

# **A Socio-Economic Analysis Of Landlessness In Tharu Community Of Chitwan District**

**Thakur Prasad Bhatta \***

## **INTRODUCTION**

Rural poverty has been the central problem in development studies. It has been a great challenge for the developing countries whose majority of the total population resides in rural areas depending upon the agriculture as the principal source of livelihood. Economic condition of these people is mainly determined by their access to land-the sole means of income in agricultural setting. However, majority of rural population is lacking access to land. There is also lack of alternative employment opportunities in non-farm sectors. It is widely accepted that increasing levels of poverty and inequality are due largely to increasing landlessness among the inhabitants of rural Asia (CIRDAP 1987). Landlessness is often considered to be both the cause and symptom of poverty.

Nepal is predominantly rural and agricultural country: more than 90 percent of people live in rural areas and 81 percent of them primarily dependent on agriculture. Despite the planned development efforts of decades no significant improvement in the living standard of rural people is realized. Poverty is widespread and deep-rooted in rural Nepal: inequality is continuing and widening. The rural people lack the cultivable land, which is the most important income-generating asset in agrarian society. Before two decades ago, it was believed that forces are in operation in the rural society of Nepal which act towards the marginalisation of the poor peasants and landlessness of the marginal ones (Khan, 1984). At present, landlessness has become one of the major problems in the country. It is reported that incidence of landlessness is higher in the Terai than in the hills and mountains (Khan 1984).

Nepal has a multi-ethnic society. The rural population of Nepal consists of several ethnic groups. They vary significantly in terms of socioeconomic characteristics. Hence generalization of any problem can not be meaningful in the real sense. It is the reality that all ethnic groups are not attaining the same status of living. Some groups are far ahead socially, economically and politically than the other groups. The focus of this study lies on analyzing the problem of landlessness of an indigenous group of the Terai region-the Tharus.

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\* *Mr. Bhatta is Associated with the Nepal Red Cross Society, Kathmandu.*

The access to land largely determines the extent of poverty. It is stated that the increasing proportion of rural population below the poverty line manifests the growing incidence of landlessness of rural Asia (FAO, 1987, p. 136). Thus, landlessness and land concentration are strong indicators of the rural poverty. The landless are the most underprivileged section of rural society. Without land, the basic means of production in agricultural economies, they are powerless. They have little or no access to credit, marketing systems or other services and also suffer several social deprivation, poor health, illiteracy and high rates of child mortality. Insecurity is the raw reality of their lives.

The alarming rate of increase in the number of landless people has triggered concern among governments and policy makers worldwide, more so in the Asian countries where the burgeoning population growth is exerting serious pressure on fixed resources-mainly the land. Rural poverty is considered as the concomitant of the rural landlessness countries. Despite all the development programs and projects which were implemented and directed toward improving the situation of the rural poor in the last decades, the socioeconomic living conditions of the poor population in most developing countries have been deteriorating (Bongartz 1993).

It reveals that strategies adopted so far for alleviating rural poverty have not been directed properly to benefit the rural poor. Experiences suggest that various interventions by government and NGOs designed to combat poverty have, in general, failed mainly because they did not recognize that poverty is grounded in the lack of access to resources resulting from an unequal distribution of assets of all kinds with consequent result in insecurity, indebtedness and powerlessness of the majority of rural households. Economy can grow and so can agricultural production, but without benefiting the landless and nearlandless. Therefore, the landless and the nearlandless are the groups, which should be reached and benefited by any development strategies that seriously aim to reduce or alleviate poverty in the third world (Esman, 1978).

Since rural Nepal is overwhelmingly agricultural and crop production is the predominant activity within agriculture, land turns out to be the most important determinant of income (Khan 1984). There is lack of alternative source of income and employment in the rural areas. Hence, access to land largely determines the level of rural poverty. In the case of Nepal, it is more applicable for the terai region than in the hills and mountains. It is worth noting that the average per capita income in non-cultivating households in the terai is lower than the average for all farm size categories while in the hill and mountain regions average per capita income of the non-cultivator household is almost 40 percent higher than on the marginal farms and is even higher than on medium farms.

Because of its plain and productive land, the Terai region of Nepal is regarded as a granary of Nepal. However, when viewed from the point of marked inequality in distribution of productive resource like agricultural land, highest population growth rate, 2.8 percent per annum, among the regions, and growing landlessness and near landlessness, the problem faced here by the rural poor does not seem different from other regions (Gewali 1994). It is reflected in the fact that the majority of the rural population in the so-called prosperous Terai region has been experiencing the decline in income and employment opportunities. This must be the reason that over the years the country has been adding the number as well as the proportion of the total rural population below the poverty-line (Gewali 1994).

Since the problem of landlessness is alarming in the Terai region, this study concentrates on the problem of landlessness of the indigenous Tharu people who have been inhabiting therein since very long ago. Studies so far on the Tharus are confined to anthropological sphere. There is virtually lack of studies on the economic problems facing the Tharus. Studies carried out in general or regional basis alone can not present the comprehensive picture of the problem. Besides obvious regional disparities, substantial socio-economic and political inequalities continue to exist among different ethnic and among caste groups in Nepal (Pyakural 1982). In connection with such situations, a study like this concentrated on an indigenous group—the Tharu, which is regarded as the socio-economically-disadvantaged group, deserves special significance. In this sense, the study has adopted a new approach to the problem by analyzing it in ethnical basis instead of general or regional approach.

## A PROFILE OF THE THARUS

### Social Context

Tharu, an aboriginal of the Terai region, live in the entire length of it. They have been living there since the unknown past. The origin of the Tharu is still mysterious, as there are many contradictory views about it among the anthropologists. Amid of the so much uncertainty, a scholar defines the Tharu tribe as—the 'forest people' came from many regions at different times to seek the peace and shelter of the jungle; the environment then moulded them, over a very long period of time, into groups of special people, all of them called the Tharu (Meyer 1995).

Initially, Tharus were the forest dwellers. They have established their settlements by clearing the forest. They used to live in the areas of less interaction and inaccessible to other people. They live in cluster, which include the houses of their close relatives. However, due to the population growth and other economic factors, some Tharu families are found to be settling away from the main cluster and some non-Tharus living close to the Tharu cluster.

Large extended family is one of the characteristics of traditional Tharu society. The concept of large family in recent years is gradually changing. In the study area nuclear families are becoming popular. The change can be the outcome of population pressure, poverty, landlessness and influence of non-Tharus people. Women are less discriminated in the Tharu society than in other non-Tharu society. In the past, when the Tharu were only the inhabitants of the land, the family was directed and managed by household chief who was called Ghar Mukhiya in Tharu dialect. All of the families in a settlement were united in a social organization of an informal type. The leader selected for it was called Mahaton. There was no relation of this body with government bodies. When some conflicts or problem aroused in the Tharu community they were settled by the Mahaton. All Tharu families trusted him. It was the responsibility of the Mahaton to mobilize villagers for the construction and maintenance of village level facilities like streets, canals etc. The direction, decisions and suggestions discharged by the Mahaton were obeyed by all the villagers. Usually, the responsibility of Mahaton was given to a rich Tharu landlord. The Mahatons in the period of Rana rule were appointed in the post of Jimidars, local level tax-collecting agents. This system gradually lost its importance in the Tharu community after the migration of non-Tharus in their locality. In the study area, it is not into existence at present.

Tharu have their own social customs, traditions and culture. They speak their own Tharu dialect. The Tharu way of life differs from that of the migrants from the hills. Tharu observe a number of feast and festivals. Meat and alcoholic drinks are important items of the feast. Considerable amount of money is spent on such occasions. Traditionally, Tharu dress very simply as they wear very little and light clothes. However, they are highly influenced by the dresses of other non-Tharus groups and as a result are discarding their traditional dress and changing to garments of modern fashions.

Tharu are regarded as simple, peaceful, honest and less aggressive than the hill-migrants. They are educationally and socially backward people. As a consequence of their innocence and illiteracy largely the non-Tharus migrants in tricky ways have exploited them. The attitude of the Tharu towards education in recent years is positively changing.

### **Economy**

Tharu economy is basically a subsistence economy. Agriculture is their most important occupation. All members of the family are employed in agricultural activities in the traditional Tharu society. In fact agriculture is not only the economic occupation but also a way of life for them. They devote most of their time in farming activities. Protection of crops from wild animals and birds in the past was the most challenging job for them as their farmlands usually located in the middle of forest or close to it. Thus in

addition of day work they had to watch their fields even in night to protect the crops from wild animals.

Tharu economy in the past before the migration of hill people into Chitwan was an indigenous tribal economy. Agricultural production was mostly for self-consumption. There were few things for sale. In the study area, tobacco and mustard were cultivated as cash crops, which were exported to Kathmandu via Hetauda. Pack transportation was another source of cash earning of the Tharu. They used to buy salt, cloth, metal and other necessary items once a year from the Thori, a market a Nepal-India border or from the traders who brought these things at the village in winter season. Thus, trade at that time was very limited. Rice the main cereal crop was cultivated mainly in the primitive way of broadcasting and the yield was low. Livestock was an integral component of farming system. Cattle, sheep, goat etc. were kept in large numbers, as there was no shortage of pastureland. They obtained building materials, grasses for thatching and firewood from the forests. Indeed, though there was hardship, the Tharu economy in the past was sustainable in large extent.

With the execution of the resettlement program and development of transportation the traditional Tharu economy nearly collapsed. Population pressure highly increased in the land and other natural resources. Manufactured goods dominated the village market. The consumption patterns of the Tharu, changed by the influence of hill migrants. Land, which was not saleable, became saleable asset. The role of money increased in the rural economy.

The economy gradually gradually changed into mixed one which is partly subsistence and partly commercial.

With the changes in economy, there was also change in agrarian relation of the Tharu economy. Until the resettlement programme and few years after it, agricultural production relation was determined by the two groups-landowners and landless bonded labors. The bonded labor is called *Haruwa-Charuwa* in Tharu dialect. The laborers had to work whole time for the landlords and in return they got some stipulated amount of grain and kitchen garden to grow vegetables. In the Tharu community of study area, most of the land was under the control of the Jimidars and their relatives. The large plots of Jimidari land were cultivated by the bonded labor. The Jimidar used to keep many pairs of ox to cultivate their land. The bonded labors were those families with no land or who had lost their lands because they were unable to pay taxes or they had fallen into the debt of Jimidars.

But as the resettlement program executed, population pressure increased highly. As a consequence, there did not remain any pastureland, which was abundant in the past. The Jimidar became unable to keep more oxen. The extended large families of the landlords started to be separated. They also sold excess land and keep land of manageable size. The landlords freed the bonded labors and used to hire labors in wages that are being

available in cheap rates. They saw that the latter is economical and there was no fear of claiming tenancy rights on land. Thus, the bonded labors converted into landless agricultural labor. At present, there is neither bonded Labor system nor tenancy of any form, all farming jobs are carried out by local agricultural labors.

## MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

### Conceptual and Measurement Issues

The concept and the measures of landlessness may vary from country to country, depending largely on the way it is defined and on the variations in socioeconomic setting of each nation (CIRDAP 1987). Thus, the magnitude of the problem of landlessness and nearlandlessness often depends on the definition adopted by the researcher. There are at least four major concepts—access to land, income, employment in agriculture and the "poverty line"—individually, or in combination with another, used in identification of the landless or near landless (or agricultural labor households) and the estimation of their numbers. Each of these concepts has its own limitations (Sinha 1984).

There is ambiguity regarding the definition of landlessness in Nepal. The definitions of rural landless cited in different studies are not clear or not based on any sound reasoning and differs substantially from each other (IDS, 1985). Due to the differences in the definition of landless employed by various studies, estimates made by them also vary in wide ranges. However, the findings of these studies except Central Bureau of Statistics indicate an increasing trend of the problem and almost all studies report a higher percentage of landlessness in the terai than in the hills and mountains (New Era, 1989).

The Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal, based on its agricultural sample censuses, has shown a declining trend of rural landless households, 1.42 percent in 1961, 0.95 percent in 1971, and 0.37 percent in 1981 (IDS 1985). The census defines operational farm holding as an area of more than 0.01 hectare. It seems unable to capture the actual situation of the problem as several other studies report considerably high incidence of landlessness.

Zaman, while evaluating the impact of the land reform program in Nepal, estimated 7.8 percent of the rural households as landless by designating operational land holdings as those above 0.12 hectare (Zaman 1973). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1982 reported that between 1961 and 1971, the number of landless households including those owning less than 0.10 hectare increased from 11.9 percent to 17.9 percent. According to the 1974 ARTEP mission report, 23 percent of the sample households in the terai were landless (New Era 1989).

The sample survey conducted by the National Planning Commission which defined rural landless households as those with no land for

cultivation but with a homestead or house site being used as kitchen garden estimated 10.35 percent rural households as landless (NPC 1977).

### Extent of Landlessness in the Study Area

As seen above, there is lack of standard criterion for measuring rural landless. In such context, considering the definitions provided by the NPC, Zaman and ADB as well as landholding patterns in the study area, the landless households are defined those who have holdings of less than 0.15 biga, 0.10 ha. Besides landless households, the landholding households were classified into four groups namely nearlandless, marginal, small and large farm households.

The concepts of nearlandless and marginal households were adopted from a study by Singh in context of land scarce countries of South Asia (Singh 1982). Singh defines nearlandless as those with less than 0.4 hectare (approximately 0.6 bigas) and marginal as those with 0.4 to 1 hectare, roughly 0.6 to 1.5 bigas. The definition of small farm, 1.5-4 bigas, was adopted from a survey conducted by the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB 1980) and the households those having holdings above than 4 bigas were termed as large farm in local standard.

A census survey of Tharu households in the study area was conducted to find out the magnitude of the landlessness and other farm groups in the Tharu community. The finding of the survey is presented in the Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution Of Landless And Farm Household In The Study Area**

Group	Number Households	Percentage of Households
Landless (<0.15 bigas)	130	46.43
Nearlandless (0.15 to <0.6 bigas)	35	12.50
Marginal farm (0.6 to 1.5 bigas)	50	17.86
Small farm (above 1.5 to 4 bigas)	56	20.00
Large farm (above 4 bigas)	9	3.21
<b>Total</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source : Field Survey by the Author, 1995.

Thus, nearly half of the Tharu households are landless. But the field observation and income level of sample households suggest no significant difference between landless and nearlandless households. If these two groups are combined, the figure for landless is found to be about 59 percent of the total households.

## THE PROCESS AND CAUSES OF LANDLESSNESS

The problem of landlessness in the Tharu community of Chitwan originated with the intergration of tribal land of Tharus into the land-administration system of the state. Before then, the Tharus had their own tribal society of primitive stage, which was free from any kind of state intervention. Primitive type of agriculture was their main occupation. They had adopted shifting cultivation in the certain area within their access. Since the introduction of agriculture, the Tharus be concentrated in certain area and develop it further in course of time. Hence the nomadic characteristics which can be a source in losing permanent land ownership of tribal groups did not exist in the Tharus of Chitwan. The land of the Tharus has been continuously controlled by state since the Rana rule. Therefore, the process of landlessness can be explained in the two specific periods-during Rana rule till the Resettlement Programme in Chitwan valley and post Resettlement Programme. In other words the process of landlessness can be viewed in terms of two specific periods namely pre Resettlement Programme and Post Resettlement Programme.

Landlessness and near-landlessness, like poverty and inequality, are the result of a complex interaction of topographical, socioeconomic and political forces operating over centuries and it is difficult to disentangle the causes from one another or indicate their relative importance (Sinha 1984). Landlessness is a multidimensional problem, which arises due to several factors operating simultaneously in society. The determinig factors of landlessness and their effectiveness may vary from society to society. Even within a society the causes as well as their extent of operation may differ among the various ethnic groups. It all depends upon the environment to which the farm family belongs.

In view of these facts, the causes that have led to landlessness of the Tharu conununity are identified and discussed in this section of the study. However, the complexity of the problem and the lack of research studies on the state of high incidence of landlessness in the Tharu community it is very difficult to identify precisely the causes which, indeed, requires extensive knowledge of several disciplines of social science. Nevertheless, attempts are made mainly on the basis of information obtained in the field to find out the principal causes of landlessness in the Tharu community.

### **During Rana Rule 1846-1950 To Resettlement Programme 1956**

#### *Historical Circumstances*

The origin and evolution of the process of landlessness of the Tharus has its strong association with the historical stage of socioeconomic and the political context. Actually, problem of landlessness lies on the historical circumstances, which have provided opportunities for the few to command over the large areas of land in the community.

Chitwan valley had been the tribal land of the Tharus since long ago until 1956 when it was opened for the hill-migrants. The economy of the Tharus has traditionally remained centered around land and other land based resources. Initially, it can be inferred that, the land in the region was abundant and out of the state management due to the inaccessibility and less populated. Therefore, the inhabitants of the region were sovereign to cultivate land or use in other ways to subsist. They had been practicing the method of shifting cultivation in want of virgin land. However, in course of time, the situation subjected to change gradually and the tribal land of the Tharu also integrated in the state management system.

There is lack of information since when the land of the Tharu in Chitwan valley put within the command of the state. Information so far available tell that it was brought under the control of the state in the early years of Rana regime. As the rising government expenditure was not being met only by the revenue collected in the form of land tax from the hills cultivation the Rana rulers sought Terai region for the potential additional revenue of large amount (Regmi 1978). They ensured some institutional set up to develop the agricultural settlements all over the Terai that was previously highly under populated. The Jimidari system was the most important measure introduced by the Rana rulers to maximize the revenue collection by developing agriculture in the fertile land of the Terai. However, it created a highly unequal pattern of agrarian structure and consequently originated the problem of landlessness even amid abundant land supply. Therefore, a discussion on the Jimidari system with its impact on the existing society bears high importance in relation to the problem of landlessness.

The tax collection system operated in the responsibility of village based functionaries introduced in the Terai region in 1861 was known as the Jimidari system. These village-based functionaries were known as Jimidars and the area under their control was called Mouja. The holding of the *Mouja* by *Jimidar* was called Jimidari, which was inheritable, saleable and transferable by process of gift. The land, which belonged personally to Jimidar-called *Jirayat*- was cultivated by means of unpaid labor and implements of peasants who held land in the *Mouja* under the jurisdiction of the Jimidar. Thus, the reality was that the peasants were not only burdened by the land-tax but other additional obligations to Jimidar and the Jimidar was not a mere tax collector but powerful body of the village backed by the government.

In the Chitwan valley, the Jimidars were from the Tharu race residing in the village unlike the absentee non-Tharus *Jimidars* of Dang valley, (Rajaure 1977). Mahatos, Chiefs of Tharu villages, were usually appointed in the post of *Jimidars*. However, it did not differ in exploitation of the Tharu community as the irrational policy of *Jimadari* system, which sought maximization of collection of taxes, worked to consolidate the position of

Jimidars in cost of the peasants. The Tharu peasants who were living in primitive type of society; subsistence farming was their way of lives; non-trading, non-monetized, and isolated economy; peculiar nature of the Tharus not going outside from their territory in search of income earning jobs; occasional crop failure; and destruction of crops by wild animals and birds were such factors that made them unable to pay land tax and fulfill the imposed obligations of several kinds to *Jimidar*.

In such circumstances, majority of Tharu peasants lost their access to land. When the peasants failed in paying taxes or in fulfilling the obligations to Jimidars, their right on land was withdrawn and cultivated by anyone who wished or by the *Jimidar* himself-as it was his liability for the fund collection of land and other taxes in the *Mouja* under his jurisdiction, even if lands remained uncultivated for any reason (Regmi 1978). The families of the peasants which were evicted from the land had to work as bonded labour, called *Haruwa-Charuwa*, for their survival. The *Jimidars* and big landowners employed them. The landless households working at present as agricultural labor in the village are the families of bonded labor in the past. The impact of the *Jimdari* system on the Tharu community resulted in the concentration of large plots of land in the hands of few driving away the majority from the land of their customary use and ultimately created a economically deprived group of bonded labors which is at present identified as landless agricultural labors in the changed circumstances.

It is already mentioned that the primary objective of the *Jimdari* system was to maximize the collection of revenue as the *Jimidar* should pay to the government the stipulated amount. The government, to prevent revenue from-declining often followed policies, which encouraged high concentration of land ownership in the hands of few by allowing the *Jimidars* to play wide role in agrarian community without any restrictions. In consequences, "the introduction of the *Jimdari* system, in particular, led to an increased degree of polarization in the agrarian community. All classes of peasants were then placed under the jurisdiction of *Jimidars*, thereby depressing the status of the independent farmers... they were placed under the fiscal and administrative authority of the *Jimidar* and obliged to provide labor for the cultivation of his demesne. The *Jimidar* had power to evict them if they defaulted in the payment of taxes, and to re-allot their holdings to other persons" (Regmi 1978).

The burdens imposed by the *Jimdari* system which was abolished only in 1964 do not fully represent the historical circumstances that compelled the majority of the Tharu peasants to work as bonded labor losing their ownership of the land: they were equally suffered by the government as they were also compelled to serve him and his employee free fo charge.

The Tharus of the Chitwan valley were excessively exploited by the government and local officials. The dense forest of the valley, which has ever, since remained highly attractive for the wild life, was also preserved by the then rulers-the Ranas by establishing some check posts in the region. Officials working in these check posts used to obtain foodstuff from the villagers. According to the old informants, the villagers who had allotments in the Mouja had to supply the stipulated amount of food stuff, called 'Phant' in local dialect, to the employee of government in each month whether they had stock for themselves or not. Whether it was legal or not the naive Tharu people were compelled to pay the Phant as they were frightened of charge of disobeying the rules related to preservation of wild life by the local officials. The Tharu people were so afraid of local officials that they used to disappear for a while if they saw any officials coming towards their houses. Indeed, the burden of paying Phant was higher than the land tax for the Tharu peasants whose production hardly meet their own subsistence needs. The consequence of this practice was that when the peasants failed to pay the Phant their ownership of land was dismissed by Jimidars in the pressure of local officials. And the peasants, as there were no alternative means of survival, obviously had to be bounded labors who were employed by Jimidars and big landowners to work in their farms.

Similarly, the Tharus were excessively burdened by the Sawari visits of Rana rulers with their distinguished guests for 'Shikar' (hunting) in the Chitwan valley-as it is ever since famous habitat of wild life. In the past, prior to the eradication of malaria it was preserved and utilized by the Rana rulers as a hunting reserved for the sport of the Maharaja and his distinguished guests, an emperos, a prince, a viceroy (Smythies 1942). At Kasara, which lies in the vicinity of study area, in the time of Maharaja Chandra Shumsher, king George V. had a camp and shoot in 1911-12 at which a record bag was made, 39 tigers, 18 rhinos and several others in great numbers, (Smythies 1942).

The matter of concern all of it is that the Tharus of Chitwan were highly used in such massive hunts. Tharus figure largely in the Shikar incidents...as they occupy the key-position of mahouts and attendants of the elephants of Nepal, and their pluck and skill is a predominant factor in the success of all big game shooting in the terai (Smythies 1942).

Often, with the beginning of winter, the Tharu peasants had to clear the dense forests and construct motorable path for the hunting programme of the Rana rulers. From Thori to Kasara, in the Rapti valley a 30 miles long motorable road had been constructed for facility of Shikar (Smythies 1942). This was made compulsory, for them and not paid for their work. According to the old informants they had to stay in the forest for a period of month or more at their own expenses to clear the path for hunting. This period was on the other hand the harvesting time of paddy. Thus the Tharu peasants were put in very difficult situation by the then rulers. One who

failed in contributing free labor for the *Sawari* had to lose his allotment in the *Mouja*. From above discussion in details, one can safely conclude that in the past the problem of landlessness in the Tharu community was the resultant of several kinds of burdens imposed upon the subsistence Tharu peasants.

### **Post Resettlement Programme 1956**

#### *The Resettlement Programme*

Rapti Valley Multipurpose Development Project implemented in Chitwan district in the late 1950s was the first planned resettlement program of Nepal. It was initiated with an objective to rehabilitate the landless and homeless people- the flood victims of 1954. The program had distributed land of varying size ranging from 4-50 bigas. The ultimate goal of the project was to exploit the land resource in order to raise production to solve the food scarcity of the capital, the Kathmandu City. As the government eradicated malaria in the region large number of people from hills migrated here. Within the few years the region which was inhabited before then only by the malaria immunized Tharu people became overcrowded by the hill-migrants so much that the late comer did not obtain the plot of land. Though said that distribution of land would be confined to landless and homeless people the majority of the beneficiaries were the clever and well to do people.

Formulation as well as implementation of the resettlement program showed that the socioeconomic condition of the aboriginal Tharus was not considered. As a result it benefited only the non-Tharus hill migrants leaving the socio-economically deprived Tharus unaffected. Though the main objective of the programme was to distribute land for the homeless and landless people it did not act so regarding such Tharus people. However the Tharu people were also offered to take the plot of land, only few progressive landlord - Tharus obtained it. The Tharus families which were landless and working as bounded labors were in the most want of land but could not obtain it. It is because, for the families which had no capital and implements necessary to cultivate land a mere offer of land certainly would not be sufficient.

Indeed, the resettlement program was hill-people oriented and less publicized among Tharus who themselves are self-centered people and less inclined towards any changes occurring in the society. Therefore, without some efforts from project side, they themselves hardly approach to any programmes however it is beneficial for them.

Besides this, due to their ethnocentric nature they highly prefer to live in the clusters of their own race in the locality separated from other non-Tharus groups. Therefore, the Tharu families who were in want of land also hesitated to take the plot of land as the plotting system of the

resettlement program which had scattered plot of farms did not meet the requirements of the traditional Tharu settlements.

Thus, the resettlement program, on the one hand, could not solve the problem of landlessness of the Tharu community which was the outcome of the Jumdari system and other historical conditions, and on the other hand, made the problem further worse as it did not leave any lands for the cultivation for Tharus in their locality by distributing all the available lands to hill-migrants. The high incidence of landlessness in the Tharu community at present is in fact the consequence of the resettlement program imposed on the tribal land of the Tharus without due considerations of their future need.

### ***Social Interaction***

Before the implementation of the resettlement program the Tharus of Chitwan valley were living in social and physical isolation. At that time, social-interaction was impossible as the valley was predominantly inhabited by the malaria immunized Tharus. Due to the fear of malaria, only in the time of winter, ruling elite and businessmen made occasional visits. The valley, therefore, was like a forest island mostly inaccessible to other people and completely not interacted socially and economically. The Tharus were little known to outsiders and viceversa. They had a close, indigenous and subsistence economy.

Along with the execution of resettlement program social interaction became effective as the large number of people of different ethnicity started to settle and farm in the valley. The migration was acted so massively that within the few years the migration through the planned resettlement program, people, in large numbers, voluntarily migrated into Chitwan Valley in search of land. Further, with the development of transportation and communication, the Tharu society in the Chitwan no longer remained isolated either socially or physically.

In the first instance, as a consequence of the social interaction, there existed significant changes in the socioeconomic activities of the Tharus. Due to the pressure of additional population, uses of natural resources such as land, forest etc. previously by the Tharus alone have been severely limited. The traditional subsistence peasant economy gradually transformed towards a mixed one where the production is only not for the self-consumption but also to sell in the market. The commercialization and monetization of the indigenous economy accelerated the flow of manufactured goods in the rural areas. selling of land so far was rare became frequently saleable asset.

Such changing circumstance were well perceived by the migrants while the Tharus were ignorant of them. Majorities of the migrants were the Brahmin & Chettri, who are considered the high status, influential and clever people of Nepal. Tharus, on the other hand, are widely recognized as

the innocent, naive and honest people. In the interaction, and thereby in the competition between the advanced migrants and backward Tharus-the former obviously outstrip the latter in most of the fields. Hence it necessitates the protection of the weaker section of population. Unfortunately, the resettlement program did not act so. As a result, in the beginning years of the migration, the Tharus were largely exploited by the non-Tharus migrants. This is substantially resulted in the marginalisation and landlessness of the Tharu farmers.

Several stories can be heard regarding the alienation of land from Tharus to non-Tharus migrants. Being the foremost settlers Tharu had occupied most of the land of best quality especially suitable for paddy cultivation. On the other hand, land distributed by resettlement program was mainly the upland. Therefore, the farmland of the Tharus tempted the migrant people. The migrant people concentrated their efforts to achieve the parcels of Tharus' land. As already mentioned that the migrants are the clever, more advanced and foresighted people while the Tharus are simple, peaceful, illiterate and backward trib ewho have been living in long isolation. Several tactica were employed by the non-Tharus to achieve the Tharus' land of high potential value in cheap price as it was just come into sale first time along with the migration. One of the stories narrated in following paragraph illustrates a tricky manner in which the land was aliented from Tharus by non-Tharus migrants.

After the migration of few years, a migant of Brahmin ethnic with a hidden purpose of acquiring land appoacheed to a Tharu who had then ten bigas of land. He treated the Tharu very well, as he was his close relative. He showed eagerness to help the Tharu in his need and trouble. The migrant used to lend money. Thus he won confidence of the Tharu. By nature, the Tharu regarded him as a good friend and accepted his suggestion without any doubt. The migrant, on the other hand, was looking to lend him money and in turn to take his land. For which lending money in very small amount was not possible. At the same time, the simple living Tharu was not in much need. In such context, the migrant framed a plan according to which he encouraged the Tharu to build a new house, in order to raise his expenditure intentionally, in modern style of brick wall and iron sheet roof by saying that there would be shortage of thatched grass in coming to contact ally officials. The migrant also lent money time to time. After the completion of the house, the migrant submitted his account of lending by compounding interest at high rate. The Tharu who was already dominated by the migrant accepted it but was unable to pay the accumulated amount of debt. As a result, he had to be exempted from the the debt of the migrant by giving three and half bigas of land which was also assessed at a very cheap rate.

The another aspect of the impact of social interaction is the demonstration effct prevailed in the Tharus community. Before the

resettlement program, the Tharus were living in a very simple manner. They were simply clothed people who rarely used manufactured goods. At that time, the role of money in the Tharu economy was very much limited. But along with the execution of resettlement programme and development of transportation and communication, the primitive Tharu economy rapidly changed into market-orientated economy in which cash transaction in must.

Concomitant of it, there existed changes in the socio-economic living of the Tharus. They discarded their traditional clothing. They began the consumption of manufactured goods available in the local market. This all needed cash-earning sources of income. Unfortunately, Tharus were out of such sources. What they had was the farmland. To meet their cash transactions they started to borrow from the hill-migrants.

The hill migrants were equally interested to lend them as the Tharu were very honest and they could pay the loan by selling their land asset. Furthermore, the Tharus who had land were supplied clothes and other consumer goods on credit by the village shopkeeper. The illiterate Tharus were severely exploited by the shopkeepers as they charged very high price for things and high interest rate on the credit-amount. Obviously, the Tharus failed to pay the debt of shopkeeper and moneylender. In such way many Tharu families had lost their lands by paying the debt borrowed for consumption purposes.

Above discussion leads to the conclusion that the social interaction resulted into the deterioration of the economic condition of the Tharus as they were dispossessed of their land property.

#### *Population Pressure*

In addition of the historical and socioeconomic factors, the increasing population pressure in the Chitwan valley further aggravated the problem of landlessness in the Tharu community, particularly after the execution of the resettlement programme. Before then, the valley was very thinly populated. The Tharus were living amid abundant supply of land resource. In such context, naturally large and extended families were highly preferred to perform the traditional farming activities as well as to bring more virgin lands into cultivation.

The situation altered completely after the resettlement programme. Since then, migration into Chitwan valley has been a continuous phenomenon, which is resulted very soon in the shortage of cultivable land. Therefore, the growing Tharu population lost its access to additional land. According to Population Census of 1971, the population of Tharu in Nepal was 495881 and ranked sixth among various ethnic groups, while it reached to 1194224 in 1991 which is 6.5 percent of the total and occupies fourth position. On the basis of the census 1971 and 1991, annual population growth rate of the Tharu is found to be 4.5 percent. It is a very

high growth rate of population. In the scarcity of cultivable land, population pressure on land resulted in low land-man ratio. The per capita holding for the sampled population is only 0.11 hectares.

In the lack of alternative opportunities in non-farm sectors, the population growth cause and perpetuate rural poverty by increasing pressure on limited land available for cultivation. When the families can not subsist from their farm productions they likely to fall into debts. Indebtedness compels the households to lose their lands. This is the mechanism that is operating towards landlessness of the Tharu community.

### **EFFECTS OF LANDLESSNESS**

The effects of landlessness in the Tharu community are wide and deep. The landless are most vulnerable group of rural people. They lag behind in every field of socio-economic life. This study gives in brief a general scene of the living conditions of the landless people and incidence of poverty in the study area.

### **General Scenario Of Landless In The Study Area**

As already mentioned that nearly half of the Tharu households are landless. Majorities of them have no home site. As a consequence, they have established themselves by encroaching into the public and forestland. One of the settlement lies in the flood disaster area as it is located in the low lying lands nearly the riverbanks. They live in the poorly constructed houses, which are too small in comparison of their family size. Nuclear family is preferable for landless than the extended family. Children of the landless family though go to school do not complete even the primary level of education. As they grow up, they have to earn for them.

Most of the landless Tharu are agricultural labor. Their access to non-farm jobs is negligible. Village-level skilled works are performed mostly by the migrated occupational castes. Uncertainty and insecurity of employment is the main hardship of the landless people. Only in the seasons of planting and harvesting, all of the family members get opportunities of employment. Wages are low in other seasons. Women get low wage than the man-worker. Due to the migration from hills to Chitwan in search of work and with the growth of landless population, labor supply is exceeding the demand, which is resulted in rising competition for work and declining wages. No access to institutional credit is another hardship of the landless family. Moreover, they are unable to get loans from moneylender as they are assetless it is risky to lend them for the moneylender. Thus, earning from wage labor is only the source of their income.

### Incidence Of Poverty

The poverty line derived for Nepal by the Basic Needs Programme of the Government is Rs. 5.40 per capita daily income at 1985/86 prices. The equivalent level of poverty line at 1994/95 prices is Rs. 13.76 per capita daily income. This line is adopted to study the incidence of poverty in the study area.

From the analysis of income data, it is found that about 72 percent of landless households have per capita income below the poverty line, which is about 64 percent of the total poor households. Table 4 presents the structure of poverty of sample households.

Table 2

#### Structure Of Poverty Of Sample Households By Farm Size Groups

Farm Size Group	Households Below poverty Line	Households Above Poverty Line	Total
Landless	23 (71.88)	9 (28.12)	32 (100.00)
Nearlandless	5 (55.56)	4 (44.44)	9 (100.00)
Marginal Farm	5 (41.67)	7 (58.33)	12 (100.00)
Small Farm	3 (21.43)	11 (78.57)	14 (100.00)
Large Farm	-	3 (100.00)	3 (100.00)
Total	36 (51.43)	34 (48.57)	70 (100.00)

Note : Figure in parentheses indicates percentage of the total.

Source : Field Survey by the Author, 1995.

It is seen from the above table that percentage of households below the poverty line is decreasing with the increasing access to land. It reveals that poverty in the Tharu community is largely the land-oriented. The incidence of poverty is highest for the landless groups followed by nearlandless and marginal farm groups respectively. Since the main source of income of landless is wage-labor, the massive poverty in this group indicates the low wages and high level of underemployment.

### CONCLUSION

The problem of landlessness originated historically in the form of bonded labour system is massive in the Tharu community of Chitwan valley. It is the resultant of several kinds of burdens imposed upon the subsistence Tharu peasants. The problem of landlessness originated with the integration of tribal land to Tharus into the land-administration system of the state. It created a highly unequal pattern of agrarian structure and consequently originated the problem of landlessness even amid abundant

land supply. The Governmently originated the problem of landlessness even amid abundant land supply. The Government resettlement programme though benefited hill-people did not solve the problem of landless Tharus. It further worsened the problem by creating soci-economic environment for exploitation of Tharus through social interaction between socially backward Tharus and advanced hill people. The rapid population growth has been aggravating the problem. The effect of landlessness is manifested in high incidence of poverty among the landless, nearlandless and marginal farmer groups. These groups in Tharu community can be regarded as the weaker section of the society and any programme to alleviate poverty is to be directed towards them.

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