> This has implications for the extent to which I can draw from the existing literature on the *Tamangs*. '*Tamangs*' have captured the interest of a number of scholars, national and international alike. However, much of this literature is demographic in nature and/or focuses on different groups of *Tamangs* with distinct socio-cultural practices from that found in Bhatpole. However, I have drawn from the literature as and when appropriate. Fricke, T. E., A. Thornton, et al. (1990). "Family organization and the wage labor transition in a Tamang community of Nepal." Human Ecology 18(3).

, Fricke, T. E. (1994). Himalayan Households: Tamang Demography and Domestic Processes. New York, Columbia University Press.

, Dahal, D. R., T. Fricke, et al. (1996). "Family Transitions and the Practice of Birdservice in the Upper Ankhu Khola: A Tamang Case." Contributions to Nepalese Studies 23(2): 377-401.

, Dahal, D. R. and T. E. Fricke (1998). "Tamang Transitions: Transformations in the Culture of Childbearing and Fertility among Nepal's Tamang." Contributions to Nepalese Studies 25: 59-77.

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<sup>47</sup> The VDC and DDC-level committees had been dissolved in Nepal at the time of the field study. Nevertheless, the major decision-making positions in the Village Panchayat (during the ‘Panchayat’ era) as well as VDC committee were mostly held by the *Jaisi-Bahun*s. If access to basic services (such as health, education and infrastructure such as roads, electricity and water supply) were to be compared between the *Jaisi-Bahun*s and *Tamangs*, the contrast between the two would become glaringly obvious.

<sup>48</sup> Differences in research contexts aside, Guneratne’s (2002) comparative study on ethnicity and politics amongst the Tharus in the *Terai* region of Nepal also points to the important role that ‘perceptions towards the dominant’ plays in the emergence of ethnic consciousness. Guneratne, A. (2002). Many Tongue, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal. Ithaca, Cornell University.

<sup>49</sup> The distinctive aspects of marriage practices in Bhatpole are the following: preference for bi-lateral cross-cousin marriages and hierarchy between wife-giving and wife-receiving households, to be discussed in the next discussion on marriage practices.

<sup>50</sup> In other words, mother’s natal family would be ‘wife giving’ and therefore have claims over mother’s marital family ‘wife receiving’.

<sup>51</sup> This will be addressed in the following discussion on gender division of family farm production and domestic labor.

<sup>52</sup> See the map of Nepal in Appendix I to see where Ramechap district is located.

<sup>53</sup> This will be the focus of discussion under 6.4, and women’s extra-local dependence on men.

<sup>54</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent discussion on intra-household allocation of resources.

<sup>55</sup> As pointed out under Section 5.1, inter-ethnic relations between *Bahun* and *Tamangs*, Jaisithok VDC.

<sup>56</sup> There could be a multitude of reasons for why the *Tamangs* did not adhere to these stereotypes in allocating labor in practice. I suspect two of the most important reasons could be: (1) *Tamangs* did not feel any sense of urgency to adhere by these principles. This probably relates to the lack of gender norms that restrict women’s freedom and autonomy more generally in the *Tamang* community. (2) Even if *Tamangs* were to follow these stereotypes, there were little mechanisms in place to enforce and monitor these stereotypes in practice. There was a conspicuous absence of an overarching authority or structure in the village and decision-making mechanisms in the household and community level were, to a large extent, decentralized.

<sup>57</sup> I use diversification of livelihood as Ellis (1998: 4) does to imply: “process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standard of living”. Ellis adds that easy generalizations about what constitutes ‘diversification’ must be refrained for the forces

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underpinning it and outcomes flowing from it depends on a number of variables such as geographical location, assets, income, opportunity and social relations. The focus of this chapter is not specifically on diversification of livelihood. Nevertheless, I have placed tremendous attention into discussing the context, relations, and outcomes of livelihood diversification amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpoles.

<sup>58</sup> The above finding on the relationship between women's role in agriculture and women's seclusion norms has also been recorded elsewhere in the gender and development literature. See for instance, Longhurst and Jewitt for similar arguments.

Longhurst, R. (1982). Resource Allocation And Sexual Division Of Labor; A Case Study Of A Moslem Hausa Village in Northern Nigeria. Women and Development. L. Beneria. New York, Praeger: 95-117.

, Jewitt, S. (2000). "Unequal Knowledges in Jharkhand, India: De-Romanticizing Women's Agroecological Expertise." Development and Change 31: 961-985.

<sup>59</sup> Maria Mies's seminal research on 'invisibility of women's labor' amongst the *Kapu* caste in Narasapur together with Ann Whitehead's (1981) analysis of gender differences in 'command over labor' amongst the *Kusasi* in Ghana aid in explaining my findings on *Bahun* women's lack of involvement in the agricultural sector, notwithstanding differences in context. As in the case study of *Kapu* women's involvement in lace making studied by Mies, the invisibility of *Bahun* women's contribution to agricultural production were the outcome of: (1) gender ideologies that serve to strictly separate 'productive' and 'reproductive' work; (2) promote the view of women as housewives and men as breadwinners, and (3) ingrain the perceptions of women's work outside their traditional roles as an extension of their reproductive duties. The fact that *Bahun* women lacked independent claims over the fruit of their labor also resonates with Whitehead's argument that differences in relative power and position of men and women to command the labor of other members of the household.

Whitehead, A. (1981). I'm Hungry Mum: The Politics of Domestic Budgetting. In of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective. K. Young, C.

Walkowitz and R. McCullagh. London, CSE Books: 88-111.

, Mies, M. (1982). The Lace Makers of Narsapur: Indian Housewives Produce for the World Market. London, Zed Books.

<sup>60</sup> The increase in demand for labor was general. However, later on in the chapter, I will argue that *Tamang* women's labor, in particular, was perceived as substitutable.

<sup>61</sup> See section 5.3 for discussions on gender disparities in markets for *Tamang* labor in towns and cities.

<sup>62</sup> See Niraula and Morgan for similar findings on the *Tamang* community they studied in north-central Nepal.

Niraula, B. B. and P. S. Morgan (1996). "Marriage Formation, Post-Marital Contact with Natal Kin and Autonomy of Women: Evidence from Two Nepali Settings." Population Studies 50(1): 35-50.

<sup>63</sup> Watkins' study of gender relations in the Nyeshangte community (Tibeto-Burman ethnic minority in Nepal) also comes with similar arguments as the one I have presented above. She argues that the community discourages women from working outside the rural areas in towns

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and cities not because of overt restrictions on women's mobility as much as to avoid harassment that women have to face on a regular basis. Women enjoy considerable freedom in their personal lives within the community, but the external environments women interact in embody gender biases. Such findings, in many respects, re-confirm the importance of networks in facilitating the migration process.

Watkins, J. C. (1996). Spirited Women: Gender, Religion and Cultural Identity in the Nepal Himalaya. New York, Columbia University Press.

<sup>64</sup> Graner (2001) also finds similar results in her much more in-depth and country-wide study on gender and carpet industries of Nepal. Both men and women worked in the carpet factory in the 1980s and 1990s, while the industry was experiencing unprecedented growth. Wages earned in the factory constituted a significant source of non-agricultural income. The demise of the industry marked a halt in the nonagricultural opportunities available for women. While male workers who had access to more attractive labor opportunities moved onto new and more attractive destinations (particularly in the Gulf), women were largely left behind. More gender inclusive markets do exist in Nepal. Women migrate to towns and cities and work in hotels and restaurants, handicraft production, and other forms of employment that are more likely to take semi-skilled female workers, like *Tamang* women of Bhatpole.

Graner, E. (2001). "Labor Markets and Migration in Nepal: The Case of Workers in Kathmandu Valley Carpet Manufactories " Mountain Research and Development 21(3): 253-259.

<sup>65</sup> See section 5.2 on gender dimensions of socio-cultural practices amongst the *Tamangs* of Bhatpole.

<sup>66</sup> As pointed out in section 5.3.2 *Bahun*s used this as a justification to pay *Tamang* men significantly more than *Tamang* women.

<sup>67</sup> There were ongoing discussions with the Canadian NGO working in Jaisithok VDC (including in Bhatpole) to promote innovative and fuel efficient technologies more widely.

<sup>68</sup> See inter-ethnic relations and distribution of productive resources in the village in section 5.1.3.

<sup>69</sup> This was after the monsoon season. Collection of forest products during the monsoon season was halted to allow for regeneration.

<sup>70</sup> In section 5.2.4 and 5.4.1 I discussed how most of the seasonal migrants (men) returned to work as agricultural labor during monsoon season in Bhatpole.

<sup>71</sup> Refer to section 5.4.1

<sup>72</sup> 1 male, late 40s, former elected chairperson, Nepali Congress Party and said struggled against Village *Panchayat*; male, late 40s, former VDC secretary (administrative position), member of the Village *Panchayat* in the late 1980s and when Koldanda PF was being initiated in the village.

<sup>73</sup> The forest guard in particular was able to discuss the functioning of Community Forest User groups in more detail, as I will discuss in more detail subsequently.

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<sup>74</sup> The Community Forestry Guidelines (1990, 1995 and 2002) are the official document, published by the Department of Forestry, that outlines the roles and responsibilities of forest extension staff in the handover and post-formation support to Community Forest User groups. The beginning of the document clearly states that all forest extension staffs must follow the guidelines.

<sup>75</sup> I will discuss what led to greater awareness about the roles and responsibilities of the users, as indicated in the 'consitution', in the subsequent section on Institutional Change.

<sup>76</sup> Micro-Credit As an Avenue for Securing Support From Men:

Gender differences in demand and access to credit existed between Tamang men and women in Bhatpole. Six male seasonal migrants who had returned to the village temporarily told me that Tamang men from Bhatpole found it easier to access credit from established, Brahmin money lenders in Jaisithok and Panckaal VDCs. But such forms of credit were confined to large sums of money and at hefty interest rates of 35-40%. Consequently, men found it more difficult to get credit for small amounts of cash flow problems they encountered on a more regular basis. For instance, as one of the interviewees explained to me, Tamang male seasonal migrants often returned to the village during peak agricultural seasons and/or for weddings and festivals. The remittances they brought to Bhatpole were spent on household expenses, frequent get-togethers with relatives and friends, to cover extravagant expenditures incurred at festivals and weddings, and were rarely saved. When it was time to return for work to the cities and/or outside of Bhatpole, most struggled to find cash for traveling expenses.

Women's cash flow problems were significantly different than that of men's. According to the interviews I carried out with women and men as part of my inquiry into the intra-household allocation of income (refer to section 5.2.3), women interviewees said they were frequently short of cash to cover regular household expenditures. They had little in the way of gaining access to the same credit channels that men had access to. I argue this can be explained in terms of most women falling under the low profitability group with little collateral in the form of land and income. Women interviewees also added that even if they did have access to these credit channels, the interest rates charged by the money lenders were largely unaffordable to them. Consequently, as I pointed out in section 5.4.2 on women's agency, women had built their own mechanisms to gain access to credit. They had extensive network of friends and kin both within and outside the village who were engaged in small scale borrowing and lending.

But more importantly, the *Tamang* women who were involved in a micro-credit scheme within the Mother's Group (VDC wide) were instrumental in borrowing and adopting from their experiences of micro-credit at the village-wide level to create a specific micro-credit scheme under the Bhatpole community forest that would be targeted at *Tamang* men. I was informed by the women interviewees who were involved that women had debated and discussed extensively amongst themselves. The discussions revolved around the issue of how best to develop a credit system, by borrowing from women's experiences with other such schemes, that would provide sufficient incentive for men to participate in community forest. Women were particularly concerned with the nature of men's mobility. In other words, men were a highly mobile group, who only came to the village at certain periods, and did not share the same tradition as women did of cooperation. Tapping into men's migratory networks<sup>76</sup> to ensure loan repayment would have been much more complex than women's networks. As the

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existing informal micro-credit could not address the issue of men's mobility vis-à-vis extension of micro-credit, women adopted the practices from the Mother's Group.

According to the 12 *Tamang* women interviewees from Bhatpole who borrowed from one another but were not members of the Mother's Group, the basis for receiving loans and repaying were on mutual trust, reciprocity and were relatively easy to monitor and enforce than the micro-credit scheme in the Mother's Group. In comparison to this, the Mother's Group incorporated women from the many ethnicities within Jaisithok VDC (Refer to 5.1 for a list of the ethnic groups in the village). I learnt through the interviews (Jan 2005) I conducted with 6 *Tamangs* from Bhatpole as well as 4 others from ethnic groups who were involved in the Mother's Group that most of these women in the Group had little prior experience cooperating with one another. Hence, what they found effective was to have certain ground rules that had to be followed in all circumstances. These rules in turn were developed through active support and input from District Women's Office's extension workers who visited the village numerous times to help with the credit scheme. The women I spoke to, including the *Tamang* ones, were well-versed with the following rules: loans had to be paid at a pre-agreed time, only certain amounts could be taken, loans could not be monopolized by any particular individual and so on. Similarly, all the income of the group, loans taken, repayment schedules and more were well recorded. Those who did not follow these rules were not eligible for re-borrowing unless they repaid the principal, the interest, and the fine. Meetings were held on a regular basis to go through the accounts, make sure those who were to repay did so, and those who were eligible for loans were able to get them.

<sup>77</sup> Information is gathered from VDC records and corroborated by the author through field work as much as possible.

<sup>78</sup> Pokhara is one of the major cities in Nepal.

<sup>79</sup> No formal study existed on the history of the Gharmi village and the evolution of caste-based relations to my knowledge. This history was orally recited to me by the numerous interviews I conducted during this time, and the above is derived from my field notes.

<sup>80</sup> Note: the last section of this chapter will discuss how male out-migration has changed in recent years and with what implications for gender relationships.

<sup>81</sup> The next chapter on gender and community forestry will discuss this in more detail and how community forestry became a vehicle for articulating and mobilizing support on the basis of these collectively perceived grievances.

<sup>82</sup> Various land reform policies (including security of tenants) were introduced and implemented by the government of Nepal in the 1950s. See Caplan's classical study on low castes in Nepal and politics of Land Tenure in the 1960s: Caplan, A. P. (1972). Priests and Cobblers: A Study of Social Change in a Hindu Village. Aylesbury, Bucks, International Textbook Company Limited.

<sup>83</sup> See discussions in section 7.2.3 and 7.5

<sup>84</sup> Bina Agarwal (1994) in her classical study on Gender and Land Rights draws similar arguments for why women refrained from claiming land.

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Agarwal, B. (1994a). *A field of one's own: gender and land rights in South Asia*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

, Agarwal, B. (1994b). "Gender and command over property: A critical gap in economic analysis and policy in South Asia." *World Development* 22(10): 1455-1478.

<sup>85</sup> 'Tilari' is a beaded and gold necklace worn by married women, and is often presented to them at their weddings.

<sup>86</sup> Nanda stands for husband's youngest sister. In the village, elder siblings got married before the younger ones. But there was an age gap between male and female age at marriage. In the example above, the 'nanda' was almost 4 years younger to the woman's husband, and was married off after 6 months of the woman's marriage.

<sup>87</sup> See subsequent discussions on gender division of labor within and outside the household.

<sup>88</sup> The intersection between gender division of labor outside the household and caste based relations are discussed in the section 7.4.2 and 7.5.

<sup>89</sup> It is not the scope of this chapter to describe at length marriage rituals and symbolism they embody from a gender perspective. Nonetheless, to summarize the major processes of *Biswa-Karma* marriages as I observed in the two marriages I attended as well as what the *Bamin* responsible for conducting the marriage ceremony relayed to me, marriages amongst the *Biswa-Karma* of Gharimi can best be described as a 'process' that contains a number of rituals, continues for years after the marriage ceremony has taken place, and can even last a life-time for those with particularly close ties to their natal home distant relatives or friends often bring 'suitable' marriage proposals to the potential bride's and groom's family. If both sides are satisfied with the proposal, they meet with each other to discuss and decide on the logistics of the marriage. After which follows a series of ceremonies such as the *Kura Chinna* (or formal agreement of marriage), *Swayambar* (or choosing of groom), *Kanyadan* (or giving away of virgin) etc. until the bride is taken to the groom's house. The first few months of the bride moving to her new, marital home is still marked with a number of rituals between the two families. Furthermore, festivals such as *Teej* and *Bhai Tika* maintain ties between the married woman and her natal family post first year of marriage. For details descriptions about similar, marriage practices and their ritual significance, see Lynn Bennett's (1988) seminal work on gender and socio-cultural practices amongst the high-caste in Nepal. Bennett, L. (2002). *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and Symbolic Roles of High-Caste Women in Nepal*. Kathmandu, Mandala Book Point.

<sup>90</sup> *Bamins* are low-caste priests responsible for conducting low-caste rituals and marriage ceremonies.

<sup>91</sup> As my study focuses predominantly on women, although I do include and discuss gender hierarchies within men.

<sup>92</sup> See subsequent discussions on caste and gender.

<sup>93</sup> For, other practices mentioned see:

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Gray, J. (1991). "Marriage and the Constitution of Hierarchy and Gender in Bahun-Chhetri Households." Contributions to Nepalese Studies 18(1): 53-82.

, Kondos, V. (1991). "Subjection and Ethnicity of Anguish: The Nepalese Parbatya Parent-Daughter Relationship." Contributions to Nepalese Studies 25(1): 113.

, Gray, J. (1995). The Householder's World: Purity, Power and Domination in a nepali Village. Delhi, Oxford University Press.

, Cameron, M. (1998). On the Edge of Auspicious: Gender and Caste in Nepal. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

, Bennett, L. (2002). Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and Symbolic Roles of High-Caste Women in Nepal. Kathmandu, Mandala Book Point.

, Kondos, V. (2004). On the Ethics of Hindu Women: Issues, Taboos and Forms of Expression. Kathmandu, Mandala Publications.

<sup>94</sup> A recent study by David Seddon (2002) gives an indication of the importance of migration to the Gulf at the national level. The study estimates that as much as 25% of the GDP of Nepal is currently comprised of remittances sent back by more than 1 million Nepali migrants working abroad, and those working in countries of the Gulf and Southeast Asia in particular. Seddon, D., J. Adhikari, et al. (2002). "Foreign Labour Migration and remittance economy of Nepal." Critical Asian Studies 34(1): 19-40.

<sup>95</sup> The disturbing incidence of 10 Nepali migrant workers duped into going to Iraq where they were captured and beheaded by a Terrorist organization stirred up debates about the efficacy of government's out-migration policies. In particular, the government has made little attempts at both negotiating with host countries for better working conditions for Nepali citizens and also ensuring the quality and integrity of man power agents responsible for sending Nepali migrant labourers to the Gulf.

<sup>96</sup> The relationship between high-caste and low-caste as well intra-*Biswa-Karmas* relations are covered in detail in Chapter Seven.

<sup>97</sup> *Poudyals*, high-castes and *Bahun*s will be used interchangeably to denote the 'high-castes' whereas low-castes, *Dalits* and *Biswa Karma*'s for the low castes.

<sup>99</sup> See the previous chapter seven on caste-based politics in the village.

<sup>100</sup> I argue my analysis of why the *Biswa-Karmas* invested in collective action and contestations against the high-caste patrons is comparable to Daniel Klooster's argument that the user's conceptions of justice, rights and moral economy were important motivating factors in accounting for individual and communal action in the commons. At the same time, I would also depart from Klooster and point to the ways in which these conceptions of moral economy were simultaneously contradicted in gender and material inequalities at the community level. Klooster, D. (2000). "Institutional Choice, Community, and Struggle: A Case Study of Forest Co-Management in Mexico." World Development 28(1): 1-20.

<sup>101</sup> In particular, FECOFUN had been implementing its gender strategy along 'Participatory Gender and Social Equity Analysis' which focused particularly on intra-household dynamics of labour and access and control over resources.



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<sup>102</sup> Bebbington employs the concept of 'uneven geographies' to explicate the implications of NGO intervention in specific, historical contexts. I argue the concept can also be used to assess the implications of development intervention in Nepal, and in the case of community forestry and Nepal in particular.

Bebbington, A. (2004). "NGOs and uneven development: geographies of development intervention." Progress in Human Geography 28(6): 725-745.

<sup>103</sup> The following are important works for discussions on the diversity and fluidity of caste and ethnic identities in Nepal:

Levine, N. (1987). "Caste, State, and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal " The Journal of Asian Studies 46(1): 71-88.

, Guneratne, A. (1999). The Modernising Matwalis: Caste, Class and Status Among the Tharus of Chitwan. Nepal: Tharu and Tarai Neighbours. H. O. Skar. Kathmandu, EMR. 16.

, Guneratne, A. (2002). Many Tongue, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal. Ithaca, Cornell University.

Gellner, D. N. (1991). "Hinduism, Tribalism and the Position of Women: The Problem of Newar Identity." Man 26(1): 105-125.

, Gellner, D. N., J. Pfaff-Czarnecka, et al., Eds. (1997). Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal. Amsterdam, Harwood Academic.

, Gellner, D. N., Ed. (2002). Resistance and the State: Nepalese Experiences. New Delhi, Social Science Press.

, Sharma, P. R. (2004). The State and Society in Nepal: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Trends. Kathmandu, Himal Books.

<sup>104</sup> This argument is inspired by Neera Chandhoke's view of governance as: "fanning of the state, spanning out of the state, the privatization of the state and para-state institutions, and subcontracting of the state functions" (pp.15). In the current era of 'governance', Chandhoke asks the following pertinent questions with regards to citizenship: "Firstly, when the state has been decentered and pluralized what on earth happens to citizens rights? Have they also been pluralized? Secondly, when the state has been disaggregated horizontally and vertically, which of the many institutions that form part of the networks of governance does the individual seek his or her rights? Thirdly, how various organizations involved in governance view the individual, his or her rights" (pp.1).

Community forestry essentially involves the 'decentralization of forest management responsibilities to the local users' with government's role as 'facilitating the local users' or to put it as Chandhoke does "the fanning out of the state". In spite of the 'horizontolization' of state functions, there were mechanisms in place, in theory, to hold forest officials promoting CF accountable to the CF users. Increasingly, however, the government is 'subcontracting' its facilitating responsibilities to civil society. Donors prefer working through civil society instead of the state. In such a context, the questions that Chandhoke raises about 'accountability' and 'voice' are important to engage in the context of community forestry. Chandhoke, N. Governance and the Pluralization of the State: Implications for Democratic Practices in Asia.

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<sup>105</sup> For example, Aus-Aid in the last year has doubled its aid to the small island of Vanuatu, with a population of 200,000 (currently AUD 44.08 million in Vanuatu as compared opposed to AUD 7.7 million) with a pledge for more in the coming years.

<sup>106</sup> “As a reaction to the events of 1 February 2005, the Danish Government decided to suspend preparations for a new phase of Danish sector programme support to the natural resource management sector. As a direct consequence of this, NARMSAP comes to a halt on 15 July 2005. However, preparations are under way to continue the Danish engagement with rural communities in this sector through other avenues.”

[http://www.forestrynepal.org/natural\\_resource\\_management\\_sector\\_in\\_nepal\\_narmsap](http://www.forestrynepal.org/natural_resource_management_sector_in_nepal_narmsap)