

Culture and Resource Management for Subsistence

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INTRODUCTION

The hill region in Nepal is mostly composed of villages and most of the rural people are peasants. The region is populated by various ethnic groups and the existence of different ethnic group gives the presence of various culture and different types of resource management patterns. Among these different ethnic cultural groups, Majhis are one of the hill village groups of Nepal, which constitute the most minority group. Most of the Majhis are scattered from the east to the west river-bank of low-land Himalayas. They are intermingled with other ethnic groups for more than a century. This intermingling is caused by the resource availability for the subsistence and economic activities due to economic hardship. Majority of the rural population, therefore, are tenants or self-cultivating farmers with fragmented landholdings. Most of them, especially in the hills, are engaged in subsistence and under-subsistence farming. So is the condition of the Majhis. They suffer from famine for 6-12 months. Some of them survive hardly and somehow maintain their livelihood.

The Majhis are mainly settled in the Tarai and hill region, but not in the Himalayan region. They have adopted a specific type of life-style. They traditionally practise boating, fishing, and agriculture. They are more influenced by nature and neighbouring groups. As Sherpas of Solu and Pharak are able to grow winter crops of wheat and potatoes, the Majhis grow winter and summer crops like rice, wheat, maize and vegetables for their subsistence.

There is difference between ethnic groups' culture in terms of resource management patterns for subsistence, life cycle patterns, rituals, dress patterns, food habits, and agricultural technologies, etc. due to geographical variations. The rituals of Sherpas and Limbus differ in various ways. Brahmins' rituals differ from these both. Magars practise cross-cousin marriage; similar is the case with Gurungs but Limbus and Rais do not practise it. Within a single ecological zone there are various cultural diversities. Most of the Matuwali castes join military service for their livelihood, but previously Brahmin did not. Such cultural and economic diversity is not exception to the Majhis community.

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The Majhis of Nepal believe in Hindu religion and are mongoloid in feature; they are similar to Tharus of the Terai and Magars of the hills. They have black skinned complexion and muscular body with semi-oblique eyes. They have their own language and cultural patterns. They have their own language and cultural patterns. They have their own resource management patterns for the subsistence and life style. They distinctly differ from other ethnic groups in various ways. Majhis' language is likely to disappear from their society. Language depends on use. The disappearing tendency is due to the decrease in the number of native speakers. Similarly, the Majhis of Nepal have also forgotten their language in some places, whereas they still use in other places. The Majhis who do not speak their own language speak Nepali language as their mother tongue.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Majhis culture in Nepal is a more minority culture; they are scattered all over the country and are subsisting themselves on different economic resource and adopting the various cultural values. They are intermingled with various other ethnic groups.

There are variety of resources on the surface of the earth. These are not produced and made by man. These are the elements which exist as parts of nature, hence these are called natural resources. There are various types of natural resources which are being used by man since the beginning of the human civilization. Technological development was the major factor to convert natural resource into resource. Land is a basic resource as most of the natural resources are inseparable ingredients of land. Man needs soil for his very existence.

Resources are two types: renewable and non-renewable. Resources like water, forest and pasture are renewable resources. The other types of resource like minerals are non-renewable, and man can't use again if used once.

The consumption of several environmental resources like land, soil, water, air, minerals and energy is increasing in developed and developing countries alike. Man often becomes irrational in the treatment of the environmental resources. Because of this irrationality, man may create a danger to himself. As a result he may destroy his base of subsistence. By understanding the nature of his impact on environment, man might learn to change the face of earth in rational, constructive fashion.

It is evident that the present need is an integration of environment management with the development. Besides, the concept of environment should not only development oriented resource use concept but also resource management concept.

Every ethnic group of Nepal has its own pattern of economic resource management for its subsistence. Every ethnic group has adopted a specific mode of production all over the country. For example, the Sherpas of the highland Himalayas have adopted trade and agriculture as their

traditional subsistence. Midland people have adopted agriculture and animal husbandry, supplemented by trading and service. The Terai people have also adopted agriculture, but if we go ethnically there we find the difference in the patterns of resource management among the various ethnic groups.

Every culture is related to its natural environment from where the economic resources are exploited for subsistence. Human knowledge always makes an idea to exploit the resources by improving the technology in order to incorporate refuse into the subsistence economy.

Economic change refuse to the ecological change. Man since his origin has been exploiting nature massively, for shelter and livelihood practices. His unlimited needs are being fulfilled by limited natural resources. Therefore, every societies' economic change obviously leads to ecological change also.

OBJECTIVES

This study endeavours to fulfill the following objectives:

- to present the culture of the Majhis of Amehaur in brief and analyse the undergoing socio-cultural change, and
- to analyse the patterns of resource management in the rural subsistence economy of these Majhis.

METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory cum-descriptive paper. Traditional methods of data collection adopted by anthropologists, such as participant observation, unstructured interview, structured questionnaire and case study have been adopted for the present study.

Census Method and Data

The village has only 51 households. There are 50 Majhis household and one is Chhetri. All the fifty Majhi household is very small, homogeneous and manageable universe. So sampling is not needed.

Techniques of Data Collection

Participant observation is used to observe the village settlement pattern, agricultural practices, cultural behaviour, daily works of family life etc.

Unstructured interview has been used to collect historical data. Structured questionnaire was administered to collect the data about personal identification, economic activities (earnings and expenditure) of other minor cultural patterns and environmental resource management and its problem.

The primary data was collected from the field during the stay of 30 days field survey. Apart from the primary data, many relevant, secondary informations have also been collected for the present study. Data have been analysed both discriptively and statistically.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SUBSISTENCE

Anthropology is the science of man and it studies man in totality. In other wards, it is the holistic science of man. Therefore, it also studies the economic aspect of man. Traditionally, economic anthropology was the study of economic lives of primitive peoples. It focused on the economic condition of non-literate, pre-industrial, non-machinery and non-pecuniary societies. This is rather an old concept of anthropology. In fact, the broader definition of anthropology is that it studies man, irrespective of whether he is savage or civilized. It studies man at all level of culture. Economic anthropology studies the economic behaviour and activity of man whether he is preliterate or modern. Previously the economic aspect of culture was neglected by anthropologists. After 1940 anthropologists started to study the economic aspect in detail, whether the society is preliterate or modern. Economic anthropology gives us the knowledte about the technique of exploiting nature, subsistence requirements, and mode of production of any primitive or modern society.

Anthropologists have long distinguished three main types of subsistence economy, that which depends on hunting, wild animals and collecting wild fruits and roots, that which depends on domestic animals, and that which depends on agriculture or on animal husbandry. According to Herskovits, subsistence economy means the ability of people having simple technologies to manipulate their resources effectively and is thus the fundamental aspect of their economic system.

Every society has its own type of subsistence economy. All societies, primitive or modern, have adopted a specific type of economy for getting food, shelter, clothing and income generation. "Most of the preliterate society had economic deterministic style. There is no society without methods of production, distribution, consumption and some form of exchange" according to Herskovits. It is the method of rationale of the allocation of scarce means to competing ends. Economic anthropology, by and large, focuses on how people exploit and manage resources for their subsistence.

CULTURAL PATTERNS AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES OF MAJHIS

The Majhis of Nepal are scattered all over the country for a very long time. The beautiful mountainous country has diverse culture and various ethnic, economic life-styles. Basically three ecological regions give different cultural traits in Nepal. The mountain and the hill culture slightly differ from the Tarai culture. The hill culture is more mosaic than other regional cultures.

The hill region is inhabited by various ethnic and racial groups of people and have adopted individual type of resource management patterns for their subsistence. In these various individual cultural groups the Majhis of Nepal are one of the distinct cultural groups. There are vari-

ous group cultures and the combination of these group culture is the Nepali National Culture. Anthropologists are of the view that Nepal is a melting pot of culture. Cultural diversity and racial differentiation and their diverse economic resource management patterns for the subsistence are other characters of Nepali hill-rural population.

The study area, Amchaur, is also called Anpchaur (by the local people), lies in the north eastern part of Kabhrepalanchowk district. It constitutes a single ward of Chandeni Village Panchayat. The Amchaur is inhabited by Majhi community for 250 years. There is only one Chhetri household at present and nearby this village one Brahmin village is settled. The Majhis have adopted the traditional way of life. Their belief, customs, cultural values and norms are primitive. There are three types of family, namely nuclear, joint and extended. There are more nuclear families and less joint families. Marriages are mostly arranged, monogamous and patrilocal. The houses are distinctly different from their neighbouring Brahmins and Chhetris. Six types of Majhis clan have been inhabiting in the study area. They have three types of kinship system, viz. consanguineous kinship, affinal kinship and ritual friendship (mit). All Hindu gods and deities are worshipped and Hindu festivals are also celebrated by the Majhis. Common foods and drinks have been adopted by them in the same way as adopted by other Matwalis of Nepal. The traditional and modern types of dress and ornaments are found in Amchaur.

Life-cycle ceremonies are not much different from those of the other upper caste Hindus (Brahmins and Chhetris). Except Pitara, all ceremonies are more or less common. Pitara is found to be typical and enthusiastic in this area. They have no priests as the people of other castes have. The priestly work is performed by the househead in each house. The Majhis are far from education. Very few of them can sign their names. Young children have alphabetical knowledge only. There is not any health post for the sick and diseased, and there are no sanitary programmes at all. Some households have used family planning schemes to check population growth. Their native language has completely disappeared due to long-term socio-cultural interaction with non-Majhi people. Every aspect of culture is undergoing change with time and interaction with other groups.

Anthropologists have begun to analyse the issues of man in relation to his surrounding environment. Economic anthropology looks at the economic organization of the society. Culture anthropology deals with the cultural aspect of human behaviour. Therefore, the anthropological inquiry helps to observe a society through various angles. If we observe the Nepali society on the basis of economic anthropology, we find it structurally primitive. The available natural resources are also managed unknowingly and exploited massively. Agriculture is the major resource for subsistence, of 90 percent of the people because of the lack of other capital resources.

The Majhis of Amchaur also live on agricultural economy. They have been engaged in agriculture as a major resource for subsistence for more than six generations, but it contributes less than the labour in their economy. Each family has a small plot of land and in the local context

the land is basically considered of two types: Khet and Bari. The third type is called Khoria. Landholding is extremely small and fragmented. Both summer and winter crops are grown in the fields. Majhis have other supporting economic resources besides agriculture and labouring, viz. animal husbandry, fishing, boating, portering, service and small scale cottage industries. Boating, fishing and service provide them with nominal income. Agriculture depends on the monsoon. Though the Majhis have a hard life and miserable economic condition, they always look cheerful and smiling in Amchaur.

In concluding remarks, it can be said that the culture, resource management for subsistence and undergoing change among any primitive types of society can also be described from anthropological perspective. There is no anthropological inquiries that has focused on Majhis culture, resource management patterns for the subsistence and undergoing change in Nepal. Many anthropological studies have been carried out in various parts of the country as various ethnic groups. This study has shown the culture and resource management patterns of the Majhis of Amchaur in Kabhrepalanchowk district. Their culture is still primitive and is going to change with modernity and is influenced by neighbouring culture. The Majhis of the study area are living on their physical labour which is basically used in agriculture sector.

The Majhis are sometimes confused with their similar cultural groups as Danuvars. The physical and cultural similarities with the common region settlers are intermingled with each other. It is said to be a melting pot by the anthropologists because different cultural traits are mixing with one another and are diffused. The cultural variation in Nepal, is the cause of topographical variation. The topographical variation results in the economic variation at the same time. Topographical variation and the environmental factor help men to adopt a specific patterns to manage the resources.

The Majhis of the study areas have adopted the agriculture and ferry service as their economic resource for 250 years. The resources were sufficient so long as the population was under the carrying capacity of the land. At that vary time agricultural sector needed more labour power and naturally they grew more in population. After the growth of population at the higher rate, they started to supply agricultural labour to their native land lords. At present the population of Amchaur is 292 and the total land is 163 ropanis among the 50 households. This fragmented land is insufficient for their livelihood because of the population growth.

TYPES OF RESOURCES AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

The rural area of Nepal is endowed with various kinds of natural resources and the patterns of its exploitation is also varied according to place, time and culture. Most of the Majhi people are under subsistence, and suffer from poverty though they have some sorts of natural resources. Predominantly they have practised agriculture, but the agricultural activity does not fully support their subsistence. All Majhis are agriculturists and supply agricultural labour for Brahmin neighbours because of the scarcity of their own-land resource and capital. Fifty household of

the Majhis inhabit within 163 ropanis (8.15 hectare) of land. Previously their fore-fathers practised boating for mail service (from Dhulikhel to Chautara) along Indrawati river, but it has been stopped. Some of them go to Kathmandu and out of Kathmandu in search of livelihood. They earn more from labouring and less from their parental land, animal husbandry, poultry and portery. Portery, animal husbandry and poultry are the subsidiary livelihood. Now some Majhi families have started stone grinding mill or Ghatta on Indrawati river side. One household has a handloom. None of the Majhi of Amchaur is in governmental service, but young boys work as peons in Kathmandu city and some boys and girls work as cooks and house servants of officials in the city.

The following table shows the types of resource and the contribution by each resource for the subsistence.

Table 1

Types of Resource for the Subsistence	Contribution in Percent
1. Agriculture	29.50
2. Animal Husbandry	10.00
3. Agricultural Wage Labour	41.00
4. Fishing	2.00
5. Boating	1.00
6. Portering	12.00
7. Service	3.00
8. Small Scale Cottage Industries	2.00
Total	100.00

Source: Field Survey 1986.

The Majhis are an old established tribe of Nepal. The old established tribes are Rais, Limbus, Tamangs, Chepangs, Lepchas, etc. Previously the Kipat land was considered as a communal land resource. Similarly, the Majhis also had the Kipat land. This land was provided to them as a salary for their service (Jagir) and on the communal basis. Now they are in crisis of land, because their Kipat land has been flooded away by the Indrawati river. They cultivate their land in the traditional way and grow only for four months in average. They have food deficit for eight months in average.

It is known that productivity of land is decreasing in Nepal. Especially in hill regions, the steeper topography and soil erosions are making land barren and deserted. The Majhis are also facing the same problems. Therefore, the agriculture sector is not sufficient for Majhis economy.

To reduce economic crisis and to support agricultural production the Majhis of Amchaur had adopted other resources, such as animal husbandry for three decades or so. Animal husbandry is practised by primi-

tive and modern society, but the Majhis are still far from modern type of animal husbandry. They have some cattle, goats, pigs, and poultry. These sorts of animals are received from their rich neighbours and raised on scarce basis. They provide meat, manure, money by exchange and oxen for ploughing. The Majhis are far from profit so far as cattle raising is concerned, because the share basis is more exploitative and they have no ownership over the cattle. A few of them have owned cattle like oxen and barren cows.

The minor resources include Ghatta and handloom is recently adopted. But those are insufficient for livelihood. Because men have no corn to grind in Ghatta, the stone mill moved by water. Therefore Ghatta cannot run full time. Handloom is adopted by one household, but it is quite irregular. It contributes very little to loom owners.

These Majhis are being massively exploited by neighbouring Brahmins in various ways and aspects of life. Culturally the Majhis are lower status people. They have to respect their neighbouring high caste people. They supply the bonded labour and herd boys to the moneylending Brahmins to reduce the exorbitant interest rate. These Majhis are still treated as slaves in this local area. The Theki Koseli and Dhyake interest systems never allow them to raise their heads in the society. Their exploitation by Brahmins and Chhetris is quite inhuman.

Various aspects of cultural patterns and economy are going to bring a change among the Majhis. Their poverty is so severe that it is difficult to bring a change without any effective economic programme. They are struggling for their economic hardship and have adopted various types of livelihood resources as fishing, service, and portering, but these alternative resources are also insufficient to remove their hardship and now they are becoming conscious of their backwardness. Their backwardness is due to illiteracy, lack of strong economic support and the existing hierarchy of castes.

The overall findings of this study suggest that the Majhis are suffering from extreme poverty, illiteracy and economic backwardness. Their conservative cultural values are another cause to pull them back. These social evils are the negative forces in Majhi community. Therefore, those evils are to be eradicated. The economic, social and cultural backwardness gives a clear picture of the Majhis' future. Transportation and communication is completely lacking here. Therefore, they must be provided with additional resources for generating income and employment opportunities to uplift their socio-economic conditions.

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