

SOCIAL IMAGINATIONS OF MOTOR ROAD: DISSECTING DISCOURSE AND ACTUALITIES

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Abstract

This research paper principally explores the intricate relationship between motor road development and social dynamics, aiming to understand how the construction of these roads influences local perceptions, societal images, and unintended consequences. In addition to the physical aspects of the motor road, this study examines the socio-cultural backdrop linked with road construction, delving into diverse accounts and historical narratives recounted by residents of the regions where the road was constructed. These roads represent dual symbolism of “bikas” (development) and “dukha” (hardship), mirroring the experiences and aspirations of the local inhabitants. The government, pursuing its own interests, takes on the task of road construction, revealing a complex interplay with the people living in these areas. This research article further uncovers the contrasting dynamics between the state and the community during the road construction process, shedding light on the disparities between the promises made and the realities of motor road development that unfold the political economy of road building. To conduct this written analysis of the motor road project, primary data was gathered through a three-month ethnographic field study carried out between August and October 2017 followed by several field visits till 2023. This approach included engaging in participant observation, conducting twenty comprehensive interviews with key informants, and having thirty informal discussions with participants involved in the research. Secondary data was obtained from archives, government records, and existing literature.

Keywords: *Motor road, social imaginations, political-economy, bikas, dukha, state, people*

Introduction

“I do not mean that off road populations do not deserve a road, or that roads should not be built. I simply call for a critical understanding of the situation of off road villages and of the consequences of roads, which are more often assumed than assessed.” (Demenge, 2013 p. 59)

In November 2013, after a struggle spanning two decades to establish a road infrastructure connecting with other major cities of the country, the Manang district successfully established a 65-kilometer motor road. This road has since become a crucial lifeline for the people, serving both their mobility and transportation needs. This research delves into the impact of constructing this motor road on various social perceptions, mental images, and opinions held by individuals from diverse social, economic, political, and professional backgrounds.

The motor road, stretching 65 kilometers, commences from Besisahar, and culminates at Chame, of Manang district, situated in the Gandaki province of western Nepal. The official designation for this route is the Besisahar-Chame motor road. It's noteworthy that this road lacks pavement on its surface. Its construction initiative began in 1995 A.D. and the road construction reached fruition in 2013 A.D. and was inaugurated¹ in the same year.

The process of constructing this road was fraught with challenges such as difficult terrain, political upheaval within the country, and disruptions caused by locals. The state held its own purposes in constructing the road, as did the inhabitants of the region who were set to benefit from improved road connectivity. The state views road connectivity as a significant developmental objective for the nation (Pant, 1956; Government of Nepal Department of Road, n.d.). The residents of the road-connected area envisioned positive changes in their lives due to their hardships in mobility and transportation, brought about by the absence of road infrastructure and the area's remote geographical location. Consequently, the road became symbolic of progress and a gateway to development, from the initial stages of conception through its construction and completion. However, once the road was established, the experiences of the local population in relation to the road's construction and utilization diverged from their initial expectations. Thus, this long awaited motor road did not carry homogenous meaning to the people of road recipient area.

This study adopts a comparative approach, examining the road construction process before its establishment and the changes that ensued after its completion focusing on 30 Kilometer section of this motor road that traverses Manang district. While roads are commonly seen as tangible achievements by both the populace and the state, this research seeks to explore the multifaceted aspects of road building such as societal perceptions,

1 In 2005 A.D., the former Royal Nepal Army (Nepal Army) assumed the task of constructing a 65-kilometer motor track. This road project was successfully finished in 2013 and subsequently transferred to the Department of Road Nepal. This road was inaugurated by General Gaurav Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, the former chief of Nepal Army.

mental images, and unintended consequences beyond its physical manifestation. It delves into the intricate political and economic dynamics underlying road construction in Nepal, aiming to comprehend the shared collective perceptions and socio-cultural influences that shape road construction. This endeavor seeks to unravel the disjunction between the discourse surrounding road construction and the actual realities that unfold.

Statement of the problem

Road connectivity has always been a highly prioritized development intervention; something which can be witnessed when we review Nepal's first planning process with the advent of First Five Year Plan in the year 1956. In the article titled 'Political economies and political rationalities of road building in Nepal' asserts,

“Not a single development plan has been issued that does not accord priority to road building and on an average transportation and communication infrastructure has comprised 24 percent of the national budget over the thirteen plans have been issued since 1956.” (Rankin et al., 2017, p. 43)

What is so conspicuous about this whole approach to planning in all of these plans is the imagination of development that would emanate once motorable road connectivity is in place. The main aim of the high investment in road in the first five year plan of Nepal was the advancement in transportation infrastructure is a key to fostering economic growth and development (Pant, 1956). In this sense road became vehicles to economic development of Nepal that the state and planners had envisioned.

If we make a review of the thought that has gone behind road connectivity as a sine quo non to development, one can claim that this planning in terms of development vis-a-vis road connectivity was dominated by the thought that road only constituted a technical undertaking, a physical structure. But lost in these thoughts was the fact that even things like road which then constituted only physicality are also entwined in socio-cultural moorings. As Harvey and Knox (2015) argues road functions beyond its physicality, road is not only objects but also it has different aspects to look at such as politics, economy, geography, symbolic, social and cultural. As a local resident of Manang, I have been a silent spectator from my younger years to all the development debates that have occurred in my locality and in these debates on development, construction of a motorable road linking Chame village with Lamjung district have always taken the centerstage. In fact, one can claim that if there was a single imagination that could be heralded as “the” imagination that pervaded the development landscape in Manang, it definitely had to be a motorable road connecting the district headquarters Chame with Lamjung (Kathmandu, Pokhara and other major cities of Nepal). What

is also true about any development interventions is the fact that even though any development interventions are physical in nature, people tend to pin their own imageries and imaginations to anything that is considered as a development intervention. This is truer in the case of Manang, where the road connectivity linking Chame with the rest of Nepal only became visible in the year 2013. But what is very interesting about any infrastructure development intervention is the fact that these interventions tend to affect people in multiple ways and even the whole development intervention for instance, in the case of Manang, the motorable road itself may signify multiple meanings. The road carrying multiple meanings to people affected by it has been aptly echoed by Harvey and Knox (2015) where they state “Although both the roads we studied were generally conceived as initiatives to bring together previously disconnected places, expectations about what such connections entailed were far from settled” (p. 52). Herein, Harvey and Knox makes a point that roads do not carry homogenous meanings to all the people that the infrastructure project tends to affect. This has been succinctly rendered in these lines “How roads emerged and what they become” (Harvey & Knox, 2015). In similar vein, this study also intends to explore the kind of social imaginations and imageries have come to be an integral part of this newly constructed road in Manang. Most research in the field of motor roads predominantly concentrates on their physical aspects while overlooking the associated intangible elements, thereby constraining a comprehensive understanding of motor roads and their multifaceted nature. Road as an emblem and door to ‘bikas’ (development) and the road serves as a space for envisioning potential futures(Thomas, 2002), this paper aims to gain insights into motor roads and the various relationships associated with the road construction process by examining people’s life experiences both before the introduction of motor roads and after the establishment of road connectivity to unfold the societal perceptions, discourses, and actualities of motor road.

Research methodology

The research fieldwork spanned from August to October 2017, with ongoing engagement including multiple visits and trips along the road, the latest being in June 2023. This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the motor road phenomenon. The research methodology encompasses observations, casual discussions, and twenty interviews with various individuals as sources of primary data. Through this approach, I have been able to gather a wide range of opinions, both individual and collective, regarding the construction of motor roads, spanning the periods before, during, and after road completion. This has allowed me to capture diverse voices, perceptions, experiences, and viewpoints on the same motor road, encompassing individuals from various age groups, genders, social classes, professions, and more. Supplementary information was gathered from secondary sources such as archives, newspapers, government records, and pertinent literature related to the study’s focus.

Introduction of the study area and road

Manang district is classified as a ‘Mountain district’ by the Nepal government, situated in the western part of the country. The district’s total population, as recorded in 2021 by the National Statistics Office is 5,658. The predominant ethnic groups in the Manang district include Gurung, Ghale, Lama, Thakali, Dalits, and various mixed castes practicing Buddhism, Bon, Hinduism and Christianity. Livelihoods in the area are centered on activities such as agriculture, tourism, foreign remittances, trade, animal husbandry, and manual labor. Recent migration patterns indicate that Manang’s residents are moving to urban areas and abroad in pursuit of improved opportunities for education, income, healthcare, and other amenities.

The residents of Manang maintain distinct ways of life, traditions, religions, and social-cultural practices that contribute to the unique identity of both the people and the region. The district boasts natural splendor with notable features like the Annapurna I, II, and III and several mountains, waterfalls, forests, lakes, and a rugged mountainous landscape.

This 65-kilometer road spans from Besisahar in Lamjung to Chame in Manang, running alongside the Marsyangdi River flowing eastward from Manang. The road traverses 35 kilometers within the Lamjung district and 30 kilometers within the Manang district. The scope of this study was 30 Kilometer motor road sections of Manang district. Despite ten years since its completion, the road remains unpaved and unimproved, creating challenges for travelers, particularly during the monsoon season due to mud and landslides on various sections. This road has yet to become an all-season route. Portions of the road are carved into solid Rocky Mountains, and even today, many commuters consider traveling on this road an adventurous journey, hoping for a safe passage during their jeep rides. During the course of this study, a total of 80 jeeps operated, facilitated by two transportation committees, to support travel and transportation along this road.

Contextualizing the significance of road connectivity

Road building history of Nepal marked the year 1950 as an important period. In 1950, Nepal had no roads, but since then, the country has constructed over 6,000 miles of well-paved highways (Bista, 1991). Since introduction of Nepal’s first five-year plan (1956) the road became one of the highly prioritized developmental interventions within the country (Pant, 1956; Blaikie et. al., 2014; Rankin et al., 2017). Government of Nepal Department of Roads, Nepal affirms ‘the reason behind road building is socio-economic development of the country’ (Government of Nepal Department of Road, n.d.). But if we go beyond its materiality roads also has socio-cultural dimensions to look at (Masquelier, 2002; Harvey & Knox, 2015; Thomas, 2002; Larkin, 2013).

Road projects in Nepal are being guided by rhetoric such as remoteness and underdevelopment. In this regard Campbell (2010) states “there is literally convention that Nepal is a country where distances are measured in hours or days of walking, rather than Kilometers travelled” (p. 268). Thus, when it comes to concept of development people generally understand it as material gain. As Pigg (1993) notes, the concept of development captivates the shared imagination of Nepal, where the term for development is ‘Bikas.’ Rooted in Sanskrit, this word, like its English counterpart, conveys the ideas of growth and evolution.

Road building involves different actors and they are state, local people, construction companies, and different personnel. Each and every actor in the road building has their own purpose to get involved in such project. Wilson (2004) argues purpose of road building for state is “to govern”. Similarly “from the first moment that Nepal institutionalized a modern bureaucratic state apparatus, roads have featured as a priority mechanism for pursuing governmental goals” (Rankin et al., 2017). However, the significance of the road is not uniformly perceived by all individuals. Beyond its mere physical existence, it becomes crucial to delve into the “distributional consequences” of the motor road (Jacoby, 2000). This implies that the road brings about outcomes—both planned and unforeseen—that differs across various points in time and geographical locations for both the people and the region, this represents the scenario under examination in this study.

Reimagining societal perceptions of road

Frequently, individuals tend to overlook the significance of roads, yet upon examining the historical background and reasons behind road construction in Nepal, several intricate elements become evident. Residing within geographically isolated and marginalized areas, facing challenges in terms of travel and movement, being cut off from the outside world, grappling with difficulties in accessing essential healthcare during illness, and bearing the burden of exorbitant transportation expenses for goods and services all represent various forms of ‘dukha’ (hardship) and life encounters that compel the local population to aspire for the development of motor roads in the context of this study.

It is asserted that roads also evoke imagination and aspirations among the people (Larkin, 2013; Dalakoglou & Harvey, 2012). People held the expectation that the establishment of roads would alleviate their challenges and breathe new vitality into both the inhabitants and the areas that had previously remained isolated from the external world. In this context, the majority of individuals associate roads with their day-to-day existence in a general sense. The prevailing mental image was that roads would reduce travel durations, facilitate the movement of commodities and services, establish links

to various regions within the nation and major urban centers, and provide access to healthcare and other essential services. Local figures deemed as leaders, engaged in politics as district representatives, perceive roads as symbols and gateways to ‘bikas’ (development) right from the onset, for both the populace and the regions involved. This can be echoed in this line of former MP of Manang district Palten Gurungonce said in public programme held in Chame village, “I will remain engaged in politics until a motor road is established connecting to the Manang district. The construction of a motor road is crucial for the development of the Manang district.”

During a conversation with 72 years old Karma Lama, the Vice-Chairperson of the Manang Development Society² (Henceforth, MDS), it became evident that his motivation to join the MDS stemmed from his personal encounters with challenges during various trade activities in Nepal and India. His aspiration for the establishment of roads and development was profoundly captured in his words, “During my youth, I journeyed across different parts of the country and India for trade. This journeying and trading persisted for an extended period. While in India, I met an individual also hailing from Nepal. In our conversation, he inquired whether my hometown had electricity and motor roads. I responded that we lacked both electricity and motor roads. He then remarked that without these amenities, my involvement in foreign trade would persist, and my homeland would remain devoid of development. This statement left a lasting impression on me, prompting my return to Nepal and my active engagement in politics, where I began advocating for electricity and motor roads. Electricity was eventually realized in 1988 AD, and now, after a prolonged wait, the road was finally accomplished in 2013” (Karma Lama, personal communication, October 03, 2017). This narrative highlights how the yearning for roads and progress emerges from individual life experiences, intertwining the concept of roads with the notion of ‘bikas’ (development).

Upon the commencement of the road project, the residents of Manang fostered visions of a more promising future for their region. Among the images that took root in the minds of the Manang populace were scenes of numerous vehicles traversing daily in front of their homes, enhanced ease in travel and transportation, reduced distances to major urban centers, improved connectivity, a surge in tourist numbers, the realization of a paved road, and an overall transformation of the area through the attainment of a long-awaited and highly coveted motor road. The inhabitants of the region that would benefit from the road displayed cooperation on significant matters concerning its construction, all with the shared aspiration of bringing the road to the Manang district. Consequently,

2 14 Member Manang Development Society (MDS) was formed in Kathmandu with the purpose of tracking and monitoring Besisahar-Chame motor road construction. All members of MDS were representatives of former 13 village development committee (VDC) of Manang district then. After achievement of the road MDS was dissolved.

the collective social visions, the primary political objectives, and the overarching development agenda for both the residents of Manang and political leaders converged around the social construction of the motor road (Dalakoglou, 2010). A decade after the road's completion, a variety of responses and perceptions regarding the road has surfaced among individuals from diverse social, economic, and political backgrounds. These divergent views stem from the road's influence on their daily lives. People shared these experiences through stories, discussing the damage to historical sites caused by road construction, its effects on businesses, security concerns, increased opportunities, connectivity, mobility, and its impact on the traditional indigenous way of life.

Connecting roads: Envisioning and actualizing the links

The inhabitants of Manang once relinquished their optimism for attaining road connectivity in their region, primarily because of the imposing Rocky Mountains that posed significant obstacles throughout the road construction area, compounded by the labor-intensive manual work progress. The sentiment of most individuals surrendering their hopes for the realization of road connectivity was aptly encapsulated in this statement of 64 years local from Chame village: “the prospect of witnessing the completion of this road within our own lifetimes appears uncertain; it's conceivable that this road's realization might only come to fruition during the era of our descendants, perhaps our grandchildren and even great-grandchildren.” Notwithstanding the prevailing skepticism among numerous individuals, the construction of the road was ultimately concluded and accomplished by the year 2013.

Upon the accomplishment of the road construction, a multitude of individuals expressed their elation, witnessing vehicles within their locale for the first time. Subsequent to the road's inauguration, jeeps commenced their daily journeys along the route, leading to the establishment of various transportation committees tasked with overseeing vehicle operations on this newly accessible thoroughfare. Officially designated as the Besisahar-Chame Road, it was entrusted to the Department of Road (DoR) following the road's opening for passage. After the road was officially opened, the local population had anticipated that road connectivity would alleviate all their ‘dukha’ (hardships), ushering in only ‘sukha’ (positive changes).

During the road's inauguration, a noteworthy exchange transpired among the members of the MDS, a group predominantly composed of fourteen individuals hailing from the ManangNgisyang valley in the upper region of Manang. Access to the ManangNgisyang valley necessitated travel through Chame, and potential road expansion to include the upper belt would require passage through Chame village. In order to inaugurate the road, all MDS members presented a stipulation to the Chame community and other MDS

participants: that in the future, the people of Chame should grant permission for the unobstructed extension of the road to the upper Manang belt. Once a verbal agreement was reached, allowing the road's connection to the upper belt of Manang, the MDS members granted approval for the road's inauguration.

Over a distance of 35 kilometers, a road was constructed to link the upper Manang belt to Chame, thereby transforming the Besisahar-Chame road into the Besisahar-Chame-Khangsar 100 Kilometer motor road, under the jurisdiction of the Department of Road.

Thomas (2002) affirms "road figures as a site for imagining possible future" (p. 369). The initiation of road construction introduced exclusively optimistic perceptions and mental representations to the residents within the scope of this study. In an ethnographic exploration of road development in Peru, Harvey and Knox (2015) underscore the contrasting impact of roads on different communities and individuals due to the influence of power dynamics and politics, as illuminated by the diverse narratives gathered from the context of Peru. These stories "describe the entanglement of past desire and future imaginaries that emerge in a relation to the process of road construction" (Harvey & Knox, 2015). On the other hand, following the successful establishment of the road, the enhanced mobility of individuals gave rise to a security concern within the Manang district. Notably, in 2014, two individuals were apprehended in possession of an AK-47 machine gun, and in 2015, another two were apprehended carrying a revolver at the same police checkpoint. This escalation in security challenges was a novel development for both the police force and the inhabitants of the Manang district subsequent to the road's connection. Such incidents had never been reported prior to the introduction of road connectivity in the area. This is echoed in line with Rigg (2002) "roads not only give opportunities for local people to get out and access new opportunities, but also for outsiders to get in" (p 625). Following the establishment of the motor road, residents of the Manang district began to experience increased mobility, with both locals and outsiders frequently coming and going. This mobility also encompasses the regular movement of goods and services in and out.

Subsequent to the road's completion, individuals began embarking on jeep journeys along the perilous route, albeit at a considerable cost ranging from twenty-five hundred to three thousand rupees for the 65-kilometer long passage. This stretch of road witnessed a rapid proliferation of transportation businesses, leading to a continuous surge in the number of jeeps traversing the route. Prior to the road's construction, the local population subsisted on basic necessities and indigenous resources. However, with the advent of road connectivity, a shift occurred as people embraced a more luxurious lifestyle, importing items like refrigerators, pre-made furniture, , and packaged foods.

Furthermore, the introduction of road connectivity triggered a transformation in the architectural landscape. People began constructing Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) structures, utilizing substantial quantities of cement, concrete, red bricks, and iron sourced from urban centers. This shift marked a departure from traditional ecological housing, constructed from locally available materials such as stone, soil, and timber.

In the peak tourist seasons (March-May and September-November), individuals face challenges in locating available jeeps. This difficulty arises due to collaboration among transportation enterprises and a committee³. Tourists are subjected to higher fares compared to locals (paying twice as much, e.g., 5,000 rupees per person for tourists, while locals pay 2,500 rupees). Consequently, a significant number of Nepali travelers encounter difficulties in securing jeep transportation during the tourist season, and this issue persists to the present day. Despite numerous attempts to alleviate the problem through agreements between transportation committees and the local population, these agreements remain largely unimplemented. As a result, conflicts and tense situations arise between local residents and jeep drivers along this route.

Blaikie et al., (2014) conducted an analysis in their book ‘Nepal in Crisis’ that focused on the economic and social repercussions of road construction in West-Central Nepal. Their study observed how the creation of motor roads had unforeseen outcomes, leading to a dependence that favored specific groups while marginalizing others. This connectivity also resulted in the movement of goods and services both into and out of the area. Furthermore, rural roads offered benefits such as access to markets (Jacoby, 2000), enabling local products to reach urban areas and providing expanded economic opportunities for farmers. Conversely, local areas received vegetables and foods of lower quality compared to local produce. The increased demand for local products in cities prompted people to resort to imported goods.

This road development introduced a variety of options for people to consume goods and services based on their financial capacity. Transportation methods shifted from walking on trails to riding in jeeps, and traditional load carriers like men, and mules were replaced by jeeps for transporting goods and services. Expensive private jeeps and motorcycles became common for personal transportation, entirely replacing horses and mules which had been vital for transport prior to road connectivity.

However, road connectivity sometimes led to disconnect between people and places. The change in travel and mobility patterns affected kinship, a significant aspect of Nepali society with both social and material significance. Before roads, people encountered their

3 Two transportation committees were formed and functioning in Besisahar Lamjung district that manages transportation, travel and ticket to the travelers in Besisahar-Chame motor road.

kin, relatives, and families during trail walks. Now, with jeep travel, such encounters are rare unless special arrangements are made with jeep drivers. Many individuals expressed a loss of close connections with their kin, relatives, and family members due to road connectivity.

The impact of road connectivity extended to the renowned Annapurna round trekking trail. I undertook a 30-kilometer journey to observe this trail in the Manang district. Unfortunately, the trekking trail had fallen into disrepair, rendered impassable due to landslides and erosion, after the introduction of the motor road. This led to a loss of economic significance for the local people who relied on tourism in Manang. The motor road also caused disconnection between places as people increasingly chose motor road travel over walking. The Yartung festival, a traditional horse racing event in Chame village, was discontinued following the construction of a motor road. This shift occurred as the practice of keeping horses became less common, with motorcycles and jeeps becoming more prevalent modes of transportation. Many local residents do not highly value the impacts of motor roads on their lives and livelihoods, a sentiment that is evident in their expressed views. They were also unaware of these consequences during the road's construction. In this context, a prominent local leader named Sangdo Lama, who is 74 years old, succinctly remarked, 'Development often accompanies destruction'.

Within a 65-kilometer road stretch, there were 20 villages situated along the trekking trails. However, the road bypassed 12 of these villages completely. Four new settlements emerged along the road, primarily hosting eateries, local lodgings, and traveler-focused shops.

Development interventions bring 'unintended consequences' (Pigg, 1999). Following road connectivity, the Government of Nepal Department of Road posted notice boards in Koto village, a kilometer away from the end of the Besisahar-Chame road in the West. These boards detailed the right of way⁴ (RoW), emphasizing that no structures were to be built within 15 meters to the right and left from the center of the road. Despite the road often being just four meters wide in sections, difficult for two vehicles to pass. This sparked resistance against the notice, prompting discussions between locals, the Department of Road, and the local government. An agreement was reached to maintain a 6-meter road width in settlement areas. If the government's 30-meter RoW policy had been enforced, settlements would have been eliminated, and new structures could not have been built. While building this roadway, numerous historical landmarks and important village shrines have been impacted; raising concerns of potential deterioration

4 The Nepal Road Standard of 2013, established by the Department of Road, designates a width of 15 meters on both sides of the road as the defined Right of Way (RoW).

should a road expansion initiative occur in the near future (Demenge, 2013). The repercussions of the motor road were unforeseen by the local residents in the study area during the road's initial construction.

Varied interpretations of “road”:

The concept of a “road” does not uniformly convey the same significance across various individuals and locations. Additionally, the functionality of a road varies for different groups (Harvey & Knox, 2015). For local and political leaders, a road holds developmental implications, often emerging as a primary political focus in numerous elections. Even today, roads remain a central theme in the electoral agendas of political leaders. However, despite decades of road development, substantial changes have not been realized, and those who traverse these roads continue to face perilous conditions. Regrettably, road safety measures have diminished in priority for relevant state authorities, local communities, transportation committees, and district-level political leaders.

Given that the livelihood of the Manang district primarily hinges on tourism, the advent of road connectivity has introduced shifts in the travel patterns of both tourists and travelers. The area receiving the road is renowned for the iconic Annapurna Circuit⁵, a trek that spans altitudes from a mere 1,400 meters to the towering 5,416-meter Thorong-La pass. The once 21-day Annapurna Circuit trek has now been shortened to 12 days due to the availability of road transport. Consequently, many tourists now opt to travel via jeeps, impacting local hotel businesses, inns, guides, and porters. There has been a surge in domestic tourists in recent years, with many visiting Tilicho Lake, positioned at a staggering 4,919 meters above sea level, and completing the famous Thorong-La pass. However, these local tourists' travel habits predominantly benefit transport services and accommodations like hotels, restaurants, and inns at the starting and ending points. Drivers tend to transport passengers directly to their prearranged lodging and dining establishments, limiting travelers' choices.

Certain segments of the population reap greater benefits from this road connectivity, particularly those engaged in commercial agriculture, transportation enterprises, and specific hotels and restaurants. Unfortunately, this leaves the majority of people with limited access to basic travel and transportation services. Those residing along the midsection of the road face challenges in capitalizing on the road's advantages due to the travel patterns of visitors and the limited seating capacity of jeeps. Most pick-up jeeps

5 The Annapurna circuit trek commences at Besisahar and concludes in Pokhara. This renowned trekking route in the Manang district includes notable features like the Tilicho Lake at an altitude of 4919 meters and the Thorong-La pass at an elevation of 5416 meters.

operating on these roads accommodate a maximum of six passengers, while passenger-carrying jeeps can hold up to ten. These vehicles embark on journeys once their seating capacity is met. However, individuals in mid-way locations often find themselves given lower priority by jeep drivers and are unable to easily travel from their midpoint to other destinations.

These realities of different people can be reflected in this line roads both separate and unite simultaneously (Demenge, 2011). Hence, the interpretation of a road differs among individuals and locations, signifying that roads do not possess a uniform meaning; instead, they encompass diverse and varying interpretations.

The road building process engage interests of state and multiple actors including contractors, land owners, workers, people from different social, economic, and political background. Roads represent a distinct approach to perceiving, organizing, and engaging with space. They hold significant symbolic and political importance for both states and citizens (Wilson, 2004). Different interests are associated with road construction budget, daily wages of the labors, compensation claim over land in right of way easement and safe travel demand from local and travelers, road survey, and operation of the vehicles in the road, transportation, and road upgrade.

The government holds a distinct interest in road construction, driven by the objectives of enhancing connectivity and fostering economic growth through national infrastructure development (Pant, 1956). On the contrary, Wilson (2004) introduces the concept of a 'territorializing regime,' which highlights how roads built by the state can also be regarded as a means of managing its population (Scott, 1998).

Conversely, the residents of the areas where roads are being constructed possess various interests related to road building. For instance, during the road construction phase, many individuals within the construction zone demanded higher prices for their land. Laborers working on chiseling steep rocks in various sections of the road sought increased wages, while contractors requested extensions to project completion deadlines. Residents from the border villages of Manang and Lamjung called for a re-survey of the road connecting Tal Village, sparking a month-long protest that led to the sealing of the border.

Moreover, transportation committees voiced their own demands concerning transport fares and vehicle operation methods. Local residents and travelers joined forces to protest against the transportation business syndicate and committee, decrying unfair travel fares and the monopoly they held. These diverse interests underscore that road construction sites become arenas where various parties - including individuals, groups, and the government - converge during the construction process, the subsequent aftermath, and the operational phase.

Conclusions

On the whole, any material intervention are seen to bring positive changes to the peoples livelihood and such material intervention are perceived as offering a blend of economic and social advancement, democracy, freedom, and technological advantages, it can simultaneously be interpreted as harboring risks and threats, including social unrest, violence, and the degradation of landscapes and rural values (Boholm, 2013). The establishment and realization of the Besisahar-Chame motor road encompass more than just tangible benefits; they encompass desires for the road, the road's construction, geographical factors, economic, and varying levels of politics that have played roles from the road's inception to construction, realization, and operation. The impetus for desiring a motor road, which gives rise to distinct images and perceptions among local residents, stems from factors like physical and psychological remoteness (Rigg, 2002) and past experiences of dukha (hardship). These factors are echoed in the narratives of the people, grounded in their experiences of struggle. However, once the road has connected a place, diverse experiences emerge among people, illustrating that roads carry multifaceted meanings.

Attitudes toward the motor road are divided, with some individuals supporting it while others oppose it. These viewpoints stem from individual experiences and backgrounds encompassing education, social status, culture, occupation, and politics. Hence, the study of the road delves not only into the location and its residents but also encompasses stories, geography, history, and politics. These aspects contribute to the formation of diverse images and perceptions within the community.

This 65-kilometer Besisahar-Chame motor road represents a tangible intervention by the state in the name of development. The road's realization has a lengthy history, marked by different stages that local residents have witnessed, lived through, and experienced before, during, and after its construction. The road's impact has manifested in unintended consequences for the people of the Manang district.

The desire for a road emerged when the area was disconnected in the past, driven by diverse life experiences and incidents spanning travel hardships, physical and psychological isolation, transportation challenges, and more. Imaginings of the road as a development intervention by the state planted the seeds of distinct perceptions, including visions of a paved road, shortened travel distances, improved transportation, enhanced healthcare access, market connectivity, general access, and an augmented district identity. However, the construction of the motor road has also brought about the destruction and abandonment of historical sites, the jeopardizing of village shrines, the fading of forgotten festivals, shifts in indigenous local life, and transformations in kinship dynamics, all of which local residents recall as essential aspects of their lives that have been altered by road construction.

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