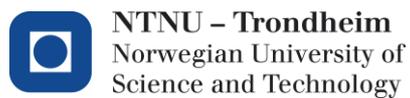


**Gender Impacts of New Livelihoods**  
**A Study of Chepang Community in Central Hill of Nepal**

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**“हामी त चेपाङ् हो, ढाँट्दैँन पो !!”**

***“We are Chepang. We don't lie, indeed!!”***

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Abstract**

This study was undertaken to identify the impact of outmigration in Chepang community of central hill in Nepal, from gender point of view. The main objective of this study was to trace out the continuity and changes in traditional gender norms and practices in relation to migration and changing livelihoods in indigenous Chepang community of Raksirang village. Analytical framework was developed based on the social relation approach, which has identified 5 major components – rules, power, resources, activities and people – as the integral parts of every social relation, including gender. Tools of qualitative research were applied in order to collect the information from various informants, including local people, experts and different organizations. Subjective interaction with local people was the main way to understand the life experiences of Chepang people.

The study found that Chepang community has more equitable and rational gender norms and practices. The traditional gender based division of labor was found to be highly flexible. Both Chepang men and women had been enjoying equal social rights and status in traditional Chepang community. However, the link with urban sector and capitalist market has adversely affected the egalitarian norms of Chepang people, and has subjected Chepang men in greater deprivation. Chepang men were forced to migrate to the urban area to work as cheap labor in capitalist markets, where they are surviving in filthy living condition, hazardous working environment, and extreme exploitations. Meanwhile, Chepang women have got opportunity to empower themselves with the involvement in NGO-led development project at their own community. Women centered development policies and programs in Nepal always assumed men as oppressor and impediments for women empowerment. As a result men are being systematically marginalized from the opportunities of empowerment and development programs in their own community. This has highly adverse impact on general welfare of the society, neither it will allow achieving the goal of gender equity and equality in long term.

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**List of Acronyms**

CBO	Community Based Organization
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MDI	Manahari Development Institute
NAPA	National Adaptation Plan of Action
NELM	New Economy of Labor Migration
NGO	Non-Government Organization
SLF	Sustainable Livelihood Framework
SRA	Social Relation Approach
UN	United Nations
UN RCHO	Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator’s Office
USD	United States Dollar
VDC	Village Development Committee

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In the last decade migration has emerged as an important issue in academia that has a significant contribution to shape the social, economical, political, cultural and environmental aspects of the concern society (IOM, 2010; UN, 2013). In most of the developing countries, rural-urban migration has not only triggered rapid population growth in urban area and shortage of agricultural labor in rural area but also brought changes in social institutions and practices in both places (Agesa, 2001). Migration can be understood as important livelihood strategy of rural households when they lack enough financial capital, get depleting outcomes from natural resources, and are exposed to various risks and vulnerabilities (Bebbington, 1999; UN, 2003; DFID, 2004).

Prior to mid 1980s migration was considered as purely male phenomena (Lipton, 1980 in Dugbazah, 2007); and up to the present day the movement of population from one place to another place is largely dominated by men. However, it is now accepted in migration discourse that migration is not a gender-neutral or male phenomena, but it is a gendered process. Numbers of migrating women have significantly increased in the last decade. Men and women migrate for varieties of reasons, they use different methods and most importantly migration has not the same consequences on men and women (Ghosh, 2009). For the migrants, migration can bring financial security and empowerment, or, on the contrary, can make them more vulnerable and victimized. Similarly, the impacts of migration on those left behind depend up on various factors such as their relationship with migrants, social norms, regulations and relations, education and awareness level etc. (Lucas, 2005).

In most of the developing countries, the traditionally institutionalized social norms, values and practices have discriminated women from getting equal rights as men, access to resources, and to decision-making about own life. Similarly, women and men are designated with significantly different tasks solely based on their biological traits. Such division of labor has often put women in highly vulnerable conditions and economically non-rewarding works in comparison to men. Similarly, in most of the cases, strong able and more aware groups of people migrate from rural to urban area. This process will leave a rural community consisting women, children,

weaker and older group of people, who have to face constant challenges to sustain household, agriculture, family and the entire rural life (Sørensen, 2005).

The pre-dominant male outmigration in agrarian community may also bring about changes in traditional gendered division of labor, as the absence of men not only increase agricultural workload on women, but also provide them with greater social responsibilities and tasks than those men used to do (Deshingker & Start, 2003). On the other hand, it is also likely that women left behind get more power in household decision making, greater independence, and increasing social and financial autonomy due to the absence of male household heads (ibid). Or in contrast, it is also likely that women are subjected to being more vulnerable, having less power of decision and disposed without any social and financial autonomy because of patriarchal control and discriminative institutional practices (Lucas, 2005).

Various gender development projects have been launched to provide women with more economic opportunities. According to Naila Kabeer (2003), incorporating women in economic activities will provide them with greater power to challenge the discriminative institutional arrangements. Such initiatives are also crucial to bring positive changes in the lives of women who are left behind by their migrant husbands. The need of this study was felt to explore how being incorporating in capitalist markets changes the socio-economy of isolated communities, and more specifically the traditional gender system and women's status. And unlike the orthodox women-centered "gender" research, this study will take men as the equally important gender actors and incorporate their thoughts, aspirations and experiences in the research analysis. As suggested by Whitehead (1996), it is equally important to do systematic gender-based analysis of migration because the gender policy measures largely depend on the understanding of dynamics of gender relations in household, community and national levels.

This study was undertaken to analyze the impact of changing livelihoods on traditional status and roles of men and women in the Chepang community. The study, on the one hand, examines what are the traditional gender norms, values and beliefs and how it determined the status and role of male and female members of the community. And on the other hand, it attempts to trace how those traditional norms, values and beliefs are changing and how that changes have affected the lives of male and female Chepangs. The well known fact is that, Chepang people are no more entirely isolated in the remote hills, but slowly interfacing the presence of outsiders,

government, NGOs, and market (Gurung, 1995). Chepang are coming out of jungle and spreading over different towns in central Nepal. This out-migration is integral part of their new livelihood system that is mainly based on physical labor in non-agriculture sectors (Janajati and Dalit Study Center, 2009). It is an assumption of this study that traditional social system, norms, value and culture of the Chepang community are subject to change as soon as they started interacting with outside world and as soon as their livelihood system has taken new form. This study doesn't favor feminist research approach; neither this study sticks itself on orthodox men-centered research approach. A balance approach has been adopted that is consistency throughout the research process – problem selection, literature studies, research design, field study and analysis. Qualitative method is primary method used to solve the research question.

## **1.2 Goal and Objectives**

This research aims at analyzing how the traditional gender-norms, status and roles are changing as a result of male outmigration and women's opportunities at the home-place. The Chepang community of Nepal, once isolated, is now connected with market and non-agriculture sector as well as with the "outside world". The specific objective of this study is to take account of traditional life-style, gender specific customs, institutions, norms and practices of Chepang community and the changes they have witnessed. I will also try to identify how migrations along with market and non-agriculture sectors are responsible for such changes. The Following are the research questions that this study will be finally addressing to.

- i. What are the traditional institution, customs, norms, values and practices and how do they shape the gender differentiations in Chepang community?
- ii. How is migration responsible for changes in the traditional livelihood system of Chepang people and what impacts migration has brought into the community?
- iii. Based on the questions listed above, how are social relations of gender organized in Chepang community now? Are they significantly different than they used to be?

### **1.3 Scope and Limitations**

This research took 30 local residents from Raksirang VDC as sample. They are assumed to represent an indigenous Chepang community where increasing male out-migration has been observed, and whose livelihoods are changing from traditional subsistence agriculture to modern market oriented and non-agricultural sectors. The findings of this study, therefore, cannot be generalized to other communities of Nepal. Since most of the mid-hill communities in Nepal have similar socio-economic and geographical traits, this study provides estimation to the realities that other communities in the mid-hill of Nepal are experiencing. However, the traditional institutions, norms, values and practices of Chepang community explained in this study are purely based on the field study and may not be found similar in other Chepang communities. This study uses a social relation approach in gender analysis of Migration and social changes, which itself is a new method in Nepali context.

Language has been a major barrier in several interviews and focus group discussion. My respondents mostly speak Chepang language. Respondents felt difficulties to speak in Nepali language during in-depth interview. The same problem was seen during the FGDs. Hence, in most of the cases a translator was required to facilitate the communication and I had to rely on what the translator explained to me. This process have distorted smooth communication as well as modified the original information. The extent of field study, observations, interviews and FGDs were restricted to the availability of limited time and resources.

### **1.4 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized in 7 Chapters, including this introductory part. Chapter 2 is dedicated to explain the Nepali context of gender and migration, and the significance of this research in that context. Chapter 3 explains the theoretical understandings of gender, and migration as a livelihood. It will also present how the social relations approach works in this study as an analytical framework. Chapter 4 elaborates the methodology, tools and techniques adopted to collect data and information required to achieve the objectives of this study. This chapter also highlights my experiences and reflections during the field study. Chapter 5 thoroughly presents the result of the field study and explains what changes have taken place in traditional institutions, norms, values and practices of Chepang community in general, and from a gender point of view. This Chapter will also explain the changes in the livelihood system with the

introduction of migration, market and modernization. Chapter 6 is a detail analysis of changes in social relations of gender based on five dimensions - rules, activities, resources, people and power. And finally, chapter 7 is a concluding discussion, and will provide the summary of the thesis.

## Chapter 2: Gender and Migration in the Nepali Context

To understand the subject matter of the research in a better way, it is equally important to understand the context where the research has taken place, which itself is a part of the research. This chapter is intended to provide insight into how gender, migration and development are playing their roles in Nepali society. I will explain how gender inequality and patriarchy has influenced the everyday life of Nepali men and women. A glimpse will be provided on the changing situation in the light of migration, market development and globalization in Nepali society. This chapter will also provide socio-economic, geographical and other development information about the study area in general, and about the Chepang people more specific.

### 2.1 History of Nepal and the Root of Discrimination

Before the mid of 18<sup>th</sup> century the remote foothills of the Himalaya mountain were occupied by scattered warring principalities; where most of the ruling groups were identified as Chhetri and Thakuri who were ranked second highest position (after Brahmin, the priest caste) in the Hindu caste system, the guiding principle of social hierarchy. A powerful Chhetri king, from Shah Dynasty in central hill, defeated those principalities and brought them together to form one united Nepal of present shape. Although Nepal was united politically, there were still dozens of isolated ethnic groups who were totally excluded from state affairs and socio-economic rights. The authoritarian monarchy ruled according to Indo-Aryan culture and Hindu religious texts and ordinances that only benefited Brahmin and Chhetri communities, and always subjugated and suppressed other ethnic groups.

In the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century the monarchy lost its power due to internal family disputes. Rana, a new ruling family from the same caste, took the control of the nation, while the monarchy remained *de jure*. Ranas were absolute autocrats; they captured all government positions, including the prime minister, and passed them only to own sons and grandsons. In the fear of losing their power, Rana kept the country in complete isolation, didn't provide education to the general public, banned development activities, stopped the modernization, and institutionalized the feudal system down to the village level. In 1854, a Rana prime minister officially promulgated a civil code named *Muluki Ain* that was entirely based on Indo-Aryan culture, Hindu religious texts and existing feudal practices. Those rules and regulation

never benefited women, “lower caste”, and other ethnic groups; rather those groups were further marginalized from state rights, and treated as second-class citizens (Bista, 1991). Ganguly and Shoup (2005), in their discussion about Nepal’s recent struggle for democratization, explain the significance of historical factors to create discriminations and marginalization of women and ethnic communities. Ranas disposed Nepal with an infectious legacy of illiteracy, impoverishment, feudal culture, and authoritarianism that persist to this day (Ganguly and Soup, 2005:130).

Dor Bahadur Bista (1991), a renowned Nepali sociologist, in his book *Fatalism and Development* explains that although Hinduism was long practiced in Nepal along with Buddhism and tribal religions, it was a quite liberal type. Bista (1991) further mentions that in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of Muslim evasion in India, high caste Brahmin and Chhetri fled to remote Himalayan foothills to save their lives. These groups of Brahmin and Chhetri brought and established the orthodox Hinduism, caste system, and also developed rituals and practices that only benefited those Brahmin and ruling Chhetri. Gradually, local chiefs and high-class families (even from tribal communities) started to adopt those norms, and reinforced them under their judiciary, which benefited them and sustained their positions for long. That system of hierarchy and discrimination infiltrated down to the community and family level, and in long-term it became the way of life for the people living in that society (ibid).

As Rana regime was overthrown and democracy was established in the 1950s, Nepali society became open to the international community. Nepal’s relation with the west was firstly established in the form of aid and development assistance. However, the orthodox Hindu upper-caste policy makers only emphasized on women’s reproductive roles within the household, and developed strict dichotomy of “male” and “female” in the development projects. This process gradually dominated the more flexible gender norms that were prevalent in many ethnic communities (Chand, 2004).

## **2.2 Gender Identities in Nepali Society**

Being socio-culturally and geographically highly diverged, the identities of men and women in Nepal have largely varied between different communities, and different time-periods. And on the other hand, gender identities are also influenced by state’s rules and regulations (Tamang, 2009). For example, Bhotia women in Northwest of the country still practice polyandry, Sherpa community in Northeast take their

women's business and hospitality skill as important resource, Gurung women in western hills have good community management skill, and Chhetri and Brahmin Hindu women try to be sexually "pure", religious, submissive, and skillful in household works (ibid, 2002). On the other hand men-identity is not as much diverged as women-identity; because in most of the communities men are identified as breadwinner (although there is wide variation in the tasks men do to feed the family), and protectors of the community/tribe from external threats (Hennik and Simkhada, 2004).

The majority of Nepali women, up to present days, receive second-class treatment in all sector of the society, in comparison to men. Influenced by orthodox religious beliefs and rituals, a birth of baby girl in a family is taken as a burden by her parents. Since it is a common practice to donate a daughter to a boy's family in the form of marriage, raising a baby girl is often considered as an unproductive investment. Parents, therefore, want to send their daughter to the groom's house as early as possible, which leads to early-marriage that has large consequences on rest of the life of the girl. It is believed by many parents in poor and uneducated communities that if they give their daughter to a suitable boy in marriage before her menstruation cycle starts, they will have a religious merit (*punya*), which, they believe, leads them to the heaven (*swarga*) after they die. Girls' parents are also obliged to provide dowry to groom's family, which is a matter of prestige and sometimes to meet the demand of groom's family.

In the poor agrarian community, the new bride in home is nothing but a free labor that will have to do hard works throughout her life; and, in return, receives no respect, no love and not even the minimum physical requirements. On the other hand, son is regarded as highly important part of the family. The main reason behind this is that, a son will sustain the family lineage, culture and property as he is supposed to marry a woman and bring her to his home. Son is also considered as strong, brave, hard working and the breadwinner of the family. In Hindu religion, the son has a significant role in funeral activities, *kriya*, (that lasts for 13 days) of dead parents, which, if properly done, is believed to open the gate of the heaven for deceased parents (Bista, 2013). Female members of the household do not have any ritual roles in the funeral activities of their parents. Therefore, every parent wants to have a son instead of daughter; and women are expected to give birth to the sons rather than

daughters, for which young girls are forced to conceive as many babies as the family wants (Bista, 1991).

Hence, there are mainly the so-called Hindu religious belief and ritual practices that put men at the superior position to women in the evolution of Nepali society. A woman is a *burden* for her parents, and a *free labor* as well as a *birth machine* at her husband's house. Whereas, man is the source of livelihood, *preserver of heredity*, and a *door opener to the heaven*. Women are supposed to take care of household tasks, raising children, and agriculture activities, giving up her personal interests and desires, while men are more free to decide about their choices and priorities. Patriarchal norms have dominated the general mind-set of every person, institution and the society as a whole. This situation has led to the much lower entitlement of women to social and economic facilities such as education, income, and health in comparison to men (Acharya, 2001). The following facts are the evidences that show how patriarchal social system has affected overall welfare of female population in compare to male population in Nepal.

- Literacy rate (for population aged 5 years and above) is 57.4% for females compare to 75.1% for males, while the national average is 65.9%. In 15-49 years age group of population, 40% women have never gone to school in compare to 14% men (CBS, 2011).
- Altogether, only 19.71% of total household has female land (or property) ownership (ibid).
- Women share 44.8% on wage employment of non-agriculture sector, and 32.8% in the national parliament. While, women in Nepal occupy only 9.59% of civil service position (National Planning Commission, 2013).
- 74.8% of unpaid family labor force in Nepal is female compared to only 25.2% male (ibid).
- In Nepal, 170 women die per 100,000 live births; and only 50% of total birth is attended by a skilled birth attendant (ibid).
- Around 50% of married women face physical and sexual violence from their husbands and in-laws (ibid).

Except the above-mentioned numerical facts, there are many traditional practices that have clearly put women in more inferior and more vulnerable position in the society.

For example, in the far western part of Nepal, women are forced to live inside a cowshed in a filthy condition for 5-7 days during the menstruation period; in the same part of the country, in a community named *Badi*, women are forced to involve in mass prostitution in order to earn to sustain the family. There is another traditional practice named *Kamlahari*, in which high caste landlord force poor parents (from *Tharu* ethnic community) to send their daughter to those landlord's as household servant. *Kamlahari* girls are prone to sexual and physical violence, and they are denied from education, health and other basic needs for which they have to suffer throughout their lives (Acharya, 2001). The dowry system is another tradition that has significant impact on girl's life. Parents, who are too poor to provide as much dowry as demanded by the boy's family, would never find the proper match for their daughters. And, if the parents cannot fulfill their promise to present the agreed amount of dowry after marriage, the bride has to suffer serious physical and mental torture from her husband and in-laws (Poudel and Carryer, 2001).

In Nepali society, gender identity is determined by patriarchal norms and values, which are based on religious creeds. Similarly, gender identity in Nepali society is also intertwined with the class and caste identities where women from so-called lower caste and poorer class are in the worst life conditions (Acharya, 2001). Different authoritarian ruling classes in different periods of Nepali history indorsed various discriminative rules that were mainly aimed to preserve the powers that the ruling class already holds, and that continued oppressing women and lower caste (Bista, 1991).

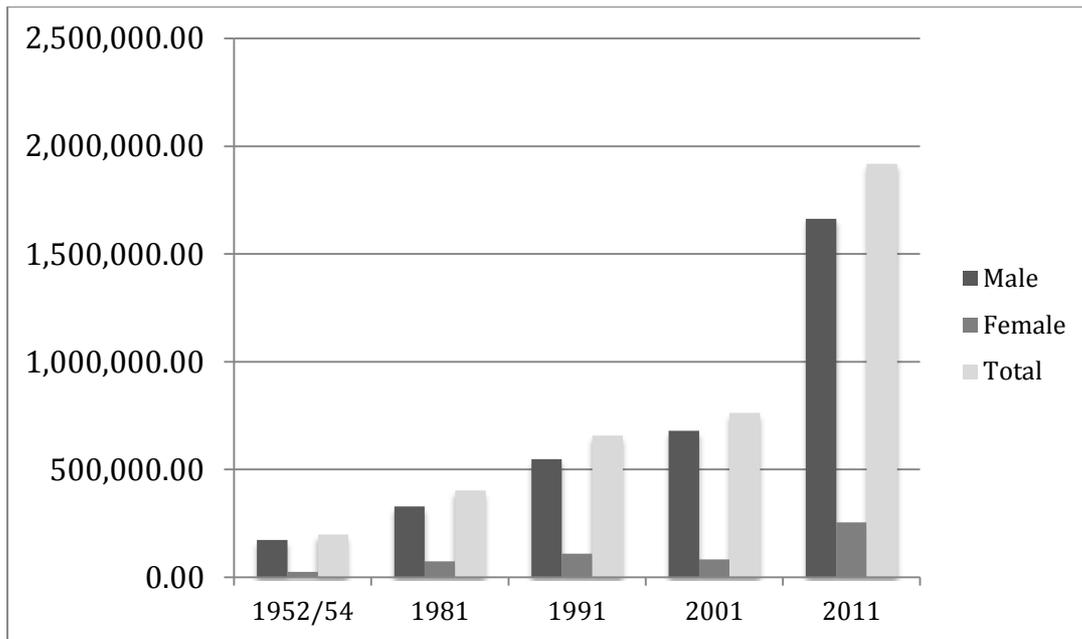
### **2.3 Globalized Nepal: A Changing Situation**

As mentioned by Fisher (2011), the one word that best describes Nepal in the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century is "change". Fishers, a pioneer anthropologist who has been observing Nepal for the last 50 years, further explains that either it be a historically famous and prosperous communities, or the conventional politicians in Kathmandu or the unheard and isolated ethnic groups, all of them are undergoing effects of globalization (p. 4). Globalization expands and intensifies social relations and consciousness across time and space, while time and space themselves are exceptionally compressed (Steger, 2009). Since hundreds of years, Nepal has been a part of worldwide interconnectedness through the exchange of population that transports goods, idea, ideologies, practices, religion and culture. And as mentioned

by Giddens (2000), in Nepal, globalization has not only been a macro-phenomena related to economy, politics and society but also a micro-phenomena that has influenced the intimate and personal aspects of people's lives.

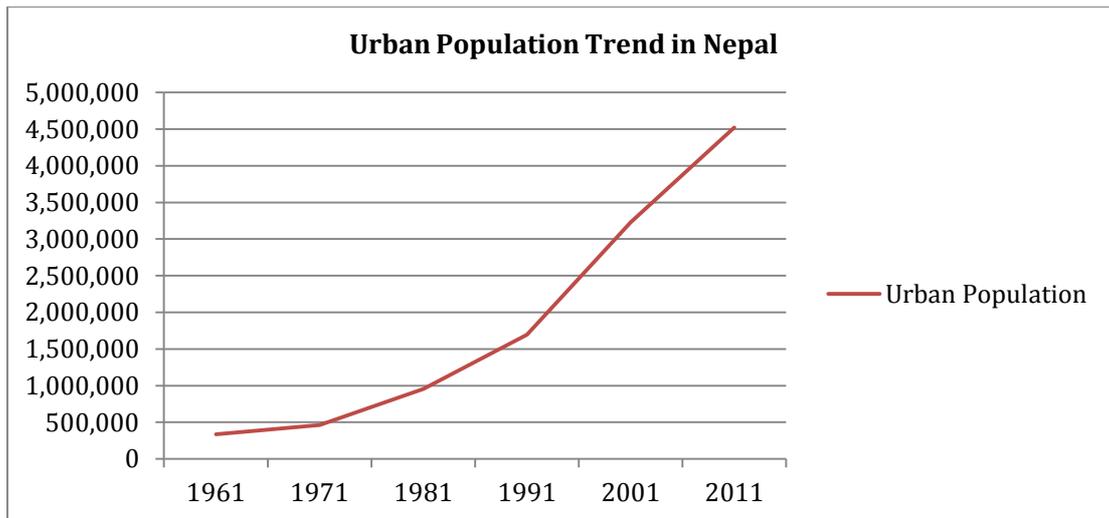
The autocratic Rana regime were overthrown in the 1950s with the revolution led by the leaders who were educated in India and influenced by various western democratic principles that were already adopted by Indian leaders. The end of the Rana regime led the country towards a liberal era in which western education system was adopted and made available for common people; formal bilateral relations were established with many other nations, and various international treaties were ratified. Nepal also became the member of international organizations, and started to accept international development aids in various forms. Tourism and industrial development extended Nepal's economic and cultural relations with many other nations beyond India and China. These aspects of globalization became more intensified after the political change of 1990's in which the King-led, party-less *panchayat* system was replaced by more liberal multiparty democracy. The once remote Himalayan country now no longer remained an isolated conservative society, but merged itself in the complex process of global economic and cultural exchange, which has distinct consequences on different groups of people living there (Fishers 2011; Seddon, Gurung & Adhikari, 1998)

Population movement has been a significant part of globalization. Since early history, Nepal has witnessed population movement as an integral part of its society, either it be the ancient trade relations with India and Tibet, or it be the different groups who came to seek refuge in Nepal, or the trend of large number of Nepali youth joining the British and Indian army. However, migration in Nepal after 1990 has become more explicit, more global, and socio-economically more significant, which has received more attentions as well. According to World Bank's Nepal Migration Survey (2009), 867,000 Nepali labors are working in Indian alone, which is the result of open border and socio-cultural similarities between two nations (Ghimire et al., 2010) In addition, the following figure shows drastically increasing trend of population living outside of Nepal (other than India) for more than 6 months a year.



**Figure 2.3-1: Number of population living outside of Nepal (other than India) for more than 6 months a year, over last 60 years (data for 1961 and 1971 are not available) (data source: CBS, 1995; CBS, 2003; CBS, 2011)**

Internal migration from rural to urban area in Nepal has also dramatically increased over last half century, which is attributed to increasing international migration. The economic status of families left behind has increased due to the remittances they received from migrant family-members. And with increasing economic strength, the families seek better facilities of health, education, housing etc. for which they normally migrate to big cities nearby. On the other hand, a section of very poor people who cannot afford the costs to go for foreign employment migrate to seek economic opportunities in big cities (ibid). The following figure shows the trend of urban population growth in 58 municipalities of Nepal.



**Figure 2.3-2:** *Urban population growth trend in Nepal during last 50 years (data source: CBS, 1995; CBS, 2003; CBS, 2011)*

Both internal and external migrations have shown a visible and significant impact on socio-economic aspect of Nepali society. Nepal received \$5.2 billions as a remittance in 2013, which is 25% of its gross domestic product (GDP) (The World Bank, 2014). Large number of population, which was struggling for basic needs, is now better off to purchase food, shelter, basic health and education facilities. The society has witnessed a massive increment in information technology - television, radio, computer and Internet facilities. These facilities, in turn, have connected Nepali society with a global society, which has transferred new ideas, knowledge and practices back to the Nepali society. On the other hand, migration also has a significant gender impact in Nepal. According to Nepal Migration Year book 2010, more than 80,000 Nepali women are working in 65 different countries (excluding India), and sending \$13.75 million remittances back home per year. The yearbook further says that a large number of Nepali women has successfully broken the chain of patriarchal society and released themselves to the height of social and economic freedom. In contrast, thousands of migrated men have left women and children behind. In some cases, those women and children are subjected to more vulnerable conditions; while in some cases those women become more independent and get more economic power with the remittances they receive from their migrated husbands.

This research will be looking very closely to the life of a Chepang community in Nepal, which has recently opened itself to the outside world and become a part of globalization. A gender perspective will be used to identify what changes have

actually taken place in various institutions such as family and community, and who has benefited or suffered with those changes. This will produce a new knowledge about gender and social change due to the migration in the context of Nepal.

## 2.4 Who are Chepang?

Nepal is a small country located between two giants China at north and India at south. Despite of its small area, Nepal possesses extreme variation in landscapes, from 60 meters to 8848 meters above the sea level. This has led further to greater diversity in climate, flora, fauna and resources on the one hand and diversity among people, their culture and well being on the other hand. Hills and mountains occupy 83% of Nepal's land where half of the country's population resides. The tiny country inhabits 125 ethnic/caste groups with distinct social origin, language, culture and lifestyle. There is no single group in Nepal that consists of more than 17% of country's total population. In Nepal there are 123 distinct languages spoken up to the date (CBS, 2011).

Chepangs, one of the 125 ethnic groups, live in central Nepal along the steep slopes of Mahabharat hill range from 450 meters to 1400 meters above the sea level. Based on the their low economic status and threatened cultural identity, Chepang are categorized as a *highly marginalized indigenous* group by Nepal Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (World Vision Advocacy Forum, 2009). Government of

According to population census 2011, there are 68,399 Chepang people in Nepal among which 34,620 are male and 33,779 female; and 66,744 Chepang people live in rural areas (CBS, 2011). Physically Chepang depict mongoloid features – medium height, small shoulder length, flat nose with small eyes, and flat palm and leg – and speak a distinct language that belongs to Tibeto-Burman language group (Bista, 2013).

There are different postulates about the origin of Chepang people. The most reasonable postulate is related to the etymology of the word *Chepang* that is actually composed of two syllable - *Chyo* meaning “on the top” and *bang* meaning, “stone”. Chepang people call themselves *Chyobang*, which means, “stone at top”. This postulate suggests a myth that Chepang are originated from out of the stone at the tope of the hill (Rai, 1985; Bista, 2013). Similarly, another etymological explanation for the myth of Chepang's origin is that, two syllables - *Che* meaning “dog” and *Pang* meaning “arrow” – made a word *Chepang*, which means someone with arrow and

dog. Hence Chepang are those who use bow, arrow and dog for the hunting of wild animals and birds (Gurung, 1989). Gurung (1989) shares his personal experience during the research at Chepang community where he got the chance to involve in a group of Chepang people who were going for hunting wild animals with arrow and dogs.

Historically, Chepang people have lived nomadic life in the dense forest of Mahabharat hill. Chepang men used to go for hunting wild animals, birds, and fish while women used to take care of small children at home (although their homes were a temporary camp that they would abandon after a short period) (Gurung, 1995). Even until 1990, no Chepang was known to live outside of his/her traditional region. They are still economically at the most disadvantaged position in comparison to other social groups living around their region (Bista, 2013). Today, Chepang people are no more nomadic and have now settled in a permanent area. However, all of the Chepang people still do not have legal land ownership and are living on *raikar*<sup>1</sup> land (Bista, 2013: 118).

Chepang are shy and timid kind of people whose livelihoods nowadays depend on the physical labor they do at the nearest markets and towns. Along that, Chepang people still rely on their surrounding forests and ecology for their food such as wild tubers, fruits, animals and fish. On the other hand, Chepang are also involved in subsistence farming with shifting cultivation in the steep slopes of Mahabharat hill. After harvesting the yield, they slash and burn the field and leave it fallow for many years to regenerate its productivity; meanwhile they shift to another slope for the cultivation (Bista, 2013). According to a UN field report, 75% Chepang are still illiterate and only 1% of Chepang women can read and write (UN RCHO, 2012). Illiteracy, food insufficiency, systematic marginalization by higher-class statesmen, and remote geographical location have trapped Chepang people in the vicious cycle of impoverishment (World Vision Advocacy Forum, 2009).

Chepangs are found in Makawanpur, Dhading, Chitwan and Gorkha Districts, which are among 75 administrative districts of Nepal. This study selected a Chepang community from Rakshirang Village Development Committee (VDC)<sup>2</sup> that is located in Makawanpur district. This district is attached to the southwestern part of national

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<sup>1</sup> '*Raikar* is a "state landlordism"; land on which taxes are collected and appropriated directly through intermediaries by the state' according to Mahesh C. Regmi, *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*. Vol 1 (Berkeley, 1963), p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> VDC is the smallest administrative division in Nepal

capital city, Kathmandu. Although it is near to the capital and has access to major roadways of the nation, sloppy hills and poor people occupy the district.

The Human Development Index (HDI) of Makawanpur is 0.479 which ranks 31<sup>st</sup> among 75 district of Nepal. The population of Makawanpur district is 420,477 that has growth rate of 0.69. During the years 2001-2011, the urban population has increased by 40.6% that indicates increasing rural to urban migration as well as rapid urbanization (CBS, 2011; DDC Makawanpur, 2012). Adult literacy rate of the district is 65.85%, which comprises 60.59% female and 57.41% male. The overall development status of Makawanpur district is below national average. There are the problems of safe drinking water and sanitation, health and birth facility, and transportations (DDC) Makawanpur, 2012). Natural disasters like floods and landslides occur frequently and people are very poor to overcome the impacts of such disaster. Hence the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) to Climate Change categorizes the district as highly vulnerable in the Climate Change Vulnerability Mapping for Nepal (NAPA, 2010).

There are several reasons for choosing Makawanpur as my field study site. Makawanpur is a district where the second-highest number of Chepang resides. As mentioned in the Population Census Report 2011, there are 19,233 Chepang in Makawanpur district; that is 21.11% of total the Chepang population of Nepal and 4.57% of the total population of the district. According to total number of population, Chepang stands at 5<sup>th</sup> position among 75 different caste/ethnic groups in Makawanpur district. In the difficult terrain of western Makawanpur, a large number of poor and disadvantaged Chepang communities resides. These groups are more deprived of basic needs, health and sanitation than their counterparts living in Dhading and Chitwan districts (Janajati and Dalit Study Center, 2009). The field study site of Raksirang VDC can be reached after 5 hours of up and down hill walk from Manahari. Manahari is the nearest market center for the Chepang of that area where they access small trades, daily consumption goods, health center and transportation to different parts of the country.



Figure 2.4-1: Map of Nepal showing Chepang settlements on Dhading, Makwanpur, Chitwan and Gorkha districts. The study area is shown in the red circle (Source: UN RCHCO, 2012).

## Chapter 3: Concepts and Theories

Social science research is about investigating complex social realities with the application of a range of concepts and theories. This research is going to identify how social relations and institutions have been changing as the effect of changes in livelihood of indigenous people from gender perspective. Therefore, this chapter is dedicated to identify various concepts and theoretical bases related to gender, livelihood and social change. These concepts and theories will form a framework that will serve as bedrock for analyzing the life experiences of Chepang people. Gender is a central component of society that holds all other social lives around it (Kimmel, 2005). Hence, theorizing gender in relation to other social phenomena is itself a complex process.

### 3.1 Understanding Gender

Laymen often use the terms “gender” and “sex” alternatively. But these terms shouldn't be understood as one. Sex is a biological identity that constitutes male and female sexual patterns. These identities are determined at the time of birth and hardly changeable. For example, anatomy, hormones and physical structure of male and female are different which is the province of “sex” (Østergaard, 1992). On the other hand, “gender” is not something that we are born with, or something that we naturally *have*. Rather, it is something that is taught by society, something that we perform as men and women (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990).

There are ranges of theoretical understandings about “gender”<sup>3</sup>. These understandings have been changing throughout the history; and still multiple views exist in academic discourses. However, a theoretical consensus is developing among the scholars that gender is not only an “identity or role” that is imparted and practiced in a family (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004: 510). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) further mentioned:

*Instead, gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women,*

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<sup>3</sup> There are large number of people in the world who neither have clear male sexual pattern nor have clear female sexual pattern. They are categorized as intersex (Lee et al. 2006). This study deals with gender system associated only to orthodox male-female dichotomy, but not to intersex category.

*and organizing social relation of inequality on the basis of that difference (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004: 510).*

Gender system is not about one or two individuals and neither it is about one or two families. Society, as a whole, has institutionalized a set of culture, norms and behaviors for men and women. In most of the cases this organization has created unequal social relations, unequal status, unequal treatment, unequal power and unequal wellbeing between men and women (UN, 2006). A Gender system is deeply rooted in all social institutions, which is sustained through the process of socialization. Similar to other multilevel systems of difference such as class, caste and ethnicity, “*gender involves cultural beliefs and distribution of resources at **macro level**, pattern of behavior and organizational practices at **interactional level**, and selves and identities at **individual level**” (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004: 510-511). A gender system exists in all major levels of the society.*

In a gender system, women’s status and roles are subjected inferior than that of men. Social norms and behavior are rigidly determined for the status of men and women (Rudman and Glick, 2008). This process is called stereotyping, which is simplified concept that people belonging to same status must share certain characters in common (Butler, 1993). Men and women are mostly stereotyped according to their biological attributes. In majority of societies in the world, women are negatively stereotyped, which develops a belief that status of women is inferior to status of men (Connell, 1995). This belief has negatively affected the wellbeing of women at macro level, at institutional level and at individual level throughout the world.

### **3.1.1 Structuralism in Gender**

Gender discriminations are observed in multi-level social relations. These social relations are constituting-components of greater social structure. Structuralist perspectives try to explain how social structures are responsible for shaping certain types of social relations (Homles, 2007). Structuralists argue that altering the social structures that create unequal social relations will ultimately enhance the status of suppressed group (Barrett, 1992).

Structural analysis of society is rooted to Karl Marx’s explanations of class struggle that says society is always in conflict between different unequal classes and groups for the power and scarce resources (Benston, 1969). Marx argues that, as society transformed from common property system to private property system, the

production of goods and services is organized to increase the profit for those groups who hold the means of production and more resources (ibid). This system, also known as the capitalist system, has deliberately suppressed the laborers and workers by only paying them the minimum wage and not allowing to share the profit of production. This unequal structure clearly splits society in to oppressed and oppressor classes that always undergo in conflict with each other; and the society propagates relying on this struggle (Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997). However, Marx himself doesn't provide exact explanation to gender division of labor and women's inferior position in the society. Later on, based on the Marx's postulate about the evolution of society, his co-writer Fredric Engels provided detailed explanation on gender division of labor and inequalities among men and women in the society (Holmes, 2007).

According to Engels, in historic societies (early iron age and before) the division of labor between men and women was for providing means of subsistence to the family, and for propagating generation of family by giving birth and rearing children. Men collected food to sustain family, provided security and shelter, while women involved in production and reproduction of another human life that would sustain the generation. This division of labor was "simple and pure" and inherent to nature where both women and men were equally important and enjoyed equal status in the society (Engels, 1972 in Kabeer, 2003: 44).

With the development of agriculture and domestication of animal, the earlier egalitarian production system was changed to surplus production and accumulation of wealth. Common resources were privatized and controlled by men who needed particular successors to handover their wealth. This process overthrew female-rights prevailed in previous societies and developed an "institutional foundation for women subordination, private property, monogamous marriage and patrilineal inheritance" (Lund, 1993; Kabeer, 2003: 44). Engels translated the master-slave relationship between working class and capitalist class in to household and family analysis. In a household, all resources are captured and manipulated by male members while women's contribution to production and reproduction is under-valued. Like a capitalist society, a household is an autocracy where male-supremacy is never questioned (Holmes, 2007).

Contemporary structuralist perspectives assert that our social structure is developed out of the dominance of some groups to another; and such groups share common need and interests. Conflict takes place not only between the workers and

capitalists, but also between many social groups who are significantly different in possession of socio-economic resources (ibid). Structuralists believe that those who hold greater amount of resources and enjoy the supremacy over other groups, try to preserve the existing inequalities as they are benefited with that inequalities (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996). Beliefs about such inequalities and power imbalance are institutionalized through laws, religious codes and social norms, which are transferred from generation to generation and persist for long term. Engels, thus, argue that if women or a suppressed group are entitled to greater economic opportunities outside the informal sectors, it will strengthen such oppressed groups and enhance their status in relation to the oppressor groups (Kabeer, 2003).

### **3.1.2 Interactionist Perspective**

The structural perspective primarily focuses on the roles of macro social structure to determine the status of different social groups. It did not analyze the role of agency, or people, in shaping the larger structure and social imbalances. Whereas interactionist perspective – also known as symbolic interaction – is an important sociological view, that focuses on micro-level analysis of social relationships (Tseëlon, 1995). It says that social interaction is a dynamic process where people modify their behavior according to the situation they are subjected to and type of interaction they are involved in (Goffman, 1987).

Herbert Blumer, pioneer of “symbolic interactionism”, argued that in a relationship people respond to others based on the meaning brought by the objects and situations around them (Holmes, 2007). Such meanings arise out of the multiple social interactions one person have with others. These meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process that the person undergoes while dealing various interactional situations. Blumer (1969) asserted that greater social structure and its aspects such as positions, status, role, authority, prestige etc. are derived from human interactions with each other over long period of time. Although human behaviors are guided by general cultural framework, they have a freedom to perform a role in certain way, which they perceive rational to the situation. Hence, in each interaction, cultural norms are modified and new definitions are created which, in long-term, changes people’s perceptions of reality about the social world. Symbolic interactionism calls this process as a “social construction of reality” (Blumer, 1969).

### ***Doing Gender***

Gendered behavioral pattern is observed in social interaction process. It is therefore argued by interactionists that the different actions conducted by men and women are the products of their understanding about what other people expect from them in a particular situation (Crossley, 1995). Ervin Geofmann (1979), among the pioneers of social interactionism, argued that men and women continue to alter their behaviors along their lives according to how other people want to see them. Geofmann (1987) compared cultural framework to a script of a play and men and women to the actors who try to give best impression on a stage of social interaction. He further mentioned that, no matter how the gender norms and values are explained, it is the behaviors of men and women that actually materialize such norms and values and make them visible. Based on the claims of interactionism, West and Zimmerman (1987) provided an explanation that gender is not a peripheral component of human interaction; rather it is a central component of all social interactions. West and Zimmerman (1987) mentioned following sentences on their article *Doing Gender* (1987), that is quite thoughtful:

*...gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment. We contend that the "doing" of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures."* West and Zimmerman (1987: 126).

“Doing of gender” is an achieved property that makes us to shift our attention from abstract cultural aspects to more visible individual aspects where gender is performed from interactional level to institutional level. Hence, it is the behavior of men and women that, in a given situation, create the differences and inequalities within them. This perspective recognizes the “agency” and role of individual to become different in gender sense.

### **3.2 Livelihood**

Livelihood is the way of life, to survive and to fulfill the need of one and one’s family. The concept of livelihood was developed at Institute of Development Studies in Sussex during 1980s and was later adopted in development actions as a framework popularly known as Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) (Schafer, 2002;

Solesbury, 2003). According to Singh and Kalala (1995), livelihood is a set of asset, activities and accessibilities that helps people to make a living. Asset includes - fixed capital such as natural resource, physical asset (infrastructures, facilities), human resource, financial capital, and social asset (communal bond, cooperativeness etc.). Access refers to the entitlement and power of decision making over various livelihood asset, activities and strategies (Ellis, 1998; Ellis, 2000).

Livelihood is a wide concept as it encompasses almost all of the human activities, the resources that are available and the strategies that guide those activities. Here, livelihood *strategy* is a central component that can be understood as deliberately and carefully combing various livelihood activities by the members of households to secure and maintain their living (McDowell and De Hann, 1997). A livelihood analysis examines the dynamics of particular livelihood system in relation to wide range of components from macro-level institutions to the local specific contexts and strategies (Solesbury, 2003). According to Bebbington (1999) these components are not static and are subjected to constant changes. Internal and external threats to the current livelihood system compel people to change their strategy. Among many strategies, shifting to market-based livelihood is most popular in developing countries (De Hann et al. 2000).

Bebbington (1999) argues that livelihoods of people in developing countries are not restricted only in agriculture or in natural resources. Rural households are increasingly diversifying their livelihood bases and activities, inside and outside agriculture to secure their needs. At this point, migration serves as a tool for diversifying the household livelihoods; and the analysis of migration and livelihoods goes forward in parallel way. Migration is accepted as the most important livelihood strategy adopted by community, households and individuals to safeguard their survival and enhance economic status (Guest, 2003). Migration is a permanent or temporary change of residence by individual or group of individual (Johnston et al. 2000) with a certain purpose. In literatures, migration is widely and extensively discussed because of the nature of migration, its causes and effects are very complex phenomena. I will first briefly present major theories of migration that dominated literatures in different period of time.

### **3.3 Neoclassical Views of Migration**

There are various postulates on migration phenomena in classical views. Dual-economy model developed by Arthur Lewis in mid 1950 argues that migration occurs as a result of difference in labor demand and supply, and the difference in wage rate between rural agriculture sector and urban industrial sector (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). Todaro (1969) and Harris-Todaro (1970) elaborated the basic two-sector rural-urban migration model developed by Lewis with some important inputs at micro level such as individual rationality (De Hass, 2008). According to Todaro (1969), it is not just wage difference that forms a base for migrating from rural to urban area. Individual migration decision also depends on his/her future expectation of income in urban job (Todaro, 1969, in De Hass, 2008). Neoclassical view of migration assumes the existence of market equilibrium, proper information flow, and perfect structures (Bauer and Zimmerman, 1998). However, in realities most of the developing countries witnessed imperfect markets. Migrants are subjected to various circumstances where they don't have access to proper market information. Multiple structural constraints were seen in entire development process. These facts are not properly addressed by neoclassical theories of migration (McDowell and De Hann, 1997).

### **3.4 Structuralist view of Migration**

Developed in late 60s, the intellectual roots of this radical perspective were Marxist views of political economy and the world system theory (Castles and Miller, 2003:25 in De Hass, 2008). Historical-structural perspective explains that underdeveloped societies are trapped because of unequally distributed economic and political power among the developed and underdeveloped societies in the world. On the other hand, this inequality is constantly regenerated, reinforced and sustained by capitalist economic system. Migration, here, is understood as an outcome of disadvantaged position of underdeveloped societies in the capitalist manifestation (De Hass, 2008).

Dependency theory developed by A.G. Frank (1966) sees migration as a manifestation of global capitalism. Unlike the neoclassical assumption, Marxist perspective assumes that peasants are not free to choose what they want. Rather their traditional livelihoods are threatened by new capitalist mode of productions and expansions. Hence, they are forced to migrate as cheap labors to the capitalist market (Castles and Miller, 2003). Migration is a process associated with incorporating

peripheries and isolated societies into core capitalist economy (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). Those uprooted population will become a part of huge mass of proletariat who works for the benefits of urban core area (De Hass, 2008).

### **3.5 Migration as a Livelihood**

During the late 1980s more liberal and wider theoretical perspectives on migration were developed, replacing rigid neo-classical and historical-structuralist views. The new approach, backed up by postmodernist thinking, developed a theoretical harmonization and flexibility in structure-agency analysis; because, as “pluralistic” view, this new approach has widened the outcomes of theoretical discourse by emphasizing both structure and agency as equally significant in migration-development context (Skeldon, 1997 in De Hass, 2008). New economics of labor migration, abbreviated as NELM, is considered a most comprehensive view in migration theory (Laal and Selod et al. 2006). NELM has remained a prominent theoretical base to understand migration of the Chepang people in this study as well.

NELM emerged as a critical reaction to neo-classical theory of migration with the postulate that rural-urban income difference is not a main cause of migration flow (Massey et al. 1993). According to De Hass (2008), the perspective of NELM is rooted to the concept by Stark (1991), that in migration, individual behavior of migrants should be understood in a wider social context; rather than an individual. The appropriate decision making unit is family or household. Stark and Lavari (1982: 191-192) argued that:

*It is suggested that an optimizing, risk-averse small-farmer family confronted with a subjectively risk-increasing situation manages to control the risk through diversification of its income portfolio via the placing of its best-suited member in the urban sector, which is independent from agricultural production (Stark and Lavari, 1982: 191-192 in De Hass, 2008: 35).*

NELM considers migration as a risk sharing behavior of family and household. Developing societies are always bound by various risks, mainly- income risk and market risk. Households take migration as an important strategy not only to increase their income, but also to reduce and spread the possible income risk among the members (Laal and Selod et al. 2006). Remittance from migrants, received by a household serves as income insurance for the family. For a household, to have a migrant members is “Pareto-superior strategy” (De Haas, 2008: 35) that, on the one

hand reduces the livelihood risk and increase the earning, and on the other hand it wont worsen anyone's existing situation. According to Taylor (1999), developing countries are characterized by imperfect credit and risk-full market where it is impossible to access capital and insurance for the poor and rural households. Hence, migration will be a potential source of investment capital for those households.

NELM has a conceptual relation with "livelihood approach" which was developed as a result of household-level researches in developing countries during 70s and 80s (De Hass, 2007). As discussed previously, the livelihood approach stresses on 5 components - assets, activities, vulnerability-context, institutions, and outcomes – that are essential at analyzing livelihood system of a rural household (McDowell and De Haan, 1997). Both NELM and the livelihood approach identify the fundamental role of human agency in shaping the economy of household and community. Migration is seen as an important livelihood strategy adopted by households when they lack enough financial capital. Possible vulnerability contexts are associated with the trend of natural disaster, calamities, diseases, and climatic conditions which directly affect the rural livelihoods. Households decide to migrate to overcome those risks and vulnerabilities, which are beyond their control (Bebbington, 1999). People who are living under the condition of economic, political and environmental uncertainties and adversities, arrange their livelihoods not in individual way, but in relation to greater social contexts such as households, community, ethnic and religious groups (McDowell and De Haan, 1997).

In this context, migration can be seen as an important strategy to diversify, secure, and durably enhance rural livelihoods, which is normally combined with other forms of livelihood activities such as agriculture as well as small non-farm activities (Bebbington, 1999). It is being widely understood that migration is not an immediate and sudden crisis coping method of household. Rather, migration is a deliberately planned and organized activity by households to improve their livelihood, accumulate the capital and reduce the risks and income fluctuation in agriculture (Bebbington, 1999; Taylor, 1999).

Neo-classical and historical structural perspectives viewed migration as a one-way outflow of population from rural to urban sectors, transferring peasant to urban labor. They totally ignored the link of migration with origin areas, which, in fact, is very important phenomenon to understand in migration analysis (De Hass, 2008). It is evident that there are vital and complex relationships between migrants and their

original communities. Anthropologists have found that there do not exist separate identities of a person as a peasant and as a laborer; rather a new group of population that is both peasant and labor emerged as a result of migration (Stark, 1991). Migration will flow the capital, knowledge, information and cultures to the origin-communities as they are firmly linked with the migrants. In a long-term, these factors will cause changes not only to the livelihood system but also in relation to existing socio-cultural and economic system of that community. Hence, it is important to analyze the migration and impacts of migration in a wider social and economic context, integrating it in to the livelihood system of the households and communities (De Hass, 2008).

### **3.6 Social Relation Approach in Gender Study**

The concept of social relation approach in gender studies was developed in early 1990s based on the work by Naila Kabeer who concentrates on the relationships between people in different socio-economic structures and functions. Social relation approach in gender studies is a method of analyzing existing inequalities in distribution of resource, responsibilities and power between men and women (Kabeer, 1994:1996). There is significant difference between gender studies and women studies, mainly in terms of the actors involved and object focused. Gender studies, in social relation approach, should take into account the relationship between both men and women in different social structures such as household, community, market and state (Kabeer, 1994).

The concept of social relation approach has guided my mind-set and entire research process. Human wellbeing has been considered as ultimate goal of life, either of women or of men. Wellbeing is not only about the survival and security, but also about the freedom of choices in life. Whether one can achieve this wellbeing or not, is determined by that person's status and role in a particular society. Those particular status and roles are reflected in social relation processes; hence studying the social relations would reveal which group is nearer to achieve the wellbeing and which group is left behind (Kabeer, 1994). Social relationships are complex processes because the same individual is entitled to various statuses in different social contexts, such as family, clan, community, workplace, market etc. Hence it is equally important to analyze the context, or institution where certain norms and values have been

developed to control the existing social relations (March, Smyth & Mukhopadhyay, 2005: 104).

Although a social relation approach is neutral in itself and doesn't bias men or women, it helps in challenging the institutions which are neutral to existing inequalities or which incorporates inequalities. The very attractive aspect of social relation approach in gender studies is that it helps in analyzing the institution in terms of rules, activities done by men and women, resource distribution among them, and control mechanism of that institution (Kabeer, 1994). This approach enabled me to look at realities of Chepang men and women from a holistic a point of view. I could simultaneously incorporate and let my informants talk about the various institutions they know and how they analyze themselves within that institution, either it be family and community or market and state.

### **3.7 Social Relations Approach (SRA) as an Analytical Framework**

Social relation approach is a tool developed for analyzing the existing gender inequalities in resource distribution, authority and decision-making, responsibilities, and power at various social institutions. This tool is also used for designing gender-aware policies and development programs (March, Smyth & Mukhopadhyay, 2005). This study adapts the theories and methods of social relation approach as described by Naila Kabeer (1994) on her book *Reversed Realities Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*.

The idea of the social relation approach has a socialist-feminist background that has its root in Marx's historical materialism. Previous sections of this chapter explain gender inequalities from Marxist perspective. This approach believes that inequality based on the sex is a part of larger social inequalities created by and intrinsic to capitalism (Kabeer, 1994). All sort of social inequalities are visible in certain relationship between individuals coming from different power-levels. Hence, *social relation approach* is adopted to analyze the way individual experiences the structural forces in a relationship she/he involved in (Kabeer, 1994: 55). Rubin (1975) extended the Marxist explanation of social relation to the analysis of gender and women's condition. Rubin further says:

*A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in*

*itself is money....* (Rubin, 1975: 158 in Kabeer, 1994: 55).

Kabeer (1994) pointed out that male and female species of human beings are similar in many ways, in their needs, vulnerabilities and life expectations. Hence it is the socially differentiated arrangement of gender that explains why women and men have experienced the same world very differently. Social rules and practices are guiding the gender relations that suppress the natural similarities of male and female and translate their biological differences into gender inequality (Kabeer, 1994: 56). On the other hand, gender inequality is also the function of other crosscutting social inequalities such as class, caste, race etc. (ibid: 57). These aspects are designated as an individual identity only under certain circumstance of relationship. The social relations approach analyzes those relationships rather than focusing just on individual identity in terms of gender or class or caste (ibid).

### **3.7.1 The Framework of the Study**

The social relation approach identified *human wellbeing* as the end of development process. It is not only about material wealth and economic growth, rather than that development is about increasing human wellbeing by ensuring one's survival security and autonomy (Kabeer, 1994:74); here autonomy means an ability to fully participate in the decision making that influence one's life choices and chances at both individual and institutional levels (ibid: 304). Development processes in the Chepang community are result of link with capitalist markets and will be assessed based on the human wellbeing it has brought about. The research will identify how migration has contributed to the broader goal of survival, security and autonomy of Chepang men and women.

In addition, SRA identifies various *resources and activities* as the means of production to create human wellbeing. Such resources can be classified as human resources (labor, knowledge, skills, health etc.), tangible resources (assets, money, equipment, natural resources etc.) and intangible resources or social resources (solidarity, relation, group affiliation, information) (Kabeer, 1994:280). And most of the production activities are carried out in variety of social relationships in different institutional settings. SRA tries to analyze the systematic differences of women and men's positions in production processes determined by the social relation of gender.

*Family and kinship* are the primary set of relations that structures gender as an individual identity as well as social inequalities. In pre-capitalist societies kinship

was a key expression of social interaction, organizing economic, cultural and political activities as well as sex and reproductive practices (Kabeer, 1994: 57). This study is conducted in a community that is in transition between pre-capitalist and capitalist stages. Therefore family and kinship are major focal points to account the “organization of rights, responsibilities and resources” (ibid: 58) for men and women. By examining the family institutions this study will try to discover how social rules are invested in men and women, and controlling their bodies, sexuality, capacity and life choices, and production systems. However, since Chepang community has already established a link of production with modern town and non-agriculture sectors, this study will also take into account the *market* institutions to some extent in order to analyze whether it has created any inequality among Chepang men and women.

Social relationship has five distinct but interrelated dimensions within an institution. These dimensions – *rules, activities, resources, people and power* - are significant for the analysis of social inequality based on gender (Kabeer, 1994: 281). These 5 dimensions are adopted to use as an analytical approach of this study. The analysis of *people* component is done on the basis of costs and benefits of new livelihoods, for men and women.

*Rules:* The distinct thing about institutional behavior is that it is rule-governed rather than random (ibid). This research will trace out the official and unofficial norms, values, traditions, laws and customs of Chepang community that enable or constrain how things are done, by whom and how resources are distributed.

*Resources:* These are material and non-material assets that have direct or indirect contributions to the human wellbeing. As mentioned above, resources mainly includes human, tangible and intangible assets, which will be examined for their availability and distribution in households of Chepang community.

*People:* Institutions are constituted by specific groups of people. Different tasks are assigned to different people; role and responsibilities are assigned to specific people in production process. Similarly, people are specifically selected for the distribution of benefits and wellbeing as well (ibid: 282,). This study will examine mainly how women and men are placed differently in production and benefit sharing processes.

*Activities:* Institutions have specific objectives and they carry out certain activities in order to achieve those objectives. Since these activities are governed by the rules, they are mainly a routinized pattern of actions. Such actions - productive,

distributive or regulative - will be another important point of analysis about how gender inequalities are performed in everyday life of Chepang people.

*Power:* Power is constituted as an integral character of institutional life (Kabeer, 1994: 282). In majority of the institutions, some actors have authority and control over others; and that also determines the distribution of resources and responsibilities. Such power will, on the other hand, sustain the privileged positions of those major actors in the hierarchy of institutions. In order to change the practice of discrimination and inequality, it is important that such underprivileged groups have an access to that power which can change institutional rules. This study's major focus is to identify how power is shared between male and female actors in Chepang families, and how it has impacted those actors.

Theory and concepts of gender studies are complex in nature as gender is interconnected with all of the institutional dimensions of our society. Migration is a popular form of livelihood in many developing countries that also has gender significance. Hence, the social relations approach can bridge the concept of gender with changing gender relations as an impact of changing livelihoods.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

This chapter describes the process and methodology of this thesis, how the field study was conducted and what are the remarkable experiences during the field study. I will explain the data collection techniques, research process and also mention what I experienced during that process. I will also try to analyze the methodology I used and explain what are the benefits and limitations of that methodology in this particular study. At the end of this chapter, I will explain the issues related to my individual position, reflection and ethics during the field study.

### **4.1 Research Design**

Investigation was done on how difficult or easy the life has become for men and women as they have changed their livelihood system from forest based to market based. The research is concentrated on changes in relationship of a men and women, rationality behind such behaviors and how such behaviors affect the overall social system. Hence, as mentioned in chapter 3 and adopted from Naila Kabeer (2003), five dimensions<sup>4</sup> of the social relations approach are taken in to consideration while collecting data in the field. Emphasis was given to equal participation of men and women of different age groups and backgrounds and balanced considerations of their views. Interview, focused group discussion (FGD) and participant observation were key methods to collect information.

### **4.2 Site Selection and Access to Informants**

The research problem was selected on the basis of my personal interest on rarely mentioned Chepang community and exponentially increasing urbanization as well as outmigration in Nepal. A detailed review of literature was done and discussions with professors and experts were conducted to develop researchable specific questions. To satisfy the research questions I needed to carefully trace out what were required data, what were the sources, how to collect them, and how to analyze those data.

Although Chepang are spread over four districts in Nepal, I selected Makawanpur District not only because heavy outmigration is observed here recently in Chepang community (DDC Makawanpur, 2012), but also because the district is

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<sup>4</sup> Five dimensions are: *rules, activities, resources, people and power*

where my hometown belongs. This made it easy for searching different persons and organizations that are working on those Chepang communities. I contacted a NGO called Manahari Development Institute (MDI), which I knew for a long time while working in a national NGO Alliance for Peace and Development Nepal (APDN) in Kathmandu. APDN had connection with MDI and launched various programs as joint ventures. I already knew that MDI<sup>5</sup> was the only organization that had long experience of working in Chepang community in the Makawanpur District. Hence, I selected MDI as an entry point to access the Chepang community and other informants. Similarly, officials in different government organizations were also ready to help me since they were excited about the research undertaken by one of their local residents on a very contemporary issue. However, Chepang communities are spread through 21 VDCs in Makawanpur district; therefore it was first difficult to select where to conduct the study. Information was gathered from numbers of MDI local project staffs regarding the location of different VDCs, their distance from towns, and demographic structure. Finally, Raksirang village was selected for the study on the basis that: it is the one with a large number of Chepang population in comparison to other VDCs (DDC Makawanpur, 2012), it is located not so far from town so that frequent mobility and outmigration are observed, and it was beyond the cost and time to reach other remote VDCs which take 3-4 days walk to reach.

Chepangs from Raksirang have been out-migrating well before the Chepangs from other VDCs (Telephone Conversation with an officer of MDI Nepal, 2013). Therefore, the impacts of that out-migration and social changes should be more visible among Chepangs from Raksirang. This selection was done in June 2013, two months before the planned date of field study<sup>6</sup>. After sorting out the field study site, concentration was given to selection of key informants, local participants and field assistants.

I went Nepal on November of 2013 for the field study. The same month that Nepal was conducting second election of the constitutional assembly. The entire nation was undergoing serious tensions between different unsatisfied groups and political parties. The situation was heated by riots, strikes, attacks on public goods and demonstrations. These unfavorable conditions had serious impacts on my field

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<sup>5</sup> Further information about MDI can be found on <http://www.mdinepal.org>

<sup>6</sup> But due to the delay by Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) to issue visa, the field visit needed to be postponed by 4 months further than the planned date.

study plan. I needed to carefully decide the different dates for various appointments, visiting different organizations and meeting the key informants. Several meetings and appointments were cancelled and postponed. This has seriously squeezed the available time for detailed study in the field. The realization was noted that externalities should be carefully identified well before, in the social research (Reinharz, 1992).

Before I went to Makawanpur, I asked for an appointment with a representative of Nepal Chepang Association in Kathmandu. This is a non-governmental indigenous people's organization established to organize and uplift the Chepang community in Nepal. The organization was established in 1988 by a few educated Chepang youths with the help of some other people who wanted to develop the Chepang communities. The organization works in collaboration with various other NGOs and donors aiming to improve the living standard of Chepang people, securing their basic needs and helping them to raise their voices in national policy making level (Interview with representative of Nepal Chepang Association, 2013). I obtained some general but important information about history of Chepang, their evolution, development progress, and representation in policy making so far.

To obtain a better picture of contemporary Nepali social and economic development in the light of increasing outmigration, a meeting was fixed with Nepali development expert Dr. Govind P. Koirala. Dr. Koirala, an agro-economist, has been closely analyzing socio-economic changes in Nepal for the last 30 years. He also served as member of National Planning Commission and consultant in dozens of national development projects. The Discussion with Dr. Koirala revealed very crucial issues related to agriculture, migration and social changes in Nepal.

#### **4.2.1 Number of Informants**

Qualitative research intends to gather in-depth information. Since qualitative studies focus on small numbers of respondents, data gathered from this approach is rich and detailed (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Owuebuzie and Leech mentioned that it is important to determine the sample size so as, on the one hand that size should be manageable by researcher capacity, and on the other, that it should be sufficient enough to produce reliable information (Manion and Morrison, 2011).

*Table 1: Number of individual informants involved in the study*

<b>Key Informants</b>	<b>Number</b>
Individual Expert	1
Manahari Development Institute (MDI)	3
Nepal Chepang Association	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

<b>Respondents in Raksirang</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Number</b>
20-50 years Men	Married	5
20-50 years Women	Married	5
60 + years Men	Married	5
60 + years Women	Married	5
15-20 years Men	Married	3
15-20 years Men	Unmarried	3
15-20 years Women	Married	2
15-20 years Women	Unmarried	2
<b>Total</b>	Married: 25 Unmarried: 5	<b>30</b>

**Total Informants: 35 (Including 16 participants - 8 men and 8 women - in 3 FGDs)**

### **4.3 Qualitative Methods**

With increasing interaction between outsiders (government, market and NGOs) and Chepang people, it is also obvious that their traditional social system is subjected to change. The social relations approach enabled me to minutely examine how Chepang men and women have been accommodating and interacting in new institutions and how their relationship has been changing under existing institutions such as family and community. To do that examination under the framework of social relation approach, the study uses extensive qualitative techniques and tools such as key informant interview, focus group discussion, semi-structured interview, and participant observation.

Qualitative research, as mentioned by Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 2), is “born out of concern to understand others”. This notion suits in my research as I had chosen a very different community that my own in order to understand the depth of their

culture, values, norms and everyday lifestyle. Qualitative research method understands the life experience of people not from researcher's point of view, but from the way people have felt and lived (Hughes, 2006). I can understand the life experience of Chepang people from their point of view, how they have understood and analyze those experiences. Techniques from ethnographic research and case study design have been adopted in this study.

#### **4.3.1 Interview**

Interview is a very important tool of information collection in qualitative research. It involves mostly verbal communication between researcher and informant that is normally concentrated on a particular topic (Manion & Morrison, 2000). Interview techniques allowed me to talk with illiterate Chepang women and men in a detailed manner. Interviews would also not disturb the physical activities the informants have been involving in as I found that most of my informants were doing some activities such as cleaning, cooking, working, taking care of children etc. while responding to my questions.

The foremost purpose of interview is to obtain “qualitative description” of life situations that respondents have undergone, with respect to the research issue (Kvale, 1996). Second, qualitative interviews are often used jointly with other research tools such as audio-video to make those tools more efficient (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). I used the interview technique jointly with audio-video recording so that it gave me a clear picture of the physical expression and gestures of respondents with respect to the questions and answers. There are various types of interview according to the pattern and openness of the question, and informants involved (Crang and Cook, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 Chepang men and women of different age groups. Semi-structured interview is used when the researcher needs detailed information on a question while at the same time keeping the interview as focused as possible. Such interviews involve open-ended questions that generate richer and deeper information (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Therefore, an interview guide was developed well before the interview should keep the interview process on track, not to let informants and researcher divert away from the main topic. And at the same time it gave informants a flexibility to explain their answers. As mentioned by Crang and Cook (2007) in their book *Doing Ethnographies*, high priority was given to

create a comfortable and friendly environment during the interview so that the informants felt more comfortable to openly express their emotions.

Semi-structured interviews, done with certain people who are experts of the study matter, place and issues, are also known as key-informant interviews (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Key-informants are those who have good knowledge and experience on particular subjects of research. Key informants have been observing the changes occurred in the community closely and consistently for long. They are also aware about characters of people, institutions, rules and values of particular community. They can contribute in research by sharing their broad knowledge and understanding with their excellent communication skill (Silverman, 2005).

This study has taken interviews with 5 key informants. Manahari Development Institute (MDI) Nepal was a main organization working in Chepang community in Makawanpur. It was selected as a point of entry for field study and pool of information regarding development of the Chepang community. Three key informants were selected and interviewed from MDI; among them the first person was working at the organization's head office in Hetauda and two were working in the field as coordinators. The interview with first one was aimed at understanding general working principle of MDI on gender issues while formulating the projects. Information was gained on various development projects launched by MDI at Raksirang village and how they are uplifting lives of people. Later, two separate interviews were conducted, one with the coordinator of agro-forestry project and the second with the local coordinator of Raksirang VDC. These two interviews focused on gaining information regarding the changes occurring in Chepang community, the situation of people in the past and in the present. The local coordinator for Raksirang was himself an educated Chepang man; hence vital information was obtained regarding history, culture, tradition, and behavior of Chepang people. Close relationships were established with all the key informants, which increased the level of trust and understanding; hence it was comfortable for key informants to share as deep information as possible (Oakley, 1999).

#### **4.3.2 Focus Group Discussion**

Focus Group Discussion, popularly known as FGD, has been another important method of data collection in this study. Dialogues, discussion, and questions and answer between participants, moderator and researcher have provided comprehensive

knowledge of Chepang people's lives, and their understanding about their own situations. Three different FGDs were conducted with participation of men and women of different age groups from Raksirang village. First FGD includes 8 participants who were only the men, second also includes 8 participants who were only the women and the third also includes 8 participants (4 men and 4 women) selected from the previous two groups. As mentioned by Krueger and Casey (2000), more than one FGD should be conducted if we want to analyze the results from different types of participants. In this study, the first FGD provided the perspective of women, the second provided perspective of men and the third one provided the mixed perspectives of both men and women on the issue of social change. All the women participated in FGDs were affiliated with community-based organizations. Hence, they had experiences of participating in numbers of focused group discussions in the past. However, for all the males, and for a few elderly people, FGDs I conducted were the first they ever participated in.

In qualitative studies, it is important to understand how people think and react about certain issues in a social relation context. This context includes process of dialogue, learning from others, reacting, answering, resisting and misunderstanding etc. (Schrager, 1983 in Crang & Cook, 2007). FGD creates a context of social relations where the researcher can study previously mentioned processes – dialogue, learning from others, reacting, answering, resisting etc. - among the participants about their “experiences and thoughts” on a specific topic (Crang & Cook, 2007). This method is meaningful in qualitative research because it investigates and explains the “intersubjective dynamics of thought, speech and understanding” (Crang & Cook, 2007: 91).

All of the participants were from same community and knew each other very well. This helped in creating a comfortable environment for participant to express their feelings and experiences (Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins, 2010). However, as mentioned by Krueger (1988) in Crang & Cook (2007), if group members are already known to each other it will impact on the way they express themselves and the content of expression. Therefore strong emphasis was given to prevent the negative impacts of existing power-relationships between participants on the group dynamics of FGD. My key informant, local coordinator of MDI Nepal for Raksirang, Mr. Nabin Subedi, mentioned:

*“Chepang communities are homogeneous in terms of their social, economic, cultural and environmental status. Indeed, men and women in Raksirang bear the same fate. They belong to a same clan and share a common history.”*

The third focus group was heterogeneous in terms of the sex and experience of women from previous focus group discussions in the community. It is recommended to have a few heterogeneous characters in the group that will bring out diverse ideas and forwards dialogues (Crang and Cook, 2007). Moderator is another important component of FGD and a skillful moderator easily facilitates the discussion. In their work *Focus Group: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, Krueger and Casey (2000) discuss about characters of good moderators that lead FGD to desired outcome. The Moderator plays a central role to facilitate the participant discussing ideas, sharing experience and opinions (Krueger and Casey, 2000). In this study, local coordinator of MDI was chosen on the basis of that person’s previous experiences, understanding of subject matter and communication skill. Since Chepang people cannot communicate effectively in Nepali language, it is important that facilitator should have good command over Chepang language to ensure effective communication during FGD.

### **4.3.3 Direct Observation**

To understand the gendered pattern of life in a community, it is not sufficient with individual and group interviews; rather it is very important that researcher lives with the community, involves in family activities closely and observes them from theoretical perspective (Oakley, 1999). Direct observation has been a supportivel method of this study that allowed researcher to interact with participant and involve in their daily activities. In this method researchers intensively involve with people in their natural environment and activities in order to observe how the research issue is manifested in everyday life. Observation with informal conversation allows at “gathering live data from live situations” (Manion and Morrison, 2000: 111).

## **4.4 Implementing Methods**

The previous section has explained various qualitative methods applied in this study, their meaning and definition from both theoretical and practical perspectives. This section will explain how exactly I implemented those methods in my research

process, what were the mechanisms developed in the field, difficulties faced, and how I tackled those difficulties.

#### **4.4.1 Interviews**

For the key informant interviews I had prepared separate sets of questions for different key informants with respect to my aim, their positions and organization they belonged to. The questions were highlighted with 2 separate colors in order to highlight their importance: primary and supportive. In the situations where time is extremely limited and where answers were already obtained by other means, such supportive questions were omitted. I had prepared a detailed interview guide; questions were set in logical sequences and typed both in Nepali and English languages.

The interview with the representative of Nepal Chepang Association at Kathmandu was the first among all. Due to the ongoing political riots, the interview was postponed twice. I utilized the transition time to gather more information and literatures about Chepang people, migration and gender, specific for the Nepali context. At the third appointment I was able to conduct the first interview of my study.

All of the interviews were started in the same manner, beginning with Nepali greeting; then I introduced myself, mentioned where I am affiliated, what I am going to study and what was the purpose of my study. I also mentioned what I expected from the interviewees. I didn't try to make the interview formal and strict because it would not bring participants close to me. Rather, a more flexible approach was adopted while asking question, discussing on various issue, and in communicating style. I knew that if I interviewed the key informants in their offices and during work it would very much limit the time for detailed talk. Therefore, I arranged all the interviews at the time when the key informants were free, mostly in the evening. All of the key informants (except one individual development expert) were affiliated with different organizations. Therefore, while giving the interview, they raised opinions from an organizational perspective. However, sometimes they started to explain things about their organizations that were not relevant to the question. In such situations the interview guide helped to bring them talk back to the focal issue. I also gave them a chance to mention their individual opinion and explanation on the

discussion issue, regardless of the organizational affiliation. All of the key informants were interviewed in Nepali language.

On the other hand, during the semi-structured interviews I conducted in Raksirang village, some structured questions were asked regarding their education, income, and health; others on social and livelihood changes were open questions. The selection of informants in Raksirang village for the interview has a rationale behind it. In gender studies, it is important that research participants represent both men and women, married and unmarried, and, young and old people. To account for the phenomena of social change, participants from different age groups were interviewed (see the section Number of Informants). Among the 30 respondents, 7 men were interviewed not in the village but in nearby towns, Hetauda and Narayangadh, where they do various livelihood activities. These 7 respondents were identified through their families in Raksirang and located with the help of mobile telephone communication.

Chepong people are shy in nature and do not express their views openly with outsiders (Bista, 2013; Interview with Nepal Chepong Association, 2013). Therefore I was worried that they might not properly respond to my question, or might not agree to be interviewed. Hence, I researched more about the behavior of Chepong; how should I greet them, talk with them and make them feel easy. Since MDI staffs had experience of working in Chepong community, informal talks with them made me clear about Chepong's customs, the way I should behave and the things that are not accepted in Chepong community.

In qualitative research, language is a prominent tool to understand the explanation given by participants. Language determines the quality of data; and to maximize that, it is very important to take interview in participant's own language (Irvine, Robert and Bradbury-Jones, 2008). Chepong have their own native language associated with Tibeto-Burman family that doesn't have any script. To make respondents easily express their feelings, I conducted the interviews in Chepong language with the help of my facilitator who was a Chepong himself. I noticed that respondents who were men or younger in age could express their views properly in Nepali language. In such situations there was no need of translator and I could handle the situation alone. However, old people didn't speak Nepali at all, and in such cases my facilitator translated my questions in Chepong language for interviewees and respondents' answers in Nepali language for me.

I was overwhelmed by the very warm and welcoming behavior of my respondents; most of them were happily ready to talk with me and expressed their views. They were more concerned about the actual purpose of my work and what would I do with information I had gathered about their life. I needed to explain my purpose to every respondents I met in the beginning. I also explained that their names and individual identities would not be disclosed in any form. Later, after a few days of stay in the village I became familiar with people; my presence became normal for them and everyone knew what I was doing there and why.

Most of the interviews were recorded in audio with prior permission of respondents. Side notes were made on respondents' physical expression, and gestures during interview. I encountered different types of respondents; some were calm, some were rigid, some explained things in much detail, some couldn't explain anything etc. Traditionally Chepang is an alcohol-consuming community and I needed to be very cautious whether a person I was going to interview was too drunk. Sometimes I felt great emotional pressure while listening to very sensitive parts of people's life, their problems and bad situations they had gone through. It was not easy for me to watch dirty, hungry and naked children gathered around their poor parents during the interview. This sometimes pulled me out of main focus of the study. I needed to struggle hard to keep my emotions in balance. A question always came to my mind: I went inside the lives of poor people; made them speak that I needed, collected the information and left them after accomplishing the task; what substantial thing could I give to them? Can their empty stomachs be filled with my knowledge?

However, with understanding cultural differences, keeping the emotions in balance and following the interview guide properly, I could manage to gather required data persistent to the research questions and objectives.

#### **4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions**

##### ***Preparation and Selection***

Selection of participants in FGD is a crucial issue before starting the session. In this study, FGDs were conducted at the end, after completing semi-structured interviews. During more than two weeks of stay in the village I became familiar with most of the families and their lifestyles. I even knew many people personally and closely. This helped me very much while selecting participants for FGDs. On the other hand, my

facilitator, who was also a local coordinator of MDI, had got long experience of working especially with women of Raksirang village in various projects.

Social change in Chepang community from a gender perspective is understood by involving participants who have experienced such changes. Therefore, equal numbers of men and women were selected separately where some are old enough to explain social realities in the past and some are young enough to explain social realities in the present. This will also help in forwarding dialogues between participants since they represent different social age and have different experiences of life. My facilitator was involving in the study from the very beginning which made him an integral part of every activity. He was given good instruction about the purpose of the study, what was his role and how should he facilitate participants during FDGs. He was a knowledgeable person and had enough experience of facilitating FDGs in the past. We sorted out some technical matters such as translation of some words in local language and how to explain them.

### ***FGD in Action***

The first two FDGs, with separate participation of men and women, were conducted in one day and the third FGD with participation of both men and women was conducted the next day. Selected participants were informed about time and venue two days before the date of FDGs. Since participants needed to come from far by foot, it was not possible to start FGD early in the morning. The venue was a community cooperative building. Sitting mats were arranged in circular way so that participants would face each other that helped in effective communication. A short tea session was launched before actually starting the discussion. This was done in order to make participants motivated, and familiar with each other and with that particular situation. The facilitator started the session with formal introduction of research team; participants were asked to individually introduce themselves. Participants were made aware that the aim of FGD was not to reach a single point of agreement but to gather their experiences and opinions on the issue related to each other. The facilitator also mentioned that there was not any judgment of right and wrong over what participants would mention. This helped to make participants more confident and fearless to speak up. Rule was made not to cross over while one person was speaking and notice should be given by raising the hand if someone wanted to speak.

Participants in the women's group were more open and expressed themselves without any hesitation from the beginning. While participants in the men's group were too shy and unable to speak up properly during the first few minutes of discussion. The moderator put a question and let the participants forward it into the discussion. I was worried that women would dominate men in third FGD the next day; because, I noticed that women were more confident than men in their respective groups. Therefore, in the next day, the moderator needed to motivate the men a little bit more. However, as the discussion went forward, participants became more familiar with the research team, and everyone started participating actively, expressed their view, agreed and disagreed with each other, and enjoyed the discussion. A 48 years old man mentioned after the FGD:

*"This was something very new I have experienced in my life. I had never realized that we all have so many things in our mind that we wanted to express. We became aware about our individual situation, and our communal situation."*

A Chepang women at 40 says:

*"We feel strange because we never had participated in such discussion with our male counterparts of the community. This is the first time that both men and women from our village discussed about their lives together. We didn't do this even at home, individually. I am feeling good."*

Although precautions were taken, women dominated men during the joint discussion at last. Sometimes women discussed the issue among themselves and didn't pay much attention to the men. Female participants had much more information about the community issue, incidents and activities than their male counterparts. Male participants sometimes would feel alienated from the discussion process. In such situations moderator played an active role in bringing both men and women back to common a discussion.

After the discussion ended, participants were offered lunch and given 4 hundred Nepali rupees (4 USD) for each as the compensation of their time they contributed in FGD. The audio recording of FGD was reviewed immediately and the dialogues in Chepang languages were translated in to Nepali. This helped me to understand many issues I had not considered before, which I could take further into investigation. Those issues which we were not able to discuss in FGD and which I

thought were not clearly mentioned by participants were considered in direct observation and informal talks.

#### **4.4.3 Direct Observation**

I lived two and half weeks with the local people in Raksirang. Observations were conducted on a continuous basis in order to develop inter-subjective understanding of the research issue. The village was not big in term of population but the households were dispersed far throughout the hills, slopes and forest. However, after a few days of stay, most people in the village started to know me, my purpose and expressed their curiosities. I was also aware of the fact that my presence could alter the normal behavior of villagers. Hence, my aim was not only to observe their way of life but also to be close with them physically and emotionally and to develop trust. Since the gender issue is sensitive, I needed to be careful if my presence did not disturb the way husband and wife behaved with each other in different situations.

I didn't stay with one single family because it would limit my chance to observe as many cases as possible. I joined Chepang's everyday life activities: taking goats to forest, fetching water, harvesting bananas, and other works. This helped me to be closer to people and to understand how they feel about doing various everyday tasks. I also observed and participated in various works done by women and men separately such as fishing, firewood collection, cooking meal etc. I also had chance to observe the conditions of Chepang men from Raksirang who are working as laborers in nearby towns. They were involved in different works, such as pulling rickshaw, construction, and in factories. Informal talks supported the observation process and helped to elaborate on people's opinions regarding different situations and social relation there were bound to.

Since many Chepang could speak Nepali language, I didn't need a translator in order to understand their responses during informal conversation. However, I couldn't understand the communication while Chepangs talk among themselves; because Chepangs prefer to use their own language to communicate among their families, relatives and neighbors. Photographs were taken in different situation during observation; but due to the absence of electricity it was not possible to charge the batteries in a regular manner. Daily anthropological notes were written down in order to record the phenomena observed on that day.

#### **4.5 Data Management**

A very essential step in qualitative research is proper management of gathered data and transferring them to finished reports. Scientific research demands systematic processes; more systematic data handling and more systematic analysis must lead the research to meaningful outcomes (Crang and Cook, 2007). Hence, high attention was given at more systematic management of data that were gathered in numerous forms during the study. Most of the data gathered in the field were recorded in different ways and languages. Information obtained from key informant interviews and semi-structured interviews were noted mainly in English, few in Nepali. I was able to record the audio of 15 interviews in total. While transcribing the interviews, those audio files were listened to make sure that any important information was not left behind. Audio of focused group discussions were recorded and later transcribed into English with the help of the moderator. A few video recordings were done, which also contributed while transcribing data in a systematic way.

The aim of this research is to discover the explanations for the research questions. Those research questions acted as base to develop an analytical framework which explores the phenomena of social change in Chepang community with a gender lens, and with the help of four major dimensions: different social institutions, status and roles of men and women within those institutions, distribution of resources among men and women, and authority of control. Gathered data were coded according to sub-dimensions developed on the basis of previously mentioned main dimensions. For example marriage, family/kinship, and markets were considered as sub-dimensions of different social institutions; how men and women acted within those institutions were mentioned distinctly. Every component of analysis is categorized on the basis of past and present so that it will give a clear picture about on changes in gender and livelihoods.

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Field study in this research consisted of direct communication with people who have special culture and norms; hence ethical issues were very important to consider prior to the field and during the field. As mentioned by Markham (2007), a researcher must know something about the culture, norms and values of the community prior to the field study. Literatures and communication with MDI enabled me to know basic norms and behavior of Chepang people and especially which kind of acts could

violate their social rules. For example, Chepangs practice animism and use a priest to cure someone's diseases and bad fate of the family. Although I don't believe such practices could cure diseases and bad fate of the family, I never tried to condemn or express my disagreements over such practices during my stay in Chepang community.

During the field study, I intervened the life of Chepang people through interview, FGD and observations. I engaged in their personal life, asked about their personal matters such as the relationship between wife and husbands, which is very sensitive. I knew that my presence would disturb the normal life of Chepang men and women in Raksirang. Throughout the field study, I was very careful to maintain the balance between obtaining enough information and not harming the respondent's personal life. I tried to interview husband and wife separately and didn't force to answer sensitive questions.

Foremost, as a researcher, it was my main responsibility to inform participants about the aim of the research (Hemming, 2009), what exactly I wanted to do, how much time did I need, what I had expected from participants and what I should do with the information recorded from them. Principles of anonymity and confidentiality were adopted in this study (Anol, 2012); participants were informed that their identity would not be disclosed outside in any form and information gathered will be used in an aggregated way so that their opinions could not be associated with personal identity. No participant was forced to involve in the research and they were well informed that their denial to participate in the research would not harm them in any means. Audio-visual recordings were done only after the informants felt comfortable and agreed with using that.

Raksirang is a developing community, occupied by financially poor People. While participating in research, most of them kept an expectation that participating in the research would immediately provide them with material benefits or uplift their life. This expectation was visible among most of the male respondents and informants from poorer families. Therefore, I needed to explain such respondents in a detailed manner not to keep any immediate expectations from me. My facilitator also further explained the purpose of this study to the respondent and mentioned that if the study would be successful, outside world would know more about situation of Chepang people. This helped to motivate many respondents to actively participate in the research. Due to their participation in various development projects and CBOs

supported by MDI, women seemed to know that development was not an overnight process and it took sometime to uplift the life standard.

It is important that after producing a final report the researcher should share the findings of study with the community where the study was taken place. They have right to know their situation and it is an ethical obligation of researcher (Markham, 2007). Hence, after the completion, major findings of this research will be shared among people of Raksirang with the help of MDI. Final report of this study will be given to the library of MDI along with a presentation among its staffs working for Chepang community.

#### **4.7 Self-Reflections and Trustworthiness**

Although the data is gathered with participation of local people, different informants and research team, the final result of the research is solely based on my own interpretation of those data. Hence, it is very important to constantly assess the researcher's own positions, contribution and influence in the research itself. I accept that my emotions and thoughts were affected by various situations during the study – behavior of respondents, cultural differences, and sensitivity of the issue - that, in turn, would have influences on the way I analyzed the data. A field diary helped me to keep record of my feelings and emotions so that I could later analyze how they affected my research.

Although I belong to the same district where Chepang live, I never had got a chance to look into their lifestyle very closely. I am from a caste Brahmin, which is considered as a highest rank in Nepali social system (Bista, 2013). Also due to the growing ethnocentric sentiments and conflicts over last decade in Nepal, I was a bit afraid that I would be treated badly by some people during the fieldwork. That thought also didn't allow me to explicitly investigate my research issue in the beginning. However, later as I found people of Raksirang were very friendly and didn't have any prejudice over other castes, I rigorously conducted my study.

Similarly, learning the customs and cultures of Chepang helped me to extend my conversation and interviews to new dimensions. For example, those Chepangs who became Christian do not produce and consume alcohol at home. However, those who are following traditional Chepang culture still produce alcohol at home. With the knowledge of this custom I could compare different families in relation to occurrence of violence between men and women.

Throughout the field study I frequently met people who didn't have enough to eat once a day, dirty and diseased children, exploited labors, and innocent women. Their situations severely disturbed my emotions. With the help of theoretical understanding and experiences, I aimed at developing good balance between my emotions, quality of the data I gathered and the angle of analysis, pertaining to the aim of my research.

#### **4.8 Summing up**

Various qualitative tools were remarkably helpful in gathering necessary information that is expected to help in solving the research question of this study. Research methodology in qualitative study is wide in nature, and requires dealing with highly diverse situations in the field. The intersubjective understandings of Chepang's changing lives will play a key role in upcoming analysis and discussion parts of this study.

## **Chapter 5: An Account of Chepang's Life**

This chapter will provide a thorough account on the life of Chepang people, how would their traditional lives look like and what are the key causes of changes in such traditional social settings. Based on the field interviews, I will try to reflect on the life experiences of Chepang people in this chapter. Since migration has been observed as an important livelihood option in current Chepang communities, I will explain how traditional livelihood of Chepang has been shifted to new livelihood options due to migration.

### **5.1 General Characteristics of Chepang Community of Raksirang**

#### **5.1.1 Households**

As mentioned by Bista (2013), like many other ethnic community of mountain Nepal, Chepangs also keep household as a significant unit of residence, which serves multiple functions as a site of biological and social reproduction as well as of socialization and decision making unit. The present household structure of Chepang is quite primitive and less extensive in comparison to the household structure of other communities such as Tamang, Bahun, and Chhetri who reside not very far from Chepang settlements (ibid). It has been only a century since Chepang quit complete nomadic life, started settling in a specific territory and began an agricultural life. Hence, Chepang's social institutions - households, family, kinship – and practices are found to be more simple and “egalitarian” in nature (Caughley et al., 1971). The key elements found in the Chepang family-system are - residential arrangement, biological succession and livelihood center. Other elements such as property inheritance, power structure, and kinship arrangements are relatively less prevalent in Chepang family.

Chepang settlement in Raksirang is widely dispersed, consisting of a cluster of maximum 3-4 households in a single location. The families living in the same cluster are mostly related to each other by blood. Normally, brothers are separated from their parent's house after they get married and establish a new household around the parent's house. The cluster itself is a community of Chepang kin that has very important role in Chepang's life. Those households have mutual cooperation in agriculture and other livelihood related tasks. Similarly, they also serve as joint partnership in family maintenance and taking care of children when others are busy.

### 5.1.2 Household Head

A large portion of Chepang communities does not have any legal document for the land they have been utilizing for centuries. Government of Nepal has not been able to transfer the land-ownership to the Chepang people as well as to many other ethnic communities in Nepal (Sharma, 2011). Hence, Chepang households in Raksirang do not have a formal head in terms of land ownership certificate. However, due to the increasing out-migration of male members, Chepang women in Raksirang are being seen as the new household heads in terms of the decision making power they possess and in terms of new household economy they control. During the field study, 100% of the respondents mentioned that at least one of their male household members, who are normally between the age 18-50, live out of the home in different towns for more than 6 months a year in relation to livelihood activities. Many male members leave home as soon as they get married. The average marriage age of boys in Chepang community of Raksirang was found to be 15.8 years.

### 5.1.3 Family Size

The following figure shows variation in family size as mentioned by the respondents of this research.

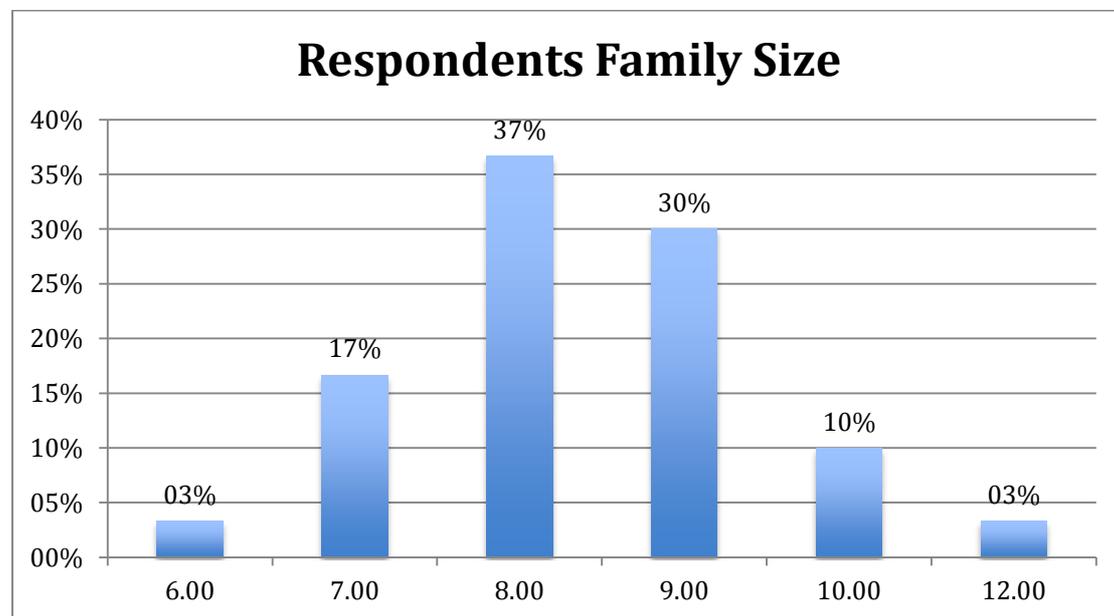


Figure 5.1-1: Respondents family size in Raksirang, N=30

Chepangs have relatively bigger family size than Bahun, Chhetri and Tamang (Bista, 2013). Average family size in Raksirang was found to be 8.4 members per family, where 37% respondents have 8 members and 30% respondents have 9 members in

their family. The bigger family size is attributed to the early marriage age of Chepang (14.5 years on average), and lack of knowledge and access to birth control mechanism. A Chepang women at her 73 says:

*"We have never thought about why we have this much children. It is normal for us to have 7-8 children. We are a part of nature; literally we are animals. And animals keep giving birth as much as they can. There is no question of numbers."*

The explanation to high rate of birth in Chepang family varied according to age of the respondents. A Chepang women at her 43 mentions that:

*"We gave birth to many children, may be because we didn't know that birth could be controlled. Most of us do not see any problem while bearing as much children. On the other hand, if you have many children then there is a good chance that they will go out, find better work and ensure the family's survival."*

Similarly a 48 years man provides another logical explanation to this issue of high birth rate in Chepang family.

*"This has a connection to our immediate history of livelihood. We used to survive merely on the forest; we hunted animals and gathered plant products. Having more children means you have more hunters and gatherers in your family, which means more food will be brought to your home. Some members would die in the forest and some would get lost. Hence we always needed a backup."*

However, during the field I observed plenty of cases where even the young couples are conceiving with low birth-gap. A girl at the very young age of 15 has given birth to a baby boy; the boy is just one and half years old and she has already conceived another baby. Co-incidentally her husband (19 years) was present at home for a short holiday. He said:

*"We, husband and wife are apart for long time. I am here after 6 months. I work hard in the town, my wife works hard in the home. We have been suppressing our sexual need for so long. And when we meet, we really do not care about the consequences. But it's true that more children means more cost".* His wife agreed that.

A female health worker at nearest government's health post in Manaharai mentioned, *"We receive plenty of Chepang patients who come here for treatment of various health problem. But our registration shows there is no record of visit by a single couple for the consultation regarding family planning. We have neither done any family planning treatment to the Chepang husband and wife yet."*

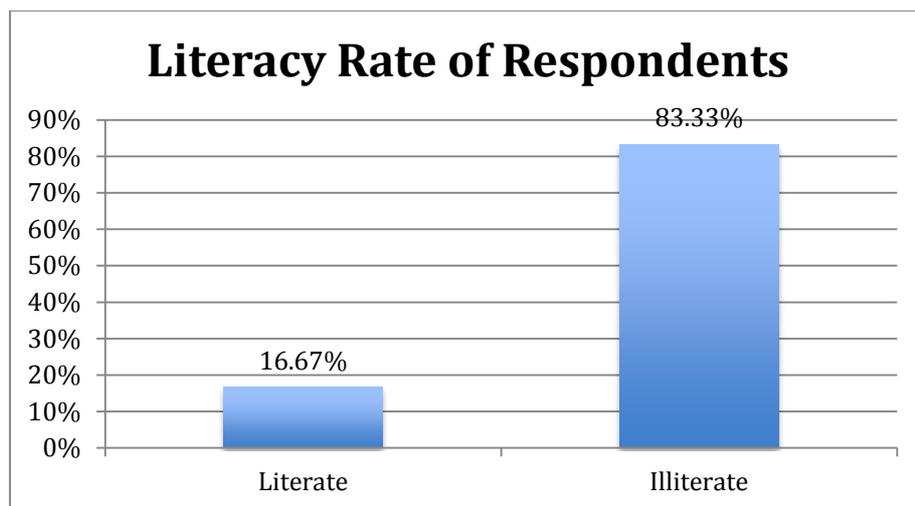
A Chepang lady (20 years), who is a mother of 3 children and also a member in local mother's group, mentioned:

*"...But these days young couples have started realizing the fact that having more children is more costly and you can not give quality life to many children. Chepang's livelihood has changed from labor-intensive traditional agriculture and hunting gathering to town and industry based work; hence, you don't need too many children like in the past. Our group is soon launching awareness campaign regarding the family planning in Chepang community."*

High rate of birth in Chepang community has a relation with age of marriage and its traditional livelihood that demands more people. The new livelihoods brought about by migration are supposed to have a positive impact to reduce the birth rate in Chepang community. This will significantly improve the household economy as well as reduce the burden of childbirth and care among the Chepang women.

#### **5.1.4 Education, Training and Affiliation**

In her book *Reversed Realities...* Naila Kabeer (1991) has emphasized the importance of education and training on the life of individual. Education and training make people aware about the decisions that affect their livelihood, health and general well being (Kabeer, 1991). Since Chepangs' survival was totally depend on forest and its products, they were masters on the knowledge about the forest, animal and plants, hunting techniques and other survival skills. They have informally transferred that knowledge to further generations (Swoveet, 1993). However, developing links with outside world, and emergence of new livelihoods have demanded new education and skills in Chepang people. The study depicts a very poor education level in Chepang community, lack of enough trainings and skill development, low school enrollment and high dropout rate.



*Figure 5.1-2: Literacy rate of the respondents in Raksirang, N= 30.*

The previous figure shows the literacy level of respondents in Raksirang village. Those respondents who can simply read and write were categorized as literate and those who cannot read and write were categorized as illiterate. The figure shows that 83.3% of the respondents cannot read and write at all. However, most of the women who are left behind by their migrant husbands are involved in income generating projects launched by Manahari Development Institute (MDI). Those women have developed more self-confidence, and awareness about their situations; and are more forward in the social activities than their male counterparts. Interestingly, it was identified that among the 16.7% of respondents who are literate, women share 73% whereas men share 27% only. This is different from of Nepal’s national literacy situation where more men are literate than women; similarly most of the other privileged communities such as Bahun and Chhetri have less number of literate women in compare to men (Tryndyuk, 2013).

There is one lower secondary school (up to grade 8) in the village. According to the head of the school, although the enrollment rate of pupils is quite satisfactory, there is a high rate of school dropouts among Chepang girls and boys. This is mainly because of the early marriage age and migration to cities for work.

Like many other communities of Nepal, Chepang also follow a part of patrilocal social system, which is mainly based on the traditional Hindu practices developed by Brahmins. In this system men are the center of family unit who is supposed to control the lives of other members, including women (Kaspar, 2005). Therefore, it is a compulsory custom for the girls to leave their parents’ house and go to the husband’s house after they are married. This custom has discouraged many

Chepong parents to invest on the education of their daughters. However, a study done by Tryndyuk (2013) about gender discrimination on education in a Chepong community of Dhading district shows that Chepong families do not discriminate while enrolling their children in the school. It is the acute poverty and requirement of extra efforts for livelihood from very young age that impede the education of Chepong children. Similarly, it is more costly for the Chepong parents to afford education materials, uniforms and food for the children as they go up to higher grades.

Most of the women respondents mentioned that they are personally affiliated with various income generation projects launched by MDI. Many of them have received training on agro-forestry, and modern horticulture; and they are also aware about the market mechanism and the techniques to deal with various market situations. Since most of the men are absent in the village for long, they are largely missing in such new development projects that could have raised their awareness level and made them empowered.

## **5.2 Chepong's Livelihood in Raksirang: Past and Present**

As we discussed in previous chapters, livelihood comprises various means of living, asset, activities and the outcomes that sustain the family's life. Livelihood involves people and their skills, natural resources, financial resources, social resources, physical resources and the actions that transform these resources in to consumable products. Indeed, status of livelihood not only determines the survival of the community but also determines its power relation with other communities. If a community is deprived of proper livelihood, it indicates a clear exclusion of that community from state affairs, rights and powers (Kabeer, 2006).

Jite Chepong, 89, explains the past life of Chepong people in Raksirang:

*“Chepong is an integral part of nature. We survived mainly on forest products. I saw grain first time when I was 30 and touched money for the first time when I was 60. Our forest was rich in wild fruits roots and herbs, wild animals and birds; those were main sources of food. Everything was just enough; everyone got enough to survive. We used to hunt together with bow and arrow, and share the food according to family size and number of hunters involved from a family. Boys are taken to forest and trained from very young age; they are stronger than girls. Women and small children collect firewood; catch fishes, crabs and frogs. Women stayed at home and took care of children and elderly. We kept small animals like goat, pig and chicken at home. Big*

*animals were difficult to take care of and to control by small children and women. We were happier back then. We were always united with the nature. That was the way of our life.”*

Chepang are historically residing on very difficult terrain of middle hill in central Nepal. Since their livelihoods were totally depended on hunting, gathering and horticulture, they didn't required plain arable land. However, as Chepang started settling in a fixed locality, they needed proper land for farming cereals and lentils. Due to being situated on steep slope and having low productivity of the land, Chepang discovered the shifting cultivation practice (Sharma, 2011).

Shifting cultivation is a farming practice in which field is prepared by clearing natural vegetation, letting them dry and burn them. After that the field is used to cultivate for generally not more than 2 years of period. Farmers leave the field fallow for longer period (up to 12 years) to let it regenerate in a natural way before it can be used again (Dhakal, 2000:93; Fujisaka et al., 1996). Shifting cultivation is practiced where the slope of land is 30 degrees or more (ibid). “Khoriya” is a name given by Chepang to such marginal land where they practice shifting cultivation. Normally, a cluster of Chepang households jointly owns a few “Khoriya”. All members from those cluster households are collectively involve in the process of farming – land clearing, cultivating and harvesting. Since Chepang are living in rugged terrain, they severely lack enough Khoriya land to cultivate. Hence, the fallow period of a single Khoriya is short, generally not more than 4-5 years.

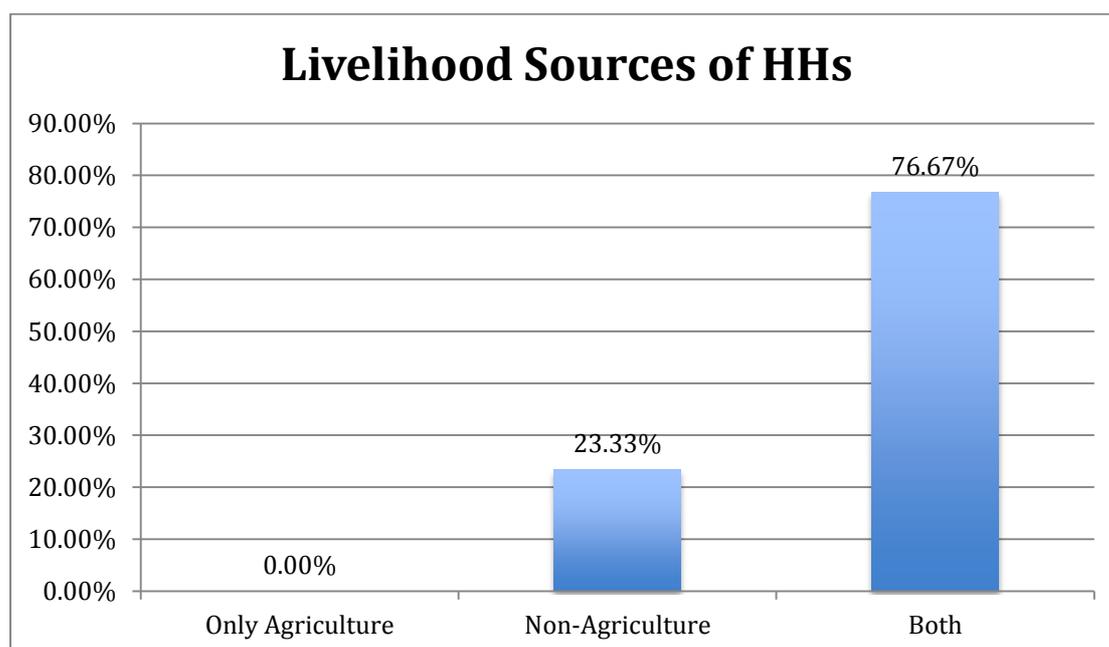
Chepangs are relatively inexperienced farmers, in comparison to other communities living around them. Chepangs use very basic instruments for agriculture, do most of the work manually, use traditional seeds and have poor storage facilities. In addition, Chepangs also do not have access to proper agricultural inputs (Sharma, 2011). Hence, this has finally led to the low yield from the Khoriya land. Chepang in Raksirang mainly cultivate maize, millet and legumes on their slope lands, which provide food sufficient for less than 4 months a year. Therefore, in order to secure the food availability Chepangs have diversified their livelihood to many other sources than just a shifting cultivation.

Another important livelihood option for Chepang people is their traditional hunting, gathering and fishing, which contribute to increase food security of Chepang. Even though Chepang do not hunt as they used to do in the past times, many of them still practice it individually. Hunting of small animals and birds, collection of wild

fruits, various edible plants and roots, and fishing are important components of Chepang’s diversified livelihood.

*“Khoriya, Chepang and forests were synonyms once upon a time. But time has changed now; everyone in this village has understood that forest and Khoriya alone are not going to meet our increasing demands - demands for better food, education, good health and demand for better life.”* Putalimaya Chepang, 60.

The following figure shows the proportion of respondents’ households involved in various livelihood activities.



**Figure 5.2-1: Livelihood sources of respondent households in Raksirang, N= 30**

There are no Chepang households in Raksirang that only do agriculture as a main livelihood activity. Result shows that 23.33% of respondent families are involved only in non-agricultural livelihood activities. These activities mainly comprise of labor work in construction, industry and transport sectors in nearby cities of Chitwan, Hetauda and Kathmandu. These groups of families either do not have any Khoriya land to cultivate or they have completely abandoned agricultural practices. Most of the labor forces from Raksirang are unskilled workers who work as porter, rickshaw-puller, cleaner, etc. in the urban areas of Chitwan, Hetauda and Kathmandu with very low wage payment. In the entire village, we found one family from which a man had a proper job (in Nepal police force).

On the other hand a large proportion (76.67%) of respondents mentioned that their families undertake both agriculture and non-agricultural activities to ensure the families' survivals and meet various demands.

*“The modern cities and fancy lifestyles have attracted most of our young people. Frustrated from troublesome agricultural life, Chepang men think that going to town for work will ultimately eradicate all of their problems.”* Khasam Chepang, 38.

Most of the respondents agreed that all household members are equally responsible for meeting the livelihood security of the household. Due to extreme food shortage and rampant poverty, it is important for the Chepang families to have their members economically active from early age. Household members of different ages and sexes are designated to different livelihood activities. Therefore by diversifying the livelihood, mainly in agriculture and non-agriculture, a family becomes more insured in terms of food availability, and flow of cash that can meet other needs such as health and education.

Similarly, with the increasing contacts with outsiders, Chepangs in Raksirang have been able to extend their livelihood further to the commercialization of their traditional horticulture practices. MDI, a NGO based in the nearby city of Hetauda, has launched training and support programs for the Chepang women who are left behind by their migrant husbands. The support programs have helped Chepang women to modernize their traditional fruit farming and small animal husbandry. The support programs have also significantly empowered Chepang women and made them aware about their situation. Increased empowerment levels of the Chepang women were reflected during the field interviews and focused group discussions. Those women have now been able to establish relationships with dealers and consumers in the market. Unlike their husband and other male members of the family, Chepang women have started earning money by selling their local products and without migrating to the towns for risky labor works.

Again Putalimaya Chepang, *“We used to plant banana and pineapple for self-consumption. Neither we knew that goat, chicken and pig could be sold in the market. MDI’s staffs taught us how to use the Khoriya for income generating purpose. The abandoned Khoriya have got a new life now.”*

Another Chepang woman, 39, *“I earn 3000 Rupees (30 USD) a month by selling pineapple and banana. That’s a big income for people like us who could never*

*imagine this. I am free to use the money wherever I want. I can now pay for children's education and health. I feel a lot better than in the past."*

Participants in the focused group discussions mentioned that their traditional Khoriya farming was highly labor intensive and the production was far insufficient to sustain the family. On the other hand, Government of Nepal nationalized all the forests of the country and it was highly restricted to hunt and freely use the forest products. As a result, Chepangs were deprived from their traditional livelihood and suffered from food scarcity. Large numbers of Chepang men become job-less as their traditional works were restricted and the Khoriya farming didn't provide sufficient to eat. These are the main push factors for male labor migration from Chepang community of Raksirang.

Manmaya Chepang, 30, a female staff of MDI Nepal and a local resident of Raksirang says: *"All of our men left the village and started working in different towns, because they didn't have anything to do here in the village. At that time when this trend started, there was no any NGO present here; we were very isolated. Our mothers and sisters were left behind to the same work they had been doing throughout history – maintaining household, rearing children, taking care of elderly, collecting firewood and gathering supplementary foods from around the house, nearby forest and river. Later the MDI Nepal came with an idea of how Chepang women can be empowered along with increasing livelihood security without going outside of the village for cheap labor work. Now you can see the result by yourself. Most of the women from this village have undertaken fruit farming, animal husbandry and small fishery around their home. Although we still take care of our home and children, we feel better than what we were yesterday. I don't think our male counterparts who work in the town have same level of empowerment that we women have"*

Most of the Chepang women have been able to continue their traditional reproductive roles in the household along with new economic and community management roles after involving in development projects. It is also evident that immobility of Chepang women has turn to be beneficial for them given the opportunities of empowerment along with modern agriculture and relationship with markets, in their own community. Chepang women have felt more empowered, and free because of cash the income they earn. The detail of gender relation changes will be discussed in next chapter.

The following figures show income of respondent families from agricultural and non-agricultural sources.

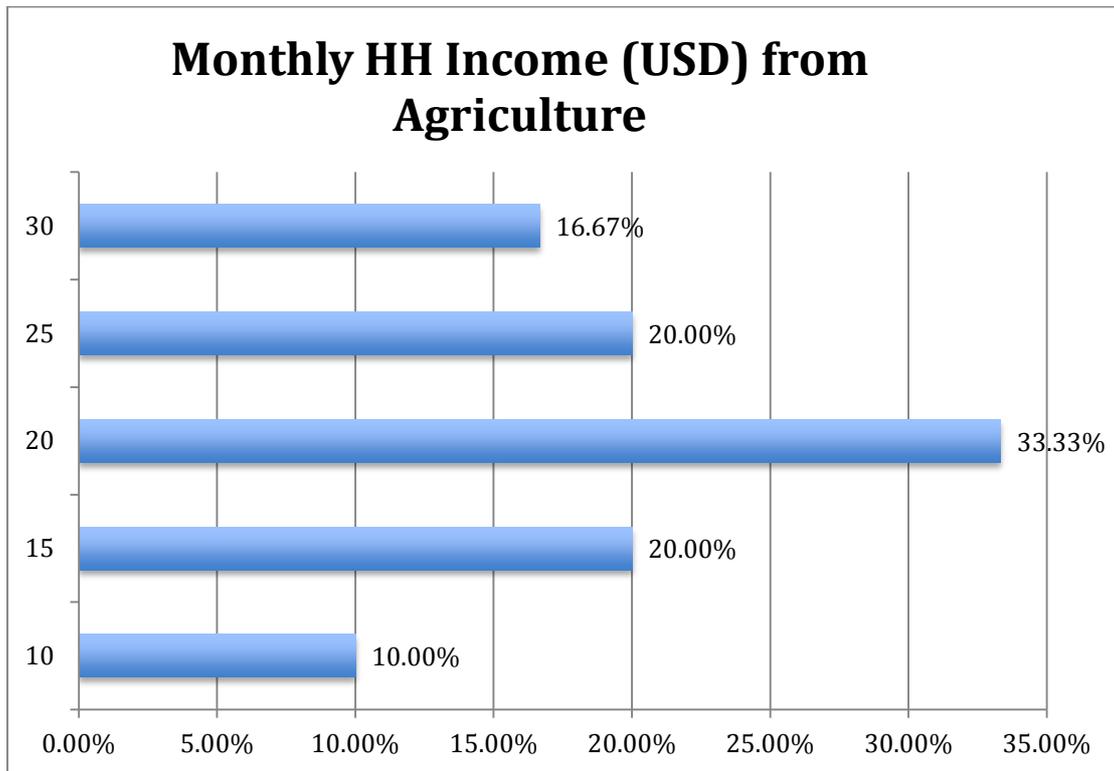


Figure 5.2-2: Monthly respondent households income from agriculture

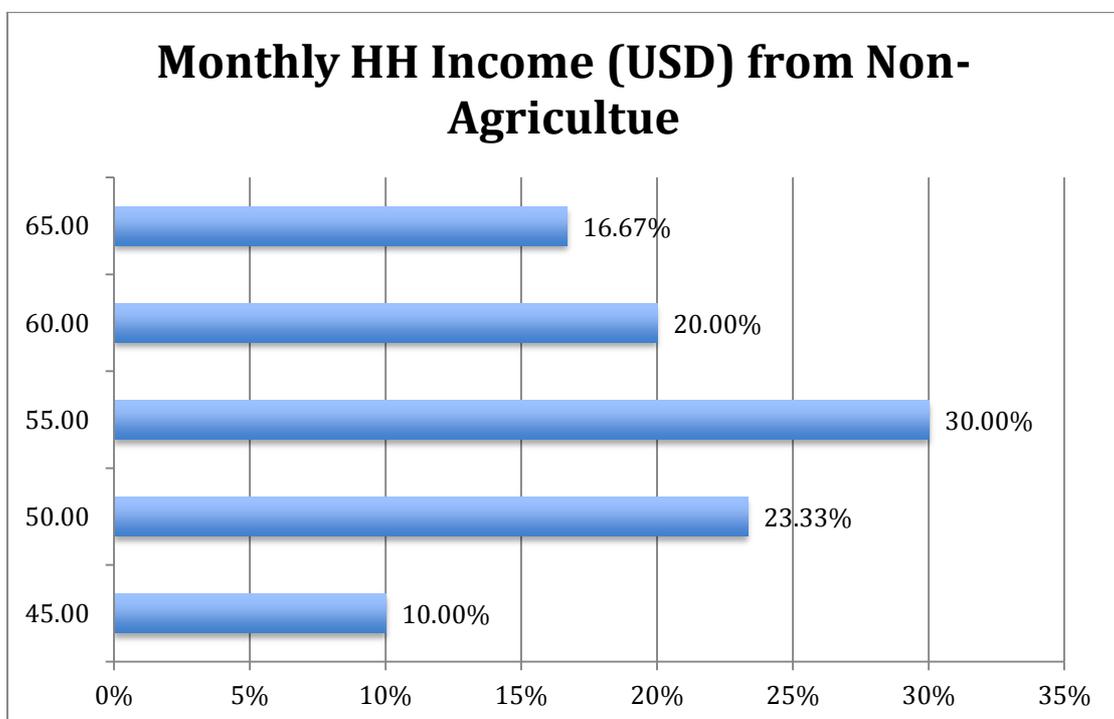


Figure 5.2-3: Monthly respondent households income from non-agriculture

The income from agriculture sector is relatively lesser than that from the non-agriculture. The main source of non-agriculture income is the labor work of migrated Chepang men in nearby cities. While, the source of agriculture income is the sales of horticultural products, small animals and fish by Chepang women who are left behind by their migrant husbands. The average monthly income from both sources per household was found to be 76.16 USD.

### **5.3 Summing up**

The life of Chepang, once the isolated hunters, has been getting more complex and at the same time more wide as they connect themselves with outside worlds. The livelihood strategy of Chepang is cleverly designed and diversified which would provide increasing food security. In the preliminary analysis it is found that staying behind in the home is financially less rewarding in comparison to migrating to the cities where there are better chance of higher income. However, gender impacts of these two situations - staying at home and migrating - seems to be highly significant in terms of actual non-monetary benefits such as empowerment, among men and women. The next chapter will be a detail analysis of the gender related changes in Chepang community in connection with the theoretical standards I have presented in previous chapters.

## **Chapter 6: Livelihoods and Gender Relations**

The following chapter will be analyzing the Chepang community of Raksirang in various terms of livelihood, migration and gender relations. The previous chapter has provided a thorough glimpse of Chepang's life and livelihood and how they are changing throughout recent history. This chapter will find out about the impacts of changing livelihood on social relation of gender from theoretical perspective. First a brief description will be provided on what are the existing gender ideologies in Chepang communities and how they sustain throughout different generations. After that, various social institutions such as household, community and market will be analyzed for different aspects of social relations as pointed out in analytical framework.

### **6.1 Gender Ideologies in Chepang Community**

While talking about Nepali society in general, gender ideology is apparently a part of greater and more general social ideology. Hence it is, most of the time, difficult to distinctly point out separate gender ideologies from general social norms and values (Acharya, 2001). However, if we look closer, these ideologies are mostly reflected in household division of labor and the decision making process. In most of the rural Nepali households, these two components – division of labor and decision making process – are seen as a legitimization of gender ideologies and also as a social reality. I have discussed in the previous chapters that in traditional Nepali society women are often considered as “weaker sex” in terms of physical and mental abilities, and always supposed to be subjugated to a male authority. In the private institutions women are subjugated to their husbands, fathers, sons, brothers and in-laws. While in public sphere, majority of men have dominated the decision making process in political, legal and economic fields.

In the Chepang community of Raksirang, the traditional gender ideologies are found projected in gender roles of men and women in different institutional settings. Gender roles are result of gender socialization that begins in very early age of the child born in the community. A stereotypical method of socialization clearly forms two separate traits that are revealed throughout the life of Chepang girls and boys. Historically Chepang men are rarely present at their home; either it was during the hunting age when men used to spend more time in forest than in home or it is in present time where most of the men are migrating to cities for earning. Hence, it is

mainly the elderly and female members of the family who impart their cultural norms and values on the young children. During the field study respondents of different ages were interviewed to trace out their ideas regarding ideal men and ideal women in Chepang community. It was a bit surprising that most of the respondents tried to provide gender-neutral response for the query about ideal men and ideal women.

*“Either you are a man or a woman, you have to fulfill your duty for your family and society. How well you have performed your duty determines how ideal you are”* Putalimaya Chepang, 60.

Unlike most of the “higher caste” communities who demand religious and cultural purity from women (Acharya, 2001), Chepang community’s main concern is the proper completion of all duties that are necessary for family’s survival. Ideal Chepang women are understood as capable in undertaking domestic chores and maintaining family integrity. Whereas ideal Chepang men are understood as capable of earning enough to feed the family and being able to propagate the survival through offspring. *“In Chepang community if a woman cannot conceive a baby, it is the man who should take the responsibility of that; and people cannot blame the women for being impotent.”* Jite Chepang.

Chepang’s gender ideology, norms and values are not based on religious or supernatural faiths, neither are they oriented to achieve any religious merits. In Nepali context, Brahmin-Chhetri and other higher castes have developed gender ideologies largely based on religious and supernatural faiths. In such cases it is very hard to break the existing norms and values that deliberately subjugate female class. However, in Chepang community there is not any concept of religious merit and “purity of women” that could subject women in to more inferior position in individual mind-set. For example, unlike Brahmin and Chhetri, Chepang do not force their women to be isolated and remain in filthy condition during their menstruation period; nor are Chepang women restricted in funeral process of deceased members.

During the field study, married respondents were asked about the qualities they were looking on their husbands and wife while getting married. Most of the middle and old aged women replied that firstly they wanted their husband to be physically strong. Because, according to the respondents, physically stronger men have high probability of being able to work as main pillar of household survival and livelihood. It would be a great advantage if their husbands had more Khoriya land and had many members at home. Because having more Khoriya would increase food

availability and having more family members would increase household labor forces that, on the one hand, reduce the burden of work on the wives and on the other hand widen the possibilities of livelihood activities. Interestingly, younger women respondents have a bit different prerequisites for qualified husbands. Younger women mostly prefer the boys who work in the cities and earn good money in term of cash. Physical strength of the individual man itself is not a prime concern for the younger female. Unlike the older and middle-aged women, younger Chepang women prefer to marry with boys who have few siblings at home. Fewer siblings would provide with larger share of property and Khoriya, and also reduce the family's cost of living.

On the other hand, both younger and older groups of men have similar ideas regarding the qualities of women they would think ideal. Chepang men, during the field interview, mentioned that they prefer to marry the women who are fluent in household activities and have ability to take care of children and elderly. In addition, older aged men wanted their wives to be equally active and skillful in farming activities. However, younger men mentioned that they do not force women to be active and skillful in farming activities but want them to be loving and caring.

It is, by these evidences, clear that Chepang's gender ideology and attitudes are more practice-oriented than religious and supernatural. Conceptually men and women have different positions in the society; and subsequently they are expected to undertake clearly different tasks and responsibilities. Ideally, Chepang women are considered to be "household managers" whereas Chepang men are considered to be "livelihood owners". The idea about women's position in the family has not changed substantially in the recent history of Chepang community in Raksirang while the idea about men's position has emerged in a completely new form. Chepang men, who were idealized in terms of their muscular power in the past, are now judged in terms of their financial power. The picture of ideal women in the mind of Chepang men has not changed but the picture of ideal men in the mind of Chepang women has dramatically changed. The reasons for this will be further analyzed in following sections.

## **6.2 Household Relations of Gender: Continuity and Change**

Chebang household is a prime social and economic unit, which is highly important for the survival of Chebang's life. On the other hand household is also a mirror where most of the social norms, value and practices are well reflected. Previous section of this chapter provided a hint that gender ideology of Chebang society has put women and men in clearly different positions. This section will further examine the actual cultural experiences of Chebang men and women in relation to each other at household level. The Social relations approach has identified five dimensions in most of the social relationships within an institution. These dimensions are namely: **rules, power, resources, people, and activities**. Most of the social relationships, including gender relations, are primarily comprised of these five dimensions. These dimensions are the main points of focus when analyzing the continuity and changes in gender relations within households. Further analysis will be done regarding the actual association between such changes in gender relations and changes in livelihood.

### **6.2.1 Rules**

According to Kabeer (2006), behaviors of social institutions are rule-guided rather than random. Rules are constantly guiding and controlling members' beliefs, attitudes and interactions within an institution. According to Grandin and Barron (2005), rules and norms are constantly forcing the members of a group to express themselves in generally acceptable manner. Some rules are made and enforced in formal ways by higher institutions (for example government bodies), while some rules are made and enforced in informal way by family, clans and community.

Chebang community in Raksirang is also guided by set of various formal and informal rules. I will be mostly analyzing the informal rules, which are also termed as "social norms" that have shaped the gender behavior of Chebang people. Emphasis will be given to consider how social norms and rules are controlling physical body, sexualities, capacity and choices of Chebang men and women.

Social norms about "marriage" have a greatest impact on the lives of Chebang men and women. The norm of early marriage has enforced them to get in to marriage relationship as early as possible. There are various justifications available in Chebang community for the early marriage system. However, this system has been developed as a profound norm and supposed to be followed by all community members. Hence young Chebang boys and girls do not have any choice but to get married as early as

possible. However, in most of the cases Chepang parents do not force their children to get married with a particular person. Therefore boys and girls are normally free to choose their spouse with whom they would spend the rest of their lives.

Similarly, it is a social rule in Chepang community that a bride has to leave her parent's house and go to her husband house to be a part of his family and live there for rest of her life. This patrilocal norm has created a sense of alienation among many Chepang women. Although they are free to select a particular husband, Chepang women mostly do not have a sense of belongingness in their new homes. This is because their husbands are absent at homes for longer period during a year due to compulsory migration for earning the livelihood. Also the young Chepang wives are subjected to face unexpected behaviors and treatments from in-laws and other family members. Leaving the parent's home, family, sisters and brothers is a painful task for a young Chepang girl, which has longer psychological impacts as well as restrictions on the freedom of choices for Chepang girls.

On the other hand, there is a custom in Chepang community, which is known as "Pong". It is an agreement between the elder members of two families that confirms the wedding between their son and daughter. During a Pong ceremony, the boy's family pays a bride price to the girl's family. After receiving the bride price, no party can break the agreement of marriage between their son and daughter. This custom is mostly observed before arranged marriage, where parents decide the person with whom their son/daughter has to marry. This custom has forcefully subjected young Chepang boys and girls into compulsory relationship with a stranger. To avoid an arranged marriage, most of the Chepang boys and girls choose their spouse by themselves and get married by eloping at as very young age. If they did not decide on their life partner before they turn 15 years, their parents will go for the Pong custom.

Rules of patrilocal marriage practice are thus the prime norms that subject Chepang men and women in different positions. It also determines their freedom of choices, sexuality and control over their own body. For example, in Chepang community it is the elderly members of the family that decide how many children a women should conceive in their families. In Chepang community there is not any special traditional rule that controls the relationship between husband and wife. Chepang men and women are calm and peace loving. Violence has never been a part of traditional Chepang community.

However, as the Chepang community of Raksirang opens itself for outside world, people have started experiencing substantial changes in their family and society. Traditional norms and rules are changing as a result of new livelihood and connection to the markets. Now it is not compulsory to get married in early age; neither the parents can force their children to get married as early as possible. Many of the young Chepang boys regret getting married in early age. Similarly many of them have realized that it is important to secure the livelihood at first place, before deciding to get married. Another important change agent in Chepang community is the introduction of Christianity. There are growing numbers of Chepang who have adopted Christian religion and sincerely follow the rules determined by the priests on the basis of the Bible. Most of the Chepang families have quit the production and consumption of alcohol after being involved in Christianity.

### **6.2.2 Power**

Social rules and norms are aimed at creating social stability by controlling the behavior of social members. Such rules and norms have provided certain persons or groups with necessary power to control other members. Hence power is a crucial aspect of social life that determines and distributes the authority of control to certain members. Power also determines the limitation of member's behaviors; and by limiting the members' behaviors powerful groups can secure their privileged position in the society (Grandin and Barron, 2005).

In traditional Chepang community, most of the decision making powers are vested in the elderly members, either it is at household level or at communal level. It is another interesting fact in traditional Chepang community that elderly women are equally powerful in decision-making processes, in compare to their male counterparts. Chepangs believe that elderly people have acquired more experiences in their lives than the younger people. Hence they have a better judgment ability in different life-situations. On the other hand, elderly women explicitly involve in decision related to family and relationship matters while elderly men mostly involve in decision making related to livelihood, farming and social issues.

Chepang people are traditionally animistic; they worship natural elements as well as their ancestors. In every Chepang community there is a male priest called "Pangde" who is believed to have the ability to communicate with natural elements and with Chepangs' ancestors. Therefore, Pangde has special position in Chepang

community; Pangde can provide ultimate decisions for various unsolved disputes in a family or in the community.

*"We believe that we originated from the nature and will finally dissolve in nature. We are happy and peace-loving. We don't have feeling of hatred, betray or dispute for anyone. We only want that everyone gets enough to survive."* Pangde Maila Chepang, 55.

Traditional Chepang community seems of egalitarian nature, where everyone has equal position in household and society. Discourse of exploitations in traditional Chepang community is irrelevant. There is a clear demarcation of areas where men and women differently exercise their power. Men do not interfere with women in family decision-making, whereas women do not interfere with men in livelihood and social decision-making. The functional division of labor doesn't form any gender-based discrimination. Indeed, it is often seen Chepang men and women working to complement each other in various situations in the households.

*"In Chepang community, we husband and wife have a huge trust over each other. I have understood that my wife has better skills in household management, family management. I know that she cannot decide anything that negatively affects me. Neither I decide anything about livelihood and social matters that negatively affects my wife or any other female members of the society"* (Bhaire Chepang, 49).

The power vested in men and women in different aspects is attributed to their long experiences in relevant fields i.e., household and family for women, and livelihood and society for men. And it is evident that both men and women have huge trust over each other and believe that they would not do anything that adversely affect each other.

Interestingly, with the increasing men out-migration, it is now observed that there are very few men left in the community to exercise their power of decision-making. As an influence of one-another, most of the Chepang men spontaneously decide to migrate for better livelihood. This has provided additional power as well as responsibility for women to involve in social-level decision-making. For example, they are now women who decide where and how to conduct the annual communal festival (*Nwagi*) and when to start cultivations. Chepang women also started involve in decision making regarding the mutual labor exchange and preparing schedule for various farming activities.

In Raksirang, there are mainly two channels through which cash income flows inside the households. First is the remittance that migrant men send, and second is the earning of Chepang women who sell agro-products to nearby markets, which they had started with the support of MDI. In both cases, women are found to be the controller of cash. They decide how, when and where to spend that cash money. This income, in term of cash, is a life-supporting factor for the poor Chepang people in Raksirang, without which they would suffer from severe food scarcity. And since the young women are the controllers of these cash incomes, they have gained more power in decision making that directly affect them. For example, many elderly people gradually transfer their traditional power to young women because elderly people have also realized the importance of money in their lives and found that you women have cash money with them.

*“Nowadays, elderly in-laws can not force young women to do whatever they want; neither they can force women to conceive as much babies as they want. This is all because we have started earning money. Migrant husbands send money to their wives’ hands, and women have additional income from selling of horticulture products. Cash on our hands made us powerful.”* Manmaya Chepang.

The emergence of new market-based livelihood has provided young Chepang women with more power in compare to their male counterparts. This power has brought more freedom for the women to decide on individual choices, family matters and social issues.

### **6.2.3 Resource and Division of Labor**

Resources and activities are interlinked dimension of social relation analysis. From a gender point of view, it is the division of labor in different resource-settings that determines the level of empowerment and position of men and women in the community.

Traditional Chepang community has a standard stereotypical division of labor for men and women. Men are considered as physically stronger than women. Hence traditionally, more physically demanding tasks are supposed to be done by men. Chepang men train their sons about techniques of hunting, running, climbing trees, and using weapons from the very young age. On the other hand, Chepang women train their daughters on household tasks, cooking, washing, gathering firewood and looking after their small siblings. During the agricultural phase of Chepang

community, the previous division of labor has changed in a small scale. Men continued to involve in more heavier and physically challenging tasks such as plough, tilling, chopping trees and clearing the land; whereas women continue to work relatively lighter tasks such as sowing, weeding and harvesting. However, the end of the hunting era has introduced the agricultural practices in Chepang community that has brought women out of their domestic chores to the fields, and brought men out of forest into the domestic life. During the field study, many Chepang men (those who are relatively older and living in the village) were found doing domestic tasks such as cooking, gathering firewood and taking care of children, which were done by only the women during hunting era.

*“Everyone is equal in Chepang community. Therefore you cannot say that this task is inferior for you. When I am free of my own work, I help my wife and daughter in-law to complete their domestic tasks. Sometimes I cook, sometimes I gather firewood and take care of small grand children.”* Maila Chepang.

Since Chepangs were isolated from so-called modern world, the life in Chepang community was simple. Survival of community was the only aim of Chepang people. Therefore, resource consumption was limited to a minimum level. Similarly, most of the livelihood activities including farming were done collectively, which provided more equal distribution of resources among the Chepang families. There was no particular group of people who controlled more resources that would make other groups deprived. Even in the agricultural era and up to date, Chepang do not have legal recognition of their land and property.

*“Resource and wealth accumulation is a very new practice in Chepang communities that is seen only after they are connected to outside world. Now people are realizing the importance of resource accumulation. In my personal view, once the egalitarian Chepangs are now gradually merging into global capitalism. This will have a complex consequences in Chepang community, at least in their egalitarian notions.”* Dr. Govind P. Koirala.

The emergence of “new livelihoods” has some remarkable impacts on Chepang’s daily activities in Raksirang. The new livelihoods have also created a resource imbalance among Chepang men and women. During the FGD I asked the participants why it is always the men but not the women who migrate out to the cities for earning a livelihood. Most of the participants mentioned that it is a social notion that expects men to work outside of their homes. Men are supposed to take the major

responsibility to earn livelihoods in order to sustain the family. Therefore, almost all of the migrant labors from Raksirang are men. On the other hand, participants also mentioned that the nature of job they are likely to get in the cities is physically challenging and demands stronger labors. Hence, women are believed to be unsuitable for such works.

The increasing male-migration is a major source of cash income for Chepang families in Raksirang. Women are the sole receivers of remittance that their husbands send to them. On the other hand, Chepang women are themselves engaged in various income-generating activities supported by MDI. These activities also provide some cash incomes for the Chepang women in Raksirang.

*“Women in Raksirang are gradually being seen as the leaders of HHs as well as the leaders of the entire community. Because, they hold the monetary resources generated from the remittance sent by their migrant husbands, and from the small farming business supported by MDI; and on the other hand, due to being involved in empowerment programs, the awareness level of women in the community is much higher than that of their male counterparts.”* Ram Kumar Chepang, MDI Local Staff.

Most of the Chepang men have left the agricultural life and started working in industrial sectors in big cities. Similarly, Chepang women in the village have also started new horticulture-based farming business that has a direct link to nearby cities. Principally the concept about role of man as a “breadwinner” has not changed in Chepang community. However, most of the participants in this study believed that women could also contribute to ensure household survival by undertaking various income generating activities. Many female participants mentioned that having a cash income is not sufficient to empower one; the level of awareness, organizational affiliations, and trainings and skills are equally important to make one empowered.

#### **6.2.4 Cost and Benefit Sharing**

In social relation analysis, people are the central point of focus. In fact, there is always an interlinked state of people and the rest of the dimensions of social relation analysis. Therefore it is not useful to independently analyze the “people” component in social relation approach. In this particular study I am considering to analyze the cost and benefit sharing among major actors i.e., men and women groups in Raksirang. The previous sections have explained various changes and continuities that Chepang community has witnessed. It is necessary to know what men and women

groups of Chepang had to pay for such changes, and what they are getting in return. Chepang people, whose traditional livelihoods were threatened due to various reasons, have been able to own new livelihoods such as labor in industrial sectors, and improvised agriculture. This has primarily helped in food security, improved health and education for Chepang community of Raksirang.

Unlike in the higher castes of Nepali society, being women in traditional egalitarian Chepang community was not about being in discrimination and deprivation in comparison to the male counterparts. There was not any particular sex-based discriminative norm, value and practice identified in traditional Chepang community, during this study. The traditional division of labor itself was not oriented to create any form of discrimination between men and women. Rather, Chepang male and female were found extremely complimenting and helpful to each other.

The new livelihoods and connection with the industrial world have become the change agents in Chepang community. Chepang women, who were left behind by their migrant husbands, got opportunity to participate in development project run by a NGO. The awareness level of Chepang women remarkably increased along with the skills of improvised horticulture. Those women further started earning money by selling agro-products to nearby markets. In addition, they are also directly receiving cash in the form of remittance sent by their migrant husbands. Organizational affiliation, trainings, income and social freedom have empowered many Chepang women in Raksirang community.

However, the story of Chepang men is quite different than that of women. The traditional stereotypical gender notion has forced uneducated and innocent Chepang men to migrate to the cities and work as labor force in industrial sectors in extreme conditions.

### **6.2.5 The Unheard Stories of Chepang Men**

In the cold morning of November during the field, I met Bhaire Chepang, in front of his thatched hut with mud wall that was too old and inclined to one side. It was apparent to us that a thick bamboo stick on his hand was to make his body stable and keep standing.

*“One part of my body doesn’t move properly. I cannot walk straight and I feel extreme pain on my back. Nowadays I stay at home, my son works out and feed us. I left this home, village and forest long ago, and went to the town in*

*the search of better ways to earn. Hetauda Cement factory was newly established at that time. I worked there for almost 20 years. My job was to carry sacks of cement from finish-plant and load them to the trucks. One sack was exactly 50 kgs. I used to get 20 Rs (currently 20 US Cent) per day and that wage continued for 10 years. Later they increased it up to 100 Rs (Currently 1 USD) a day. I usually carries 200 sacks a day. I had to work very hard and didn't have money to buy enough food, as I had to save some money for my family. I was getting weaker day by day. One day I fell down with a sack of cement from a slope that is attached with the truck (which was used to climb the truck). I was unconscious. People around took me out of there, but none cared about looking for medical help. After I woke up, I felt very bad pain inside my back. Neither I had any security on job, nor any insurance, nor the employer paid attention on my situation. I continued work for few days despite of pain. But later I became unable to move my left part of the body. I quit work and came back home.*

*My son is our only hope. He married as soon as I came back home; after that, he left this home, this village, and this forest and went to the town in search of better way to earn, to feed us. Exactly in the same way I left the home long ago. Sometimes I feel that to born as a male, is curse for you. I wish my son would not face the similar fate in the town like I did.”*

Bhaire Chepang is one of many Chepang men in Raksirang who have similar stories of their lives, their struggle and hard work. The traditional gender based division of labor demanded men like Bhaire to work hard and win the bread for all families. The nationalization of their local forest restricted Chepang men to pursue their traditional livelihoods. Similarly, lack of proper training and technologies, difficult landscape and extreme climate variability didn't allow Chepang to obtain enough food from their marginal lands. This has put extra pressure on Chepang men to ensure the food security for their families. The only option remained with them was to migrate to the big cities and work in industry and transport sectors.

The conditions Chepang men are subjected to in big cities during their work are extreme and adversely affect them physically and mentally. During this study many cases were discovered in which helpless Chepang men were subjected to the worst working environment, filthy living conditions, and insecurity. Many of them

have no payments for work for months and many of them need to work up to 16 hours a day.

Man Bahadur Chepang, 44, says: *“I work 15 hours everyday. I don’t have fixed work. Sometimes I pull rickshaw, sometimes I work in construction, and sometimes in factories and transportation. Everywhere there are risks, risks of exploitation, injuries, and accidents. I once had a big accident. A bus, once, hit, my rickshaw. I was seriously injured; my leg was broken and I was admitted in hospital for weeks. I didn’t have enough money to get proper treatment. Neither was there anyone who helped me to get that bus and fine it. We poor do not have any connections and power. My leg still hurts and doesn’t let me work properly. It was almost 7 years back.”*

Another man Dalle Chepang, 35, says: *“Around 3 years ago, I was working on construction and needed to stay at construction site for months. One night some thieves came with knives and stole some minor equipment. I was alone and couldn’t do anything. My owner blamed me for carelessness. To repay that loss I didn’t get wage for 3 months. Neither could I run from there because my owner had connection with police and threatened to put me in jail if I run. I earn 200 Rupees (2 USD) a day. I have six children and a wife. You can imagine how hard my life is.”*

Here is another story of a man told by his wife:

*“I eloped with a boy when I was 14; he was 16 then. My parents were too poor and they wanted me to get married as early as possible. When I was 13 they said I must marry as soon as possible. If I didn’t find a boy myself, I would be compelled to go with anyone my parents ordered. This is the same case for most of the young girls and boys in our community. I liked a boy and decided to marry with him. In a year, I gave birth to a baby girl. My husband worked very hard at such a young age. He worked as porter, pulled rickshaw, worked in construction, agriculture and anything he got on the way that gives some earning. Sixteen months after we got married, I had already conceived another baby, while the elder daughter was only 6 months young. I love my husband very much and understand how difficult was it for him to work for us. He got a contract to carry loads of agriculture products from the farm to the town, in Chitwan. He was very straight and innocent person. He was carrying a sack where the owner had filled Marijuana and wanted to supply to his agent in the town. My husband thought it was something he usually carried, like vegetables. But on the way,*

*the police raided them. Everyone escaped, but my husband didn't, because he thought he didn't do any wrong. Police caught him, and the court decided imprisonment for 3 years for supplying drugs. He was below eighteen that's why the punishment was reduced to half.*

*My family was devastated after that. I gave birth to a baby boy 3 months ago. You can't imagine how difficult our life is without him, and how difficult is it for him to stay in prison. My husband is innocent. In our community most of our husbands are subjected to such risks.” Sukumaya Chepang, 18.*

Lack of proper livelihood opportunities in local community had compelled Chepang men to migrate to cities where they are subjected in more vulnerable conditions. This migration pattern was later established as a new tradition among Chepang men that everyone spontaneously follows. The compulsory migration of Chepang men is also associated with the demand of many young women who prefer to establish relationship with those men who work in cities and can promise them fancy future.

*“I had promised my wife that I would provide her with beautiful clothes and ornaments similar to what city dwellers wear. She had demanded that I should take her to big cities, show the bright lights, take her to cinema, and make her happy. Now I must do this in any cost” Dile Chepang, 19.*

As a result of outmigration, Chepang men largely missed the chance to involve in development programs launched by MDI in their own community. Neither the NGO nor any other stakeholders provided any concern to involve Chepang men in development project, training programs and awareness campaigns. I mentioned the local program coordinator of MDI about the situations Chepang men from Raksirang were going through:

*“It has been only one and half year since we are aware about this. Various incidents and reports from the family members informed us about the bad experiences that Chepang men are going through. However, for the small donor-based organization like ours, it is not easy to overrun the mainstream norms, which focuses only on women in development projects.” Mr. Nabin Subedi, MDI.*

### **6.3 Summing up**

It is evident that the egalitarian gender norms of Chepang community are Changing due to the change in their traditional livelihood, and connection with industrial world. Due to the absence of men in the community, Chepang women have raised up as new household as well as community leaders. The traditional men-centered social decision-making power is being gradually shifted to women. Similarly, women are being free from the control of elderly members in various personal and family matters. Involvement in planned development projects have empowered the Chepang women and provided them more income generating opportunities. Whereas, traditional gender based division of labor has forced Chepang men to migrate to the big cities where they have to work in the extreme conditions in the industrial sector. Chepang men are deprived not only from their traditional livelihood and social life, but also from various opportunities that Chepang women have got in the village that the NGO has provided. The new livelihoods have brought nothing but physical, mental and social deprivations for those innocent and uneducated Chepang men.

## **Chapter 7: Summary and Concluding Discussion**

The aim of this chapter is to forward the discussion considering major issues identified during the analysis of gender, migration and livelihood in Chepang community. This chapter also concludes the thesis by answering the research questions set at the beginning of this study.

### **7.1 Egalitarian Chepang Community Transformed**

Gender relations in traditional Chepang community were found to be simple and equitable in nature. Gender based division of labor was the major social construction that placed men and women in different positions throughout the evolution of Chepang community. Evidence shows that until the end of hunting era, Chepang men and women had a clear demarcation in the nature of works they were supposed to do. Because, most of the time men were in the forest for hunting and women were at home accomplishing domestic tasks. This was the most basic gender based division of labor found in many other communities during the hunting and gathering age. However, the end of hunting period led to the beginning of an agriculture period, which changed the previous strict gender-based division of labor. This study has identified that Chepang men retreated back to their homes from the forest, as they needed to start the cultivation, and women came out of their domestic periphery to participate in agricultural activities with their male counterparts. Participation of Chepang men in domestic activities and participation of Chepang women in livelihood activities proved that gender based division of labor in Chepang community was highly flexible and situation-based. It was also identified that, for the Chepang people, who are struggling for basic needs, the only concern is proper completion of livelihood activities and survival of the family.

This study has revealed that the gender based labor division is not universal and permanent; rather it can be changed, and modified according to the need of the society. Another explanation given for the egalitarian nature of gender norms in Chepang community can be based on the Marxist perspective. Engels (1972) argued that the development of agriculture and animal husbandry started the surplus production and accumulation of wealth. And the wealth accumulation with certain groups of people provides them with higher power than other groups who are deprived of sufficient wealth (Kabeer, 2003). However, in the Chepang community agriculture development was so primitive that it didn't produce surplus; neither the

Chepong had local landlords with large amount of land. Therefore, wealth accumulation was not possible to any family or group of people in Chepong community, which consequently didn't provide anyone with higher power than others. Therefore, there were not any hierarchical positions of men and women in the traditional Chepong community. Division of labor was oriented to the survival of the family and was purely based on the work experience. Trust, love and respects between Chepong men and women were found very high and ideal.

## **7.2 Migration as Structural Impact**

Like many other rural communities in the world, Chepong community of Raksirang is also transforming mainly because of its economic link with so called "modern" world, with industrial society and with capitalism. Migration has been developed as a new livelihood option for the Chepong community because of its disadvantaged position in the current capitalist manifestation. The nationalization of all the local forest by government has restricted Chepong people to practice their traditional livelihood activities. The lack of political power and systematic marginalization of Chepong people from mainstream development has pushed the community into more deprived position. Similarly, lack of access to plain land, lack of access to improved agricultural inputs and government's unwillingness to transfer the land ownership to Chepong people are some facts that never let the agriculture flourish in Chepong's locality. In this situation, Chepong people were not free to choose what they want. In fact, they didn't have any choice other than migrating to the urban sectors to work as cheap labor in the capitalist market. It is true according to the NELM that migration is the risk sharing behavior of households (Laal and Selod et al. 2006). However, it is the capitalist manifestation and a systematic marginalization from the state that create a risk on traditional livelihoods of Chepong people.

In Chepong community, migration was not a deliberate behavior of the households; rather it is externally induced phenomena where local agencies do not have any freedom of choices. Chepong households have passive participation in migration decision and they are only seen as victims of structural forces. What Chepong people had understood was - the vulnerability and due threats in their traditional livelihood, and subsequently in their survival. Due to the threat in traditional livelihoods, Chepongs were in such a situation that they would choose not only migration but also any other alternative livelihood activity that was available for

them at the moment. Migration itself is not a livelihood activity; rather it leads individuals toward such conditions where there are higher possibilities of finding many livelihood options. And most of the migrating Chepang do not know exactly where they will be working, or what livelihood activities they will be performing in the cities. Therefore most of the Chepang people do not deliberately think and plan on migration. The lack of proper information and knowledge about the labor market and lack of personal competences and Nepali language skill are some reasons that further restrict Chepang to understand the market and plan accordingly.

### **7.3 New Livelihoods and Missing Men**

The nature of livelihoods that Chepang had owned suddenly changed as soon as a link was established between isolated Chepang community and the “outside world”. The surplus agricultural labors and hunters were transformed into industrial labors, while domestic workers were transformed into agricultural entrepreneurs. The concept of work distribution in Chepang community is mainly based on the previous experiences in particular work. Therefore as a result of long experience in livelihood earning and working as a main pillar of household survival, Chepang men were expected to migrate to the cities to earn. Similarly the nature of job in the cities they would likely to get was physically demanding and required more physical strength. Likewise, Chepang were also aware about the uncertainties they would probably confront in the unknown place, where women would be more vulnerable. Therefore Chepang men became the suitable actors for out migration, who were expected to sustain the family and ensure its survival. On the other hand, Chepang women couldn't stay far from home for longer period not just because they were assigned to domestic chores, but mainly because of the small children who were highly dependent on their mothers.

Planned, NGO-led development model is old and popular in the Nepali context. No matter what the aggregated results have been obtained, NGO-led development programs are still the most preferred and have larger coverage. The link of Raksirang with MDI was established nearly one and half decade ago, many years later the trend of out-migration was started. MDI launched its empowerment and income generating programs at the very moment when the entire country's development efforts were concentrated to involve women in mainstream development process.

The orthodox presumption regarding women's subordination, patriarchal suppression and male chauvinism was mainly based on the analysis of upper caste Brahmin and Chhetri where women were subjugated to men in all social peripheries. On the other hand, most of the indigenous ethnic communities in Nepal had more flexible gender norms, equitable and rational gender practices. The "straitjacket" policies made by higher caste policymakers, politicians and NGO-workers finally destroyed the egalitarian gender norms prevailing in most of the ethnic communities and brought them to the strict "male" "female" dichotomy in development practice (Chand, 2004; Bista, 1993). As a result, large number of rural Nepali men have been denied to obtain similar participation in development activities. And consequently, socio-economic status of rural Nepali women didn't improve and even degraded in many parts of the country.

Chepong men were forced to migrate out from the village in search of livelihood, while Chepong women got opportunity to involve in empowerment projects launched by the NGO. The women-centered feminist development approach had completely denied the fact that gender equity could never be achieved without equal participation of both men and women in empowerment programs (Cornwall, 2000). The development program also did not recognize the pattern of evolution of Chepong community and the egalitarian nature of gender relations. It was a wrong presumption, which was actually based on the analysis of higher castes, that Chepong women were subjugated to the male authority in social and household relations. Men are normally considered as oppressors, and obstacles to equitable development and women's liberation in Nepali context. This has not been true for Chepong community where men and women had traditionally enjoyed equal rights and social status.

Chepong men, who were forced to migrate to the urban area, were subjected to a great oppression in capitalist markets. Chepong men are working as cheap labors in industrial sectors under hazardous circumstances and filthy living condition. Many of the industries, and business where Chepong men work are owned by group of people from higher castes. Most of the men are forced to work below the minimum wage. They do not have any access to health facility, job security and neither any protection from exploitation. Chepong men are working hard up to 16 hours a day in order to sustain their families, and feed the children. Those men are not only marginalized from mainstream development because of their disadvantaged gender status, but also highly oppressed in the capitalist market because of their inferior class positions.

Individual impact of migration greatly varies among Chepang men and women even in the same socio-economic settings. Unlike a postulate of NELM, out-migration in Chepang community doesn't seem "*pareto-superior strategy*" because migration has significantly worsened the condition of Chepang men in comparison to the women. Indeed, Chepang women are getting benefits in the form of increasing financial ability because of the cash in-flow due to men out-migration.

#### **7.4 Conclusion and way forward**

Migration has developed into a complex phenomenon in the current world. Migration establishes a connection between remote and isolated communities with bigger societies. Often, this connection is developed as an important relation that has various influences on both communities. In the context of Nepal, due to the various threats in their traditional livelihoods, agricultural workers in rural areas see migration as only the option to obtain alternative livelihood sources. This is verified by millions of migrant Nepali workers working in various countries, and similar number of rural migrants working in different cities within the countries. This study was intended to identify the impacts on their community brought by internal migration of Chepang people.

Qualitative research methods were used to investigate the research issue with special concern to intersubjective understanding and analysis of life-experiences of Chepang people. It is realized that qualitative research of this type requires plenty of time to be spent in the fields. Informal conversations are found to be more effective to collect wide range of subjective information from respondents' lives. It is highly important to develop an intimate relationship with the respondents in order to go in depth in to their expressions related to the physical and emotional experiences in their lives.

It has been only a few decades since Chepang community was connected to the "outside world". Survived by traditional hunting, gathering and marginal agriculture, Chepang's livelihoods were threatened due to the government's restriction on access to forest, and due to the lack of proper land for agriculture development. For the poor Chepang, migration was the only option, which could bring about multiple livelihood possibilities that would ensure their survival.

Traditional Chepang community was identified as more equitable in gender norms, values and practices. The traditional gendered division of labor was highly

flexible and based on individual's experience and skill in particular tasks. Chepang men and women had enjoyed equal rights and status in the community. Restriction on access to national forest and decreasing agriculture production are the reasons due to which most of the Chepang men became workless; meanwhile Chepang women had enough tasks to do in household periphery. Hence Chepang men were identified as appropriate candidates for migrating to urban area and finding livelihood options that would ensure the survival of Chepang community.

Chepang men are working as cheap labors in capitalist market, where they are highly exploited. They are surviving in urban area in filthy living condition, health hazards, and less than minimum wage working for more than 15 hours a day. Meanwhile, a women-centered feminist development program has incorporated Chepang women in empowerment and income generating activities back in the village. Chepang women are gradually rising as new leaders of their households and community.

Gender based development plans and policies in Nepal are guided by higher-caste norms and presumptions. Such programs have never identified the existing egalitarian gender practices in most of the ethnic indigenous communities in Nepal where gender norms and practices are much more equitable than those prevailing in so-called higher castes - Brahmin and Chhetri. As a result, despite of uncountable resource investment in the projects, gender empowerment and development is still a dream in Nepali context. On the other hand, hundred and thousands of rural Nepali men, who are supposed to be livelihood owners and who are excluded from development projects, are subjected to multiple threats and hazard while working for rich industrialist in capitalist markets.

The social relations approach has helped in designing the research and identifying the aspects of analysis in gender relations. This relation approach has been highly flexible and the framework can be adjusted according to the research need and local settings. With extremely limited resource, this study has identified a crucial but rarely discussed issue in gender and development discourse in Nepali context. It is very important to understand that gender based discriminations has not existed in many traditional egalitarian community like Chepang. Situation-blind policies, radical feminism in development efforts, systematic marginalization of ethnic communities and widespread poverty are the reasons that have created "new inequalities" such as gender and class. Further researchers can extend the study to other ethnic

communities in Nepal and see how systematic development efforts can affect traditional gender norms and practices in addition to other forms of decimations such as caste, class and ethnicity.

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## Appendix

### A. FGD Guide (Women's Group)

#### Dimension 1: Link with Development Projects

1. Please describe current development projects in your community? What do they do? Who are involved in? Why types of sub-groups are formed?
2. How did you first come in contact with MDI? How did you react to them? What did you thought about MDI's intervention?
3. How and why did you decide to take part in the development projects? Did you decide it by yourselves? Or did you consult with your husbands and other family members?
4. What types of trainings and supports did you receive from MDI in the beginning? Were they helpful? If yes, how those trainings and supports helped you?
5. What are the ultimate benefits you have got? Do you think this is enough?
6. How MDI can improve its functions related to development projects in this area, and others?

#### Dimension 2: New Livelihoods

1. What were the roles of Chepang women in livelihood activities in the past? And what are the roles in present days?
2. Do you think by involving in the development project your livelihoods have improved? Please explain how.
3. Why most of the men from your village are migrated to Chitwan, Hetauda and Kathmandu? What do they do there? And why it's only the men who migrate, but not you women?
4. Do you know, or do your husbands tell you that what is going on with them in the cities, how they work, what is the working conditions etc..? Do you ask them about such things?

#### Dimension 3: Gender Relations and Changes

1. Please explain what does it mean to be a Chepang woman in present days?
2. During the past time what was the status of Chepang women in the household and in the community?

3. What were the roles, responsibilities and tasks that Chepang women should do? Do you think they are changing now? (Daily activity schedule)
4. How much role women would play in the decision making process about households and community matters in the past? What were the jurisdictions of women regarding decision-making? Do you think they are changing now? How?
5. How do you understand power? And for what do you think you need power?
6. Do the MDI's projects have helped you being more powerful? How? If yes, what are the factors that making you powerful?
7. Describe how typical relationship between Chepang husband and wife would look like in the past. And how they are now? How do you see your husbands and other male family members now?
8. What roles and responsibilities do your husbands carry out in your home?
9. How do you share your works? Do you work interchangeably, regardless of the tasks? How often male members do the household chores?
10. Please tell who is living better life? Chepang men or women? What are the hardships the women and men are facing, individually? Do you think one of you is at better position than other? How?

### **B. FGD Guide (Men's Group)**

#### Dimension 1: Link with Development Projects

1. What do you know about current development projects in your community? What do they do? Who are involved in? Why types of sub-groups are formed?
2. How did you know about MDI and its development projects? What did you thought about MDI's intervention?
7. Why most of the men from your community are not involved in development projects directly?
8. Did you try to involve in the development projects that most of the women from here are already involved in? Did anybody tried to involve you?
9. Have you received any training and supports? Were they helpful? If yes, how those trainings and supports helped you?

#### Dimension 2: New Livelihoods

5. What were the roles of Chepang men in livelihood activities in the past? And what are the roles in present days?

6. What are the reasons for the migration? How do you decide to migrate, where to go, whom to contact, how to find work etc? (family consultation, friend's suggestions)
7. Why most of the men from your village are migrated? What types of work they do in the cities, what are wage rates for different works? And why it's only the men who migrate, but not the women?
8. Do you think by migrating to the cities and working in industrial sector your livelihoods have improved? Please explain how.
9. What are the problems Chepang men are facing in the cities?
10. Have you (or do the men) tell their wives about what is going on with them in the cities, how they work, what is the working conditions etc..? Do your wives ask you about such things?
11. What do you think about the activities your wives are doing? Do you think they are helpful to achieve better livelihoods for the family?

#### Dimension 2: Gender Relations and Changes

12. Please explain what does it mean to be a Chepang man in present days?
13. During the past time what was the status of Chepang men in the household and in the community?
14. What were the roles, responsibilities and tasks that Chepang men should do? Do you think they are changing now? (Daily activity schedule)
15. How much role men would play in the decision making process about households and community matters in the past? What were the jurisdictions of men regarding decision-making? Do you think they are changing now? How?
16. How do you understand power? And for what do you think you need power?
17. Do you think by working in urban industrial sector you have gained power? How? If yes, what are the factors that making you powerful?
18. Describe how typical relationship between Chepang husband and wife would look like in the past. And how they are now? How do you see your wives and other female family members now?
19. What roles and responsibilities do your wives carry out in your home?
20. How do you share your works? Do you work interchangeably, regardless of the tasks?

21. Please tell who is living better life? Chepang men or women? What are the hardships the women and men are facing, individually? Do you think one of you is at better position than other? How?

**C. Interview Guide (Key Informant: Chepang Association)**

1. Please tell about the organization, its aims, working area, current activities and major achievements so far.
2. Who are Chepang? What is their history? How they lived in the past?
3. How Chepang are living in the present days? (livelihoods and threats)
4. What are the causes of poverty, illiteracy and deprivations in Chepang community?
5. What is the status of gender development in Chepang community? What are the problems men and women are separately facing? What are the significant gender practices in the Chepang community?
6. How gender based inequalities are prevailing in Chepang community (comparing the past)? What do you recommend for the development of Chepang community?

**D. Interview Guide (Key Informant: Development Expert)**

1. How do you see Nepal's recent development pattern? What are the significant social-economic changes?
2. What are the reasons for massive out-migration from Nepal? How do you relate internal and international migration in Nepali context?
3. What impacts migration has brought in Nepali society in general? And what impacts in gender point of view?
4. How do you think about development of indigenous ethnic communities, like Chepang, in Nepal? What are the main reasons behind their underdevelopment?
5. It is said that traditional indigenous ethnic communities in Nepal had more equitable social norms and values. Do you agree that? How do you think they are changing in general and in gender specific (in the light of consequences that migration has brought)?

**E. Interview Guide (Key Informants: MDI Staffs)**

1. Please mention about MDI, its history, aims and major achievements.

2. How MDI was linked with Chepang community in Raksirang? What was the process? Was it the demand of local people? How MDI decided to work in Chepang community?
3. What were the initial reactions local people showed to MDI? Why MDI didn't think about incorporating men in their development project?
4. What was the socio-economic status of Chepang people before the MDI's intervention? What actually MDI did?
5. What kind of help and support the project delivered? And how they benefited Chepang people (short and long term)?
6. Who are the actual beneficiaries? How their lives have changed in compare to the past?
7. How do you observe the livelihood situation of Chepang people (past and present)? What major changes have taken place? Why do you think Chepang people are deprived of their traditional livelihood?
8. What do you say about out-migration of Chepang men? Do you know that they are facing various hardships in the urban areas where they work? Why MDI didn't help Chepang men to establish better livelihoods (like women)?
9. What do you say about traditional gender practices in Chepang community and how they are changing? How role and status of women and men are changing these days? Do you think that Chepang women are in better situation than their male counterparts?

**F. Interview Guide (Chepang Informants)**

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Literacy Status:

Family Occupation:

Income:

Marital Status:

Marriage Age:

Number of Children (age and sex also):

1. Please tell how was the life of Chepang in the past? And how is it now? How Chepang's livelihood is changing? And how the roles of men and women are changing with the change of livelihoods?

2. What are the reasons behind such changes in livelihoods? Why so many men are migrating out?
3. Have you participated in the development project run by MDI? How did MDI support you? What have you benefited from the project? What impacts has it brought in your life? Please explain.
4. What does your husband/wife do? What he/she contributes in family's livelihood?
5. How do you decide on household and economic matters? Do you prefer to decide everything by yourself? Please explain.
6. Who do you give your income to? Who decide to spend it? If you decide to spend by yourself, what do you think about before spending the money?
7. Do you and your spouse quarrel to each other? How often? On what issues? How you solve the problem? Please explain.
8. I heard that Chepang men are having many troubles in the cities where they work. Is it true? What do you think about that? Do you have any particular experience about yourself (or someone else you know)? Please explain.
9. How did your marriage happen, please explain.
10. Why most of the Chepang marry in early age?
11. What are the reasons for choosing particular spouse? What are the qualities you seek in your spouse (before marriage)?
12. What the traditional marriage system of Chepang look like? And how is it changing now?
13. How do you take decision regarding birth? Is there any particular person who decides when and how many children you should have? Why Chepang women give birth to many children?
14. Do you know that birth can be controlled? Have you tried any controlling mechanism?
15. Did you experience any complications during the pregnancy or while giving birth? What about in your community? Please explain, if any?
16. Who is important for Chepang, boys or girls? What do you prefer to have? Please explain.
17. Do your children (5-14 years) go to school? Why many Chepang children leave school in the middle?

18. Please tell what do you from morning to night. What is your occupation?  
What roles do you have in your family?
19. How is your relationship with you husband/wife? Do you help each other?  
Please explain how.
20. Please tell me what are the problems Chepang men are facing and what are the  
problems Chepang women are facing? Who is living better? Are you happy  
that you are woman/man?
21. What is the main driving force that engages you in life-activities? (any dream  
you have? Family responsibilities? Survival challenges?). Please explain.
22. Do you have anything to ask me?

Thank You!!