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DEVELOPMENT AND LIVELIHOOD CHANGES AMONG THE KUMALS IN THE POKHARA VALLEY, NEPAL

Bidyanath Bhurtel
Ram B. Chhetri

Introduction

This paper attempts to relate the livelihood changes among the Kumals of the Pokhara Valley in the Western Region of Nepal to the kind of 'development' being experienced within the region as well as within the country during the past couple of decades by different groups of people including Kumals themselves. The changes in the livelihood strategies of Kumals are seen here as their way of adapting to the changing natural, socio-cultural and economic environments around them in general. In order to explain the strategies adopted by Kumal individuals and households, a brief discussion of general changes in the environs of the area will also be useful. However, the main thrust of the paper is to explore and explain the state of the traditional occupation of Kumals (i.e. the making of the clay pots, which may have earned them the identity as *kumaal*) and the new economic activities or strategies adopted by them today.

The data used in this paper was collected during a fieldwork between mid-November 1999 to mid-January 2000 as a part of an ongoing research project on Environmental Change and Livelihood Strategies in the Hills of Nepal. In line with the main research project, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The quantitative data was felt to be necessary in order to understand the socio-economic aspect of Kumal society such as changes in primary occupation, education and economic activities. A household census and survey was administered in the 73 Kumal households of Kumal Gaun in Lekhnath municipality. The ethnographic data (i.e. the qualitative and more contextual information) required for the study were collected by employing conventional anthropological methods. A check-list (developed earlier in the project) was used to guide the interviews—with the key informants and groups in formal interviews—and field observation as well as for informal interviews.

After giving a brief introduction of Kumals in the study area, we will note some of the environmental changes that have taken place during the last couple of decades in association with the developmental activities in the region. An attempt is made to identify the incidents and events that have played momentous roles in prompting changes in the natural, socio-cultural or economic environs of the region. In the next section, the main findings of the study in relation to the changes in the livelihood strategies will be presented. In the case of the Kumals, we want to show that there were two

parallel processes that played key roles in shaping the present life-ways of Kumals. First, the historical incidents and events that took place or were carried out as developmental activities have resulted in the adoption of new values, and this is manifested by change in some of their cultural traditions. Second, the macro policies regarding the use of the environmental resources have affected their customary socio-cultural institutions and practices. Although they were parallel processes, the present lifestyles adopted by the Kumals will be shown to be actually due the inter-relations between the two.

This paper ultimately attempts to link up the changes in the utilization of resources, cultural traditions and economic activities and to relate them to the overall process of development in the region. Theoretically, the study has remained closer to the broader framework of the anthropology of development and aspects of political ecology, which tends to deal with the dynamics of resource utilization.

The Kumals in the Pokhara Valley

The word Kumal in the Nepali language denotes a person who is engaged in manufacturing clay pots as an occupation. Some scholars have considered the Kumals as one of the 'tribal' peoples (see Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 313) although more recently, they have been listed under the *adivasi janajati* category. Although Kumals are to be found in different parts of Nepal (see also Kattel 2000), their place of origin has not yet been confirmed. Their settlements are generally located in river basins and plains of lower hills and inner Terai of the country (Bista 1980: 128, Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 313). Differentiating basically on the basis of geographic regions in which they are found today, they are recognised as *Madesh* Kumal (i.e. those living in Madesh or the plains), *Newar* Kumal (mainly in Kathmandu valley) and *Pahade* Kumal (those from the Hills). Like most of the ethnic minorities in Nepal, they seem to have been incorporated in the caste system of hierarchy as *matwalis*. In it, they were put in the inferior sub-caste of the *masine* (meaning enslavable) *matwali jati* in the Muluki Ain of 1854.

In the caste hierarchy, the people carrying out a traditional occupation were assigned a definite caste name. A speculation can be made about the Kumals of Pokhara that is redolent in the wide differences in appearance within Kumals. Originally people of both Indo-Aryan *khas* and mongoloid Magars living in the area might have been engaged in the making of clay pots which was made possible by the availability of the suitable type of clay across the Seti Gandaki River, near the village. As they became more skillful, their acquired knowledge and art was passed down to the successive generations. In this way pottery became the traditional occupation of the Kumal families living in the present study area. They might have been labeled as 'kumals' in the code simply because they were 'kumaales' or people who made clay pots. Due to the lack of ethnohistoric data on these

people, we are tempted to speculate that the Kumals may be one of the products of centuries long interaction of the Magars with the Khas living in the same ecological zone. In the caste echelon they belong in the same position as the non-caste ethnic groups of people like the Magars and the Gurungs. For these reasons, the collective identity that Kumals of this region have might have something to do with both ethnicity and caste, and to label them as 'tribes' might invite serious debate.

In the Pokhara valley of Kaski district, Kumals are found in several villages within Lekhnath municipality alone (see Table 1). These people today claim to be aboriginals of this locality. As Kaski district is in the hilly region, Kumals living here fall under the category of *Pahade* Kumals. The present study covered all the settlements shown in Table 1 and the area is henceforth referred to as Kumal Gaun after the main settlements of Kumals in the municipality.

Table 1: Distribution of Kumal Households by Settlements in Lekhnath Municipality, 2000

Settlements/Villages	Number of Households	Percentage
Kumal Gaun*	44	60.27
Jalkini Danda	13	17.81
Buke Khola	2	2.74
Bhoonkuna	9	12.33
Gatcha phant	2	2.74
Gairi Bazaar	3	4.11
Total	73	100.00

Source: Field Survey, January 2000. *This is the main village. The Kumals in other villages live in mixed settlements of other caste/ethnic groups. The last 4 villages are put under Arghaun in later Tables in this paper.

The Kumals in the study area have also been farmers while the making and selling of clay pots was an important part of life for most of the Kumal households here. The income from pottery (sold for cash or exchanged with cereals) supplemented their income from agriculture. Today the significance of this particular activity—i.e., making clay pots for the market—as a livelihood strategy seems to have diminished due to changes in the social and economic aspects of life in Nepal in general and for Kumals and their 'customers' in particular. In fact, their traditional practice (and the skills) of making clay pots is in the verge of disappearance altogether from Kumal Gaun. They bear the surname Kumal but today they are no longer a group of people engaged in pottery—skillfully designing and making various types of clay pots, pitchers, and other items as they did in the past. As we will discuss below, the availability of substitutes (plastic or metal utensils) have also been

responsible for this abandonment of traditional occupation by the Kumals in the study area.

Development, Environmental Changes and the Kumals

The activities carried out as development were based on the orthodox notion of development. Escobar (1997) has concisely summed up this notion of development, as it was understood especially in the early post World War II period in the following words:

[It is] the process to pave the way for the replication in most of Asia and Latin America of the conditions that were supposed to characterize the more economically advanced nations of the world—industrialization, high degrees of urbanization and education, technification of agriculture, and widespread adoption of the values and principles of modernity. (Escobar 1997).

The changes in the socio-cultural and economic environment for the Kumals in the present study site are rooted in the history of the region. The most noteworthy of the changes in this environment is the gradual emergence of local market centers or the bazaars, namely those of Arghaun, Talchowk Begnas and Sisuwā that surround the traditional settlements of the Kumals. This development can in turn be seen as an outgrowth of the process of urbanization in the Pokhara valley.

One of the most important factors that paved the way for the urbanization of Pokhara was the construction of *Prithvi Rajmarga* (Prithvi Highway), started in the mid 1960s and completed in 1972 (Stiller and Yadav 1979: 228). It can be argued that no other highway across the hills of Nepal has had such an obvious impact on the local economy as the *Prithvi Rajmarg*. First, since it was connected with the *Tribhuvan Rajpath* that linked the plains of Nepal and India to the hills, this highway has facilitated the flow of goods and commodities from the south and thereby opened up the market of the hills to products from India. The adverse effects of this to the local production systems have been mentioned frequently by researchers (Blaikie et.al. 1980, Stiller and Yadav 1979, Mishra 1986). Second, the emergence of a gateway-hinterland relationship among the trading centers and settlements has been equally significant when analyzing the after effects of the construction of this highway (see Messerschmidt 1995: 101).

Coming back to the study area, the formation of a mini gateway-hinterland structure can be discerned. Before the construction of the *Prithvi Rajmarga*, a trail that linked the town of Pokhara to Besisahar of Lamjung district in the east dissected Kumal Gaun. Caravans of mules carrying goods can still be seen to be using this trail. But the difference now is that when caravans of the mules come into the Pokhara valley from the hills on this side, they tend to stop at the bus terminal of Khudikomuhan, located about

four kilometers east of Kumal Gaun. After the highway was constructed, a gateway bazaar called Arghaun took shape and increasingly became the center of trade and commerce at the point where the old trail joined this highway. Plastic utensils, kitchenware, and metal pots and pans of various types are so easily accessible that one can forget the innovative local productions of crafty clay pots manufactured by Kumals just a couple of kilometers inside the hinterland.

Among many impacts of 'westernization' in Pokhara valley, the most noticeable have been the diffusion of western cultural values in the region. Every year the number of pizza and ice cream parlors, fast food centers and late night activities (e.g., parties to celebrate Christmas and Gregorian New Year) have been increasing. For instance, just when field work for this study was underway (November 1999 - January 2000), many locals were seen to be arduously participating in the celebration of the 'millennium night' by partying the night away. The elderly people in the study site were quick to comment that celebrations of such events were unheard even a decade ago. The attraction towards consumerism is not a thing that can be contained within a certain boundary. The mass communication media like radio and television further accentuate the diffusion process. Kumal Gaun, situated so close to Pokhara (an important urban center in the region), has not been spared by this phenomenal diffusion of values creeping in from a consumer culture from all over the world.

The disposition towards the adoption of so-called modern values is also manifested by the changes in the cultural traditions of Kumals over the years. The changes that have occurred in the marriage practices of Kumals demonstrate this. The Kumal practice caste endogamy and clan exogamy.¹ People recall that in comparison to ten or fifteen years ago, many Kumal children are able to go to school now. Many of the cases of marriage by elopement that have become common now are related to the increase in the incidence of school going among youths. Many of the young boys and girls were found to have met their spouses at school. In addition, local people argue that easy communication facilities, entertainment channels on television and similar other amenities are enabling the young people to have different attitude towards sex and marriage. As reported by the elderly Kumals, in general, there is a more liberal attitude towards sex and marriage these days.

Elderly Kumals also point out that some of the traditional practices related to the marriage ceremony have been replaced by non-Kumal customs. For instance, in a traditional arranged marriage, a custom known as *vundko khuwaune* was practiced. This custom involved the prospective bridegroom's parent visiting the prospective bride's parents' home with a good size earthen jug (known as *vundko*) filled with home-brewed *rakshi* and giving a small feast to the bride's parents as a token of the confirmation of the relationship

(some sort of engagement). The bride's parents accept the homemade liquor or *raksi* if they approve of the proposed relationship. But now, Kumals too have started to adopt the practice of *janai-supari*—an engagement ceremony common among the Bahun-Chhetris. These are examples of how the new generation of Kumals are becoming 'sanskritized' and giving up their own traditional cultural practices.

In relation to the natural environment, the changes in access and the rights to use natural resources like forest products (mainly firewood) and clay needed for making pots seem to have significantly impacted the livelihood of Kumals. The access of the Kumals of the study area to the forest resources started decreasing rapidly from the time when the forests all over the country were nationalized and subsequently turned into Panchayat Forests and Panchayat Protected Forests. What is more interesting is that their situation regarding access to forests did not improve when national forests turned into community forests since they have not been the members of any Forest Users Groups and they did not have a community forest in their ward. The management of other resources such as the clay available in public lands has not been in their favour either. Some Kumals pointed out that, at least in the case of clay, the problem is not of reduced access but one of a change in the social environment. They argue that now there is no social co-operation among Kumals in fetching the clay from the mines. Besides, as noted already, the demand for Kumal pottery has reduced—because many of the utensils used in the homes are made of metal and not of clay any more. In this way, the decline in the availability of the natural resources coupled with technological developments have impacted on the livelihood strategies and cultures of the Kumals.

Changes in the Livelihood Strategies of the Kumals

By the term 'livelihood strategy' one might make the obvious mistake of thinking only of the economic activities that a group of people are engaged in. The socio-cultural norms and values that legitimize or inhibit the involvement of people into such activities are not less important to justify adoption or non-adoption of a given economic activity (or occupation) in order to earn a living. In fact it will be argued in this section that in the case of the Kumals in the study area, their changing values in favor of so-called modernity is one of the factors influencing their adoption of new economic activities. This is not to deny that access to or lack of access to natural resources (e.g. clay and firewood for the Kumals) are equally important in determining the choice and/or continuity of an economic activity (pottery in the present case).

Having discussed the changes in the natural, socio-cultural and economic environment of the Kumals in the research area, let us now comparatively discuss the main economic activities in which Kumals were involved in the

past and what they are engaged in today. The idea of 'past' in this study generally refers to a time point or period at least a decade ago and beyond. Particular events and incidents relating to the specific economic activities have been mentioned in order to explain the adoption or abandonment of the socio-economic activities in question. We will first discuss the traditional economic activities of the Kumals and then talk about their current livelihood strategies.

Traditional Livelihood Strategies

The Kumals lived more or less as a homogenous social unit in the past. They lived in close clusters and this was very important for them as it facilitated a joint involvement in their economic activities and cultural traditions. They claim that they owned agricultural and forested lands in a place called *Ritthevani* on *kipat*.² In fact there is still a place called 'Kipat' near the Kumal Gaun. The traditional food crops grown by the Kumals included maize and millet. During the rainy season with the onset of the monsoon, some wet land rice-paddy was also cultivated although the yield was not very significant. Thus the traditional local diet consisted of a thick paste of millet or maize flour called *dhindo* while rice was cooked only on special occasions like the major festivals and wedding ceremonies when pork (or sometimes mutton or chicken) was also cooked to be consumed with the rice. Maize and millet were also used for brewing local *jand* (locally brewed beer) and for making *raksi* (locally distilled liquor), which have remained regular items of their food and drinks.

There were three distinct economic activities in which the Kumals were engaged in the past. The predominant one was undoubtedly agriculture—because every household was engaged in farming. The other important economic activity for the Kumals was of course making clay pots. The third one was fishing in both fresh water rivers and lakes. The socio-cultural institutions of the Kumals in the past generally revolved around these activities and also regulated the use of the resources in their natural environment. Let us describe briefly the traditional aspect of each of these major activities as they were practiced in the past.

State of Agriculture in the Past: the Kumal people of this region have always relied upon agriculture in its various forms as their chief economic activity. But the socio-economic and cultural environment in which agriculture was carried out in the past was completely different from today. The socio-cultural norms and institutions that existed before have to be mentioned in order to understand the state of agriculture among the Kumals in the past.

Kumals have always practiced a sedentary type of agriculture. They have also been living in the present locality for many generations. In the past, they

were able to grow two harvests of food crops in a year. The actual amount harvested depended upon the location of their farmland in relation to the natural sources of water. Many elderly Kumals recall that those who had farms closer to the water sources (i.e. towards the northern/upper end of the village) were able to get comparatively better yields of rice paddy than others. However, even for those farmers who received better yields, their total production of rice was not enough to meet the food requirements of their families for the whole year. Since the cultivation of paddy depended upon the availability of rainwater (and the soil here has a very low capacity to retain water for long), the annual yields were unpredictable. Given this situation, other food crops like millet and maize were quite important for the local farmers as staple food. As mentioned earlier, the main staple diet for Kumals in the past was *dhindo* and rice was considered a delicacy and consumed mainly on occasions of social or cultural importance. Some Kumal informants reported that they still prefer *kodo-ko dhindo* (the paste made by cooking millet flour with water). They argue (in a nostalgic tone) that there was a time when they gained so much strength to work in their fields from a good lunch comprising mainly of *dhindo*.

Livestock raising has remained an integral element of their agriculture. They kept buffaloes, cows, goats, pigs and fowls/poultry. The buffaloes were kept for their milk, cows for milk and for producing oxen (needed for traction), goats and pigs for their meat and chicken for meat and eggs. The animals also were sources of energy which they provided in the form of dung. While the compost was used in the farm, dried dung cakes called *guintha* (valued by the locals for giving a constant mild heat when burned) was used as fuel. The *guinths* were also used to bake the clay pots to some extent but this practice had to be given up because of the scarcity of this kind of fuel in recent years. Considering the presence of vast areas that could be used for grazing, Kumals kept quite a relatively large number of livestock. The elderly Kumals recall that on average each household had at least a pair of buffaloes and cattle (including cows and oxen), a couple of goats and pigs and few chickens. Of course, the better off families had many more in comparison to the poor or economically average households.

Those Kumal households who did not have larger or more productive farms to be able to produce enough for the family from their own farmland were engaged in the *adhiyan* (share cropping) system of cultivation. *Adhiyan*, in actuality, was like a socio-economic institution that guarantees some degree of distribution of resources, in this case, food produced through cultivation. This practice seemed to be applied mostly to cultivation of major food crops in the past. Not only did the system of *adhiyan* provide the cultivator and farmers with half the food grains produced on the farm, but also other by-products like hay and husks in the case of paddy.

There were still other socio-economic institutions that helped in strengthening the intra-community ties among the Kumals. Most of the adult males participated in *Parma* (mutual exchange of labour) which involved the sharing of human labourer in cultivating and harvesting the food crops. In an economy of those days when cash was not readily available the effectiveness of this practice was immense (see Messerschmidt 1981). If a man or a woman goes to work in another villager's field for a day, she/he expects a day's labour in return. This is similar to the practice of *pareli* among the Limbus in Eastern Nepal (see Caplan 1970: 108). In the Kumal Gaun, the household receiving the services had to treat people providing the labour with a major meal in the evening comprising of rice, pork and *raksi* or *jand*. They were also treated with light food during the daytime. *Parma* was of course not limited to agricultural works only. The other institution was the communal ownership of land called *kipat*, most of which was under forest cover (as recalled by elderly Kumals) and thus supplied the Kumal households with the much needed forest resources in those days.

Making and Selling Clay Pots: Most of the people interviewed in the study site reported that either their parents or their grandparents were engaged in making the clay pots and selling them in the village as well as in the surrounding areas. Local gatherings or *melas* (fairs) like the one held at Dhungesangu on the first day of the month of *magh* (January/February) were the occasions when Kumals could sell their clay pots. The *melas* were attended not only for selling the pots but also for buying the daily essentials like cooking oil and spices. The Kumals also went around with loads of clay pots to the rapidly growing bazaars of Pokhara, Khudikomuhan, Syangkhu and Talbeshi (around the Begnas-Rupa Lakes) and the surrounding villages. Those Kumals who could sell the pots in the neighboring villages and had deficit food productions at home also bought or took maize and millet in exchange for their pots.

After fetching the clay from the other side of the *Gandaki* (the Seti River is often referred as *Gandaki* by locals) on a co-operative effort, the clay was worked on for next few days in order to make it ready to be given any kind of shapes. Probably due to the elaborate methods they employed in preparing the clay itself, they claim that their pots were much better in quality than those made by the Newar Kumals of Kathmandu. They said that those who recognized the better quality came to the village to buy their pots. They made a limited variety of pots and their pots were congruent with the culture of the people. An estimated selling price for some of the items made by Kumals is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Clay Pots of the Kumals and Market Price by Types in the Past

Types of Pots	Major Uses	Price (Rupees/pot)
<i>Handi</i>	Roasting corn	1.50
<i>Hanna</i>	Brewing <i>raksi</i>	2.50
<i>Aari</i>	Making/storing pickles	3.00
<i>Paini</i>	Brewing <i>raksi</i>	6.00
<i>Gagro/Ghainto</i>	Fetching and storing water	5.00

Source: Fieldwork, January 2000 (Key informant interviews).

Fishing: The Kumals of the region were also found to have a close association with fishing. The Kumal Gaun lies in close proximity with the Seti Gandaki and its two tributaries Bijayapur *khola* and Bagadi *khola*. The tributaries are considered to be good sources of fresh-water fish during the monsoon months when the rivers swell considerably. In the winter months the Kumals visited the Begnas and Rupa lakes for fishing. In the past, fish were used to supplement their diet at home. They used hooks, rods and fishing nets either made in their own homes or bought from people like the *Jalaris* who are known for making their living from fishing (see Chettri's paper on *Jalaris* in this volume).

Livelihood Strategies of the Kumals Today

The rapid growth of the town of Pokhara into an urban center is certainly one of the primary factors responsible for initiating socio-cultural and economic changes in the surrounding areas like Kumal Gaun. The increase in social amenities and economic opportunities has indeed influenced the process of change in local cultural norms and values. For instance, a relatively stable and self-reliant Kumal village economy (with numerous socio-economic institutions) in the past finds itself to have been dragged into wider economic scenario today where their very position defined as it is on the basis of their occupation has become a disadvantage for them. Hence the Kumals are compelled to participate in the game where their position in the play field is unfair from the start. The natural resources that they had access to are out of their reach today. In sharp contrast to the economic activities they adopted in the past, every single economic activity adopted by Kumals today seems to be an influence of a globalized market economy. In this section we discuss changes in the primary economic activities of Kumals.

Involvement in Agriculture Today: At present doing agriculture mainly comprises of activities related to the cultivation of crops and keeping livestock. The economy, though still predominantly agrarian, has diversified to a significant extent. Agriculture does not fulfill the undisputed role of being the primary economic activity. As the data presented in Table 3 show,

53 (74.36%) households are today engaged in growing cereal crops while the remaining 20 households have adopted other activities for making a living.

Table 3: Distribution of Households by Farming Activities and their Ranking

Farming Activities	Ranking of the Economic Activity			Total (%)
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
Growing Cereal Crops	33	17	3	53 (72.60)
Growing Vegetables	4	7	8	19 (26.03)
Livestock Raising	1	0	0	1 (1.37)
Total	38 (52.06%)	24 (32.87%)	11 (15.07%)	73 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, January 2000.

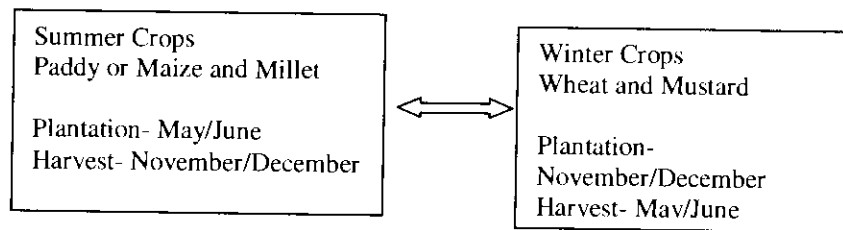
The survey data presented in Table 3 show that there are a considerable number of households (20 or 27.39%) for whom dependence upon cereal crop cultivation is secondary or tertiary in importance at present. Only 33 (45.20%) Kumal households in the study site reported growing cereal crops as their primary economic activity. Growing of vegetables for the market seems to have become an important activity for many Kumal households. About 26% (19 households) of the total Kumal households were engaged in growing vegetables either as primary, secondary or tertiary economic activity (see Table 3).

The construction of an irrigation canal in 1983 (i.e. 2040 BS) could be considered to be an important factor for the changes in the form of agriculture practiced by Kumals. The canal enters the village via Arghaun and obviously Kumal households lying near the bazaar have easy access to this facility as well. Apart from a few households located at the lower end of the village, all Kumal households are able to raise the productivity of their lands due to this facility. At present there are three basic trends in preoccupation of Kumals in agriculture. First, the majority of the households are now involved in raising many more food crops through an intensification of farming. Before the advent of the irrigation facility they could reap only two major harvests in a year. At the start of the monsoon, they planted paddy or maize. The yield was not satisfactory. After harvesting the crops the plots were prepared for the plantation of winter crops like wheat or mustard. Now they enjoy three major harvests in a year (called '*tin bali khane*') along with several vegetables in between. As soon as they harvest their paddy around October-November, they can now prepare their farms for planting winter vegetables. The most common vegetables planted are potatoes and cauliflower. When these vegetables are harvested they are able to plant maize and millet around February-March. These crops become ready before they plant paddy again. In this way the cycle of cultivation continues.

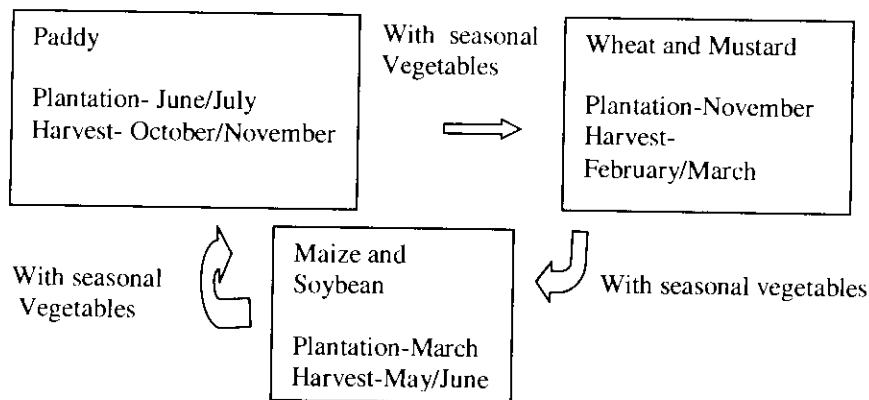
Figure 1 also reveals that there has been an intensification of food crops grown by Kumals over the last couple of decades. Before the construction of the irrigation canal, they had to depend upon rain water and this allowed them only two major harvests. In the summer, they cultivated paddy, maize or millet. The productivity per unit of land was not uniform throughout the village. After the harvest of summer crops, they cultivated the winter crops and there were almost no signs of the cultivation of vegetables in significant amounts. After the construction of the irrigation canal, another important step in the general cycle was added. It was possible because the abundant irrigation water made the harvests quicker. That means they were able to have three major crop harvests and in addition to that the plantation of vegetable crops has been made possible. In fact, some have benefited to the extent that they are now able to earn significantly by being engaged in the growing of vegetables throughout the year.

Figure 1: Change in General Cycles of the Cultivation of Major Food Crops in the Kumal Gaun

a) Before the construction of the irrigation canal



b) After the construction of the canal



The second trend in crop cultivation is simply the continuation of the old ways in which they had two major harvests in a year. This has more to do with social reasons than anything else. Either some of the household members engaged in this type of cultivation are also involved in other income earning activities or simply they do not have enough resources, land or labour, to carry out more intensive cultivation.

The third trend, due to its sheer potential of overtaking the above two trends, deserves a special mention. This is the tendency among Kumals to shift towards allocating their farms and resources towards growing more and more vegetables. Although the information presented in Table 3 shows that there are only four households making their living primarily from vegetable farming, the point to be noted is the inclination of more households towards it. There are 19 households getting handsome earnings from this engagement but 15 of them can not give up their traditional practice of cultivating major seasonal food crops. Nevertheless, 4 households carry out the practice of market gardening throughout the year. Only a couple of decades ago, they cultivated crops mainly for home consumption and if there was any surplus they sold the products. The cash income was used to buy other household necessities. Today, farm production is mainly for the market (i.e. to earn cash income) and then only for home consumption. Moreover, some of the households have at least one of their members involved in other income earning activities. At least three Kumal households own private businesses (retail shops in all cases) that more or less revolve around farm products (i.e. buying and selling of food grains, vegetables, etc.). In other words, more socio-economically affluent Kumals have been able to strengthen their household's livelihood security by mobilizing the resources at their disposal. Evidently, their detachment with the traditional web of their society was the prerequisite for them to embrace the economy dictated by the market. On the other hand, more than 90% of Kumal households in the interior part of the village show the first trend discussed above.

Table 4 shows the main vegetables grown by Kumal households and the months (according to the Nepali calendar) in which they are usually planted and harvested. The types mentioned in Table 4 are the main ones that promise good earnings to the Kumals and for this reason other vegetables have not been included in the list. In other words, the major objective of growing these crops was to earn cash income by selling the product in the market.

Table 4: Types of Vegetables Grown by Kumals for the Market

Vegetable Types	Plantation Months	Harveting Months
Potatoes	Mangsir (Nov-Dec)	Falgun-Chaitra (Feb/Mar-Mar/Apr)
Tomatoes	Mangsir (Nov-Dec)	Falgun-Chaitra (Feb/Mar-Mar/Apr)
Cauliflower	Bhadra (Aug-Sept)	Mangsir-Falgun (Nov/Dec-Feb/Mar)
Cucumber/Pumpkin	Falgun (Feb-Mar)	Baisakh-Bhadra (Apr/May-Aug/Sept)
Sponge-gourd*	Falgun (Feb-Mar)	Baisakh-Bhadra (Apr/May-Aug/Sept)

Source: Field Work, January 2000. *Note: Although other vegetables of the gourd family are also planted, sponge-gourd is the main one that is sold.

During the 1999-2000 agricultural season, one farmer named Krishna Bahadur Kumal (who specializes in vegetable farming now and is ranked as one of the two best vegetable farmers in the area—the other being a non-Kumal)³ reported that he sold cauliflower worth 10,000 rupees, cucumber worth 50,000 rupees and sponge-gourd worth 30,000 rupees. The other 3 Kumal households reported that they too made similar earnings.⁴ Although these are approximate figures, it becomes evident that the vegetable farming has become a very lucrative business at present. In the village, there are other *Bahun* and *Chhetri* households which are also actively engaged in growing vegetables for the market.

The Kumals report that a full time engagement in growing vegetables for the market is not a trouble-free affair. Although informants mentioned a variety of problems that are hindering a more effective production of vegetables, the most common problems were clearly the ones that could question the sustainability of this particular activity. They reported that:

- 1) In the month of Shrawan (July-August) due to increased rainwater, floods could bring about siltation that can be very harmful to some of the vegetables. Moreover, the irrigation water from the Bijayapur *khola* carries a lot of sand that sometimes clogs the canal while affecting soil texture in the farms. This could cause a serious problem in the long run.
- 2) The fertility of the soil is decreasing and they explained it by saying that although they have practiced the same methods and used the same materials, the production of the vegetables is declining.
- 3) There is more competition in the market due to increased production. Since people from surrounding areas and with better resources are attracted to this business, it is hard to say that the Kumals with their limited resources will continue to reap benefit from vegetable farming.

In addition to the change in the forms of agriculture, there have been notable changes in some practices related to farming such as the systems of *adhiyan* and *parma*. Today the socio-economic institution of *adhiyan* can be seen as the out growth of its older version due to the significant changes of the economic environment. Modern developments and market forces today

may have introduced a socio-economic rift between a group of people who were close-knit until not long ago. The change in the size of the landholding is one of the phenomena justifying the presence of the rift. As a result, the institution of *adhiyan* among the Kumals is not limited to food crop cultivation. Today relatively poorer Kumals are engaged in activities ranging from raising livestock (even chickens and ducks) to weaving straw mats and bamboo baskets on *adhiyan*. Some women were even selling the vegetables on *adhiyan*.

Local Wage Labour: The practice of agricultural wage labour has always been one of the indispensable components of the overall economy of the Kumals. In contrast to *adhiyan* or *parma* a person engaged in agricultural labour is free to make her/his own decision whether or not to provide such services. The main difference today is that unlike in the past when the wage labourers used to be paid in kind they are now paid in cash. Some local households do still engage in labourer exchange and going to work for them is known as *mela jaane*. For them the *mela jaane* is a common thing during the plantation, weeding, and harvesting of major food crops (rice, wheat and maize). The local women reported that in the *mela*, if not done for *parma*, they still prefer to be paid in kind.

Not only does the practice of agricultural labour have historical significance, but Kumals all over Nepal are found to have been engaged in doing manual works to earn their living (see also Kattel 2000 and another article on Kumals in this volume). The Kumals in Kaski district are not an exception. They have had a patron-client relationship with the people from the so-called higher castes like the *bahun*s and *chhetris* of the nearby areas for generations. The most common manual works undertaken now by the Kumals of this region are portering and the physical labour in construction works. Table 5 presents a summary of individual Kumals who are involved in various wage earning activities in order to make a living for their families.

Table 5: Distribution of the Kumal Households by Settlement and Work Type

Settlements	Type of Wage Work			Total
	Unskilled	Semi-Skilled	Skilled	
Kumal Gaun	11	10	1	22
Jalkini Dando	-	2	2	4
Arghaun	7	5	-	12
Total Individuals	18	17	3	38
Total Households	15	15	2	32

Source: Field Survey, 2000.

A number of individuals in the study area possess skills in carpentry, masonry, welding and wiring. Such individuals have been put under the semi-skilled category in Table 5. Those who have been put under the skilled labourer category are either drivers or trained in computers. As the data in Table 5 reveal, 38 persons from 32 (43.83% of the total households) Kumal households are earnings wages from various types of wage-work in order to make a living for their families. A point to be noted here is that although this is the main economic activity that earns these households their daily income (to buy their necessities), these households do not fully depend on wage labourer alone for subsistence. These earnings supplement other sources of income including their own annual agricultural production.

The Export of Labour: The discussion of wage labour above is confined to the wage labouring activities within the local area. The story of wage labour works embraced by these Kumals does not end there. Today, a significant number of Kumal youths are in Gulf countries selling their labour (see Table 6) or are aspiring to do so in the future. This is a comparatively recent phenomenon which was reported to have begun about a decade ago for the Kumals. The countries they are going to are Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain.

Table 6: Distribution of Kumal Households by Settlements and those Working in the Gulf Countries

Settlement				Total
	Unskilled	Semi-Skilled	Skilled	
Kumal Gaun	7	4	1	12
Jalkini Dando	1	1	-	2
Arghaun	4	-	1	5
Total Individuals	12	5	2	19
Total Households	11	4	2	17

Source: Field Survey, January 2000.

As can be seen from Table 6, most of the Kumals who have gone to the Gulf Countries are involved in unskilled manual labour work. The skilled Kumals here are those who are reported to be working as vehicle drivers in the Gulf. The earning from this source is the most important activity upon which their respective families depend. In sending these young men to the Gulf, their families are making a significant investment, perhaps the most costly investment they have ever made. It was reported that the costs for sending one person to the Gulf comes to about 85-100 thousand rupees. Some of the households had to sell private land in order to accumulate the required cash for this purpose. Others who did not possess land that could be sold had no other alternative but to take a loan from local moneylenders. The interest rate they had to pay on such loans ranged from 3-5 rupees a month for each of the 100 rupees borrowed (i.e. 60% per annum).

When Kumals or any other wage workers first go to the Gulf countries they get a visa for two years. According to informants, their salaries per month ranged from 400-600 Riyal (1 Riyal = about 18 Rupees). If 500 Riyal is taken as the average monthly salary, a person can earn 12,000 Riyal in two years. Unless they are able to extend their visas, there is every possibility that they will return to Nepal with very little amount of money for themselves. Hence from this simple arithmetic, one can easily see that the attraction of Kumal youths to the Gulf is an investment promising lucrative earnings to the moneylenders, not for the Kumals themselves. The only benefit for the individual, as reported by the local informants, was the illusive rise in the social status of the individual among the fellow villagers for having been to a foreign country.

Other Sources of Income for Kumals: With the changes in economic environment and the associated changes, Kumals are now exposed to many more economic opportunities. The emergence of the bazaar at Arghaun and Talchowk has prompted those with adequate resources to make the best of the growth of the market. In fact well-off Kumal households own shops at Arghaun today. Two other Kumal households have opened retail shops in the interior part of the village. One Kumal household had a shop in Talchowk also but unfortunately they were forced to close it recently due to a feeling of discrimination on caste grounds. The owner of this shop has now made arrangements to go abroad to work. A Kumal youth has opened a restaurant (with pizza as its specialty) in Lakeside of Pokhara by selling a portion of his land. Incidentally, he used to work for the municipality office and he is one of the very few Kumals who have studied up to higher secondary level (see Table 7). The examples cited here make it apparent that those Kumals who have adequate means (financial or other) are increasingly attracted to invest their resources in lucrative businesses. Not surprisingly, the most common answer to what the parents want their sons (not daughters) to do in future was 'to take on a business' for an occupation. To them this meant either opening up a shop/restaurant or buying a passenger bus that would ply between Pokhara and Kathmandu.

Table 7: Distribution of Kumals by Economic Activities/Jobs

Settlement	Business		Service/Job		Total
	Owner	Partner	Government	Private	
The Kumal Gaun	1	1	1	5	8
Jalkini Dando	2	--	4	1	7
Arghaun	4		2	4	10
Total Individuals	7	1	7	10	25
Total Households	7	1	5	10	23

Source: Field Survey, January 2000.

The other prominent involvement of Kumals today is in holding various kinds of jobs. The new environment has indeed opened up numerous employment opportunities for Kumals. At the time of the field study, 15 Kumal individuals were found to have been employed in full time service/jobs away within Nepal but away from their homes. They were engaged in salaried work both in government offices and in the private sector. Within the government sector, Kumals have managed to get jobs in hospitals and in the Nepal Police. Those who worked in the private sector were employed by the biogas company, and those related to the tourist industry including hotels and restaurants Pokhara (as waiters).

The case of biogas as providing employment chances deserves a special mention here. The role of these plants in other socio-economic aspect of the Kumals has been discussed in detail elsewhere (see Bhurtel 2000). Kaski is one of the districts where a large number of biogas plants have been installed in recent years. In Kumal Gaun alone 42 out of the 73 households under study have installed the biogas plants for themselves. The company with which the Kumals are associated is called the *Gobar Gas tatha Krishi Yantra Bikas Pra.Li.* (Biogas and Agricultural Equipment Development Pvt. Ltd.) which was established with the joint efforts of the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) and the Timber Corporation of Nepal. The offices of the company are located in Simalchaur, Pokhara and the Agricultural Bank at Gagangaunda. The company provides the necessary hardware equipment required like the pipes and fitting materials and the technicians. The involvement of Kumals will be discussed in some detail below.

There were four Kumal men working as technical experts in installing the biogas plants. Their earning per unit of biogas plant installation was determined by the size of the pit that needed to be prepared. The pits had to be dug, plastered with concrete and the instruments put in the right place. The four Kumal technicians learned the skill needed for the job by practice. Of course, in addition to other materials the concerned household also had to arrange the labour required to dig the pits and do the manual works relating to the construction works. From the amount they are getting for their works, it can be concluded that they can earn a good income (see Table 8). Apart from high demand, the only problem they reported in this engagement was that they sometimes have to visit far away places in difficult circumstances. For instance, during the start of the monsoon they need to work in their own farms at least during the planting of paddy. They reported difficulties in visiting other villages for biogas plant installation during the rainy season. The average earning per plant according to the size of the pit is given in Table 8.

Table 8: Average Earnings for the Kumals from Installing Biogas Plants

Pit size in Cubic Meters	Cash Paid by the Company (in Rupees)
6	1200
8	1400
10	1800
12	2200

Source: Field Survey, January 2000.

Among the six Kumal men providing their services in the police force, all of them work as constables. One Kumal man works in a government hospital in Pokhara. It is interesting that only one Kumal woman has a paid job/service and she happens to be the only Kumal woman to have passed the School Leaving Certificate so far.

Although only a couple of households produce *rakshi* mainly for the market, this engagement is increasingly proving to be a regular source of income for many Kumal households. Since *rakshi* is consumed on special social occasions (festivals, ceremonies, rituals, etc.), and because many of the local men drink it regularly more out of habit, *rakshi* seems to be in high demand. A combination of a *bhushu chhulo*, a *paini*, a *hanna* and a *handi* is used for the production. A metal pot filled with water is kept at the top for cooling purposes and the concentration of the alcohol depends upon the number of times the water at the top pot is replaced with cooler water (often changed up to seven times). In the village it was found that they usually make *chha/saat pani* (six or seven waters) *rakshi* for sale. The product is sold to dealers in the village as well as the bazaars. According to an informant, they usually brew about 5 liters at a time (takes about two hours of cooking/distilling time). To be able to do this, they need about one *pathi* (about 4.5 kg = one *pathi*) of millet brewed into *chhyang*. At least one week of brewing makes the *chhyang* good enough for distilling into *rakshi*. The local measure used to sell *rakshi* by the villages is a container known as a gallon (which takes about 4 litres of liquid). Each gallon of *rakshi* is sold by the villagers to the retailers for Rs. 100 (1 US dollar = about 70 Rupees). But if the *rakshi* is sold directly to the consumers/customers, one can earn up to 200 Rupees by selling one gallon.⁵ In Kumal Gaun it was found that only women were engaged in preparing *rakshi* and they did it during the day when they were not busy with other household chores or agricultural works.

In addition to the above mentioned economic activities, Kumals seem to be engaged in numerous other income earning activities. Such activities have not been included in the above table simply because of the irregularity in which they are pursued. An elderly Kumal jokingly said that due to the growth of the market in recent years, anything that is taken to the bazaar could be sold. He claimed that he himself had sold jackfruits or *rukh-katahar* (*Artocarpus Heretophyllus*) worth Rs. 5-6 thousand in 1999.

A couple of young Kumal men also seemed interested in doing mushroom cultivation. One of them had already started work and sounded hopeful of making a good earning from it. According to one of the key informants, sometime in 1997, a mushroom collection center at Pokhara introduced and promoted mushroom cultivation in the Kumal Gaun area. For the first year the center provided seed, manure plus training (for its cultivation) free of cost. From the second year, people had to buy the seeds and chemical fertilizers. A bottle of seeds was available for 28 rupees in 2000 and to be able to sell it back to the center, the farmers had to grow at least 100 kg of mushroom. If all went well, and this was not a guaranteed, they required from 15 to 20 bottles of seeds to be able to grow that amount (which took about two to three months). If the goal was reached, they would be able to earn around 25 thousand rupees. The total cost of production they had to bear was around 8 thousand rupees. Thus the Kumal key informant concluded that he had good reasons to be interested in the mushroom cultivation.

Fishing Changes by the Traditional Method: Fishing as an activity is also an aspect of the traditional life ways of Kumals that can not be overlooked. How fishing was practiced by Kumals in the past has been discussed already. Here we intend to note the difference in its practice today. Kumals still fish in the tributaries of the Seti River, namely the Bagadi *khola*, Bijayapur *khola* and the Kotre *khola* throughout the year and visit nearby ponds and lakes like the Begnas Tal, Rupa Tal (*tal* means lake in Nepali). Though there were few households (at the time when field survey was being done) pursuing this economic activity as a primary source of earning for living, they have been adopting to new ways of fishing. The most noticeable change is the equipment with which they now fish. This is in turn related to the purpose of fishing. In the past they used home made nets or hook (*balchhi*) and fished mainly to supplement their diet. Occasionally some of them did exchange surplus, if there was any, for other food items. Now Kumals use lethal means like electric current that can kill fish swimming in extensive perimeters of the river. The informants told that they started using this set of equipment about five or six years ago. The amount of fish they normally capture ranges from 2 to 4 kg/day, and selling fish is not a problem. The price depends upon the species of fish. The common local species called *bhitti* (*Barbus sp.*) is sold at Rs. 50/kg, bigger fish fetch Rs. 100/kg while the *bam* types (eels) can be sold for Rs. 120-150/kg. The actual amount caught also depends upon the time of the year. Kumal informants reported that they could catch more during the monsoon (they claim that swollen rivers bring more fish). In any case they seem to be able to make about Rs. 200-400/day. More men are becoming interested in pursuing this activity by investing on the electric equipment. This set consists of a battery, a transformer and a net attached at the end of a rod and costs about Rs. 6,000. In Kumal Gaun alone, there are five

households (two are Magars) who own this kind of fishing set. There are also Kumal men who collect smaller *jhinge* (prawn or *Puntia puntaias*) fish with the help of the traditional fishing nets. Even these men were found to do fishing primarily for selling in the bazaars. They get Rs. 60-80/kg for *jhinge*.

Concluding Remarks

The change in the socio-cultural and economic environment tends to be rooted in the history of the region. The most noteworthy change in the present study site is the emergence of market centers like Arghaun, Talchowk and Sisuwa. This, in turn can be seen as an outgrowth of the process of urbanization in the Pokhara valley.

Kumals seem to show the tendency to earn cash income quickly by getting involved in the market economy. Those with adequate resources are already active participants in the market economy. Those without the means or the resources (i.e. the majority) are struggling to make a livelihood. The economic activities in which Kumals are engaged have diversified. They show a tendency to try whatever new strategies they think might earn them a living. The way they carry out their agricultural work has also changed. Their economy has always been primarily based on agriculture. In the past, earning a livelihood from agriculture meant planting cereal crops and keeping livestock. They also took part in the institutions of *parma* and *adhiyan* that regulated the distribution of resources, both human and natural. Some Kumals with limited resources also engaged in local wage labourer work. Fishing and making clay pots were practiced during their free time from farm work.

The traditional occupation with which they were identified is in the verge of being given up completely. They are called 'Kumals' but are no more 'Kumhales'. The young generation of Kumals has not acquired the skills of making pots. They are of course able to read and write today, but their achievements in education have not been to the level of ensuring them jobs. Thus, we argue that this could make them even more vulnerable. This point finds support from the fact that many youths are pursuing or aspiring to pursue jobs that may not prove sustainable in the long run. The case of labour export to the Gulf countries can be taken as a good example of this.

Farming as a primary economic activity of Kumals is undergoing change. In the past, agriculture was done to meet the subsistence needs only. At present, due to improved irrigation facilities and introduction of 'improved' varieties of cereals there has been an intensification of the cultivation of crops. People are increasingly showing the tendencies to intensify their cultivation for the market. The growing of vegetables for the market is a good example. The importance of land is ever increasing, both from the viewpoint of carrying out agriculture for the market and the gradual urbanization of the market at Arghaun.

The overall intention of this study has not been to suggest that Kumals should be encouraged to go back to their traditional occupation of making clay pots in order to gain a livelihood security. Rather, we have made an attempt to delineate how Kumals have come to be in a state of transition since they have more or less abandoned their relatively secure occupation in favor of the increased number of economic opportunities which certainly appear to be promising better life chances but involve tough competition. The discussion has made it evident that although their economic activities have diversified to a great extent, their chances of a secured livelihood remain uncertain. Only future will tell whether all Kumals will be able to continue on or improve their social and economic status with the adoption of new income earning opportunities.

Notes

1. The Kumals in the study area belong to six clans, viz., *Khattri*, *Gotanye*, *Rana*, *Chittaure*, *Rajput* and *Kumbhakarna Shiladevi*. Judging from their general appearance, *Khattri* and *Gotanye* bear similarities with the *Bahun*s and *Chhetri*s of the hills with their typical Aryan features while the rest resemble the Tibeto-Burman *Magars* and *Tamangs* from the hills of Nepal.
2. Kipat, a land tenure system has been reported to have prevailed in Eastern Nepal (see Regmi, 1978). The presence of a place called Kipat near the Kumal Gaun and the assertion by Kumals that they had access to Kipat land as a community in the past warrants further investigation.
3. In fact Krishna Bahadur Kumal has won himself first prizes in consecutive years 1995 (2052 B.S.) and 1996 (2053 B.S.) for growing the vegetables in the best manner in Kaski district. Competitions were organized by an extension of HMG's Agricultural Ministry, the District Agricultural Development Office at Kaski.
4. It was difficult to assess the exact figures due to the fact that the other three households conduct private business which are basically the outgrowth of their involvement in horticulture.
5. A *pathi* of millet was available for about fifty rupees. They also had to buy *dhutto* and *bhush* (saw dust) as sources of energy. Considering all these factors, the *rakshi*-makers are able to make Rs. 40 to 50 for producing one gallon of *raksi*.

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