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CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS AND LIVELIHOODS: ADAPTATION OF THE JALARI PEOPLE IN THE POKHARA VALLEY

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Introduction: Some Conceptual Issues

In his analysis of the ecologic relationships of ethnic groups in Swat, Barth (1981) makes a general statement that in plural socio-cultural contexts, "ethnic segmentation" and "economic dependence" remain as fundamental features. He further states that the environment for any particular ethnic group is not only defined by natural conditions, but also by the presence and activities of other ethnic groups on which it depends. Each group exploits only a section of the total environment, and leaves large parts of it open for other groups to exploit (Barth 1981: 3). It is in this context that Barth borrows the concept of a niche from animal ecology and defines it as "the place of a group in the total environment, its relations to resources and competitors" (1981: 3). The concept of niche and Barth's formulation of 'the total environment' is of some relevance to the discussion of the Jalari people in this paper. I agree with Barth that any single group of people can not exploit the total environment and that parts of it are left open for others to exploit. One example of this is the caste-based occupations people follow or the types of services people exchange[d] among themselves in Nepal and elsewhere. That is, each caste group would have its own 'traditional' occupation in the array of the total economic activities needed to keep the society going.

This paper discusses the changing livelihood strategies of the Jalari people who happen to be one of the many socially marginalised and disadvantaged groups of people in Nepal. The Jalaris included in this study live in Begnas area (named after one of the two lakes in the area). Before this, they were residents of an area once known as the Poda Tol (renamed as Naya Bazaar today) in Pokhara municipality. The total environmental context in Pokhara valley, which includes populations (of Jalaris and other communities around them), and population processes (growth and migration in particular), and natural resources (e.g. land and fish), provides the broader field within which the Jalaris have been situated in the present study. The main focus of the paper is the changing livelihoods of the Jalari people in Pokhara—in particular, looking at how the space (both physical and social) of their interaction have changed over time as a consequence of changes in the total environment around them. It will also review the unique social positions of Poda people (called Jalari in this paper) in Nepali society in order to put the Jalaris in the context of caste-based society in the country. Of all the people who were labelled as 'untouchables' in the traditional caste system, the Podes appear to be an anomalous case—since they remained

untouchable sweepers, scavengers, etc., but have also acted as 'para-priests' when they work as the caretakers of selected shrines in the Kathmandu valley.

Pokhara valley (which now has two municipalities within it) has been known for its socio-cultural plurality—i.e., various caste/ethnic groups of people with distinct cultures living together and interacting meaningfully with each other (see Chhetri, 1986, 1990). In such a situation, every caste/ethnic community tends to maintain cultural and ethnic boundaries as distinct from others (see Barth 1969, 1981). However, economic interdependence (see also Chhetri 1990, Parish 1997) among different caste/ethnic groups becomes an inevitable imperative either for survival or to ensure that every one would have work to do. Given this, it would be quite logical to reason that the total environment for any caste/ethnic group would consist of the physical environment (Barth's 'natural conditions') as well as other caste/ethnic groups and the social and economic spaces or contexts wherever they meet and interact (thereby occupying their respective niches in the environment). It is not a single community occupying a given spatial and social environment. In reality, a number of groups live together in a given environment—either cooperating or competing with each other for essential resources and services. A model of human environment relationship now ought to account for such empirical realities. At this point, I also find that Andrew Vayda's concept of "progressive contextualisation" becomes relevant since it also challenges the idea of bounded nature of a community or a population. In a real world, populations or communities remain interconnected with others around them in one way or the other. Today, hardly any anthropologist would make claims of having done ethnographic research among an 'isolated' group of people untouched and unspoilt by outside 'civilization'. Such an idea is not important to the ethnographers any more even though in the past many did deliberately make a note that the people they studied were indeed 'isolated' and untouched by 'civilization' in a bid to prove that their own works were providing an account of an 'exotic' people.

I also feel it necessary to tell the reader that I am sceptical about the usefulness of the concept of 'development' as a conceptual framework for discussing social, cultural and economic processes in Nepal (see also Chhetri 2005). To begin with, the concept of 'development' is normally used to denote positive things like growth, progress, advancement, improvement, etc. It is often used to talk about progress or improvements in infrastructure, economy of a country, per capita income of a population, physical growth of a particular place, etc, which can be measured. There is no doubt that these are 'developments'. But when our subject matter of research happen to be groups of people and their life-ways, we may find different groups of people living in any particular place where 'development' is said to have come

about, may have experienced progressive or regressive changes in their ways of life, livelihood opportunities, etc. That is, the process of 'development' may be experienced as positive by some but may not be necessarily so for others. Given such a reality, I have been in favour of using the concepts of change and adaptation in my own research (see Chhetri 1986, 1990) since I find these to be more appropriate for talking about the empirical realities in Nepal's context. One simple advantage of such concepts is that you need not require taking a position or a side.

Population growth in many of the urban centres results from an accelerated pace of in-migration besides the intrinsic growth rate. It has been a common observation in Nepal that the process of urbanisation and development of infrastructures in any locality attract migrants towards such places. Availability of amenities and new livelihood opportunities (e.g. jobs and possibilities of setting up enterprises) tend to be the main attractions. However, not everyone who is aware of such developments can or does move towards the urban centres and we do not know the reasons of such people for their indifference or apathy towards the 'pull factors'. Still, there are others who feel the push of a centrifugal force in the same process of change. That is, centripetal and centrifugal forces seem to be at work simultaneously—triggered by environmental changes in any given place.

Generally, the in-migration of people is so overwhelming in urbanizing areas that out-migration of some small groups that cannot stand the pressure of changes or can not afford to live in the transforming environment (i.e. the area which becomes urban and socially and economically more and more complex) has received little attention from researchers. Those who move away from urban areas in Nepal also happen to be marginal people to begin with and therefore, their exodus goes unnoticed.¹ A better understanding of the reasons for a community or group of people abandoning a 'growing' centre is needed. This study on the Jalari people living in Begnas today contributes towards filling such a knowledge gap.

The Pokhara Valley: Past and Present

In talking about the adaptation and change in the livelihood strategies among the Jalaris in Begnas today, it will be necessary (as a way of contextualizing) to refer to some of the changes that have been observed in Pokhara and its environs. Until the mid-1970s, I remember seeing the Poda Tole on a rocky site about two kilometres north of the Pokhara airport with its small huts by the roadside in what is known today as Naya Bazaar (see Map 2). The Poda houses were clustered together and were on the southern end of Pokhara.² The site of Poda Tole with fishing nets hanging outside their huts (which were themselves in the middle of some maize and millet growing around them) has disappeared from Pokhara. Urbanisation and urban growth in Pokhara has attracted many people but apparently the same processes have

also pushed some people out.³ Jalaris in Pokhara valley are one such group of people.

Pokhara, just as any urban centre has been undergoing change in terms of its population size and amenities. Landon wrote about Pokhara in the early 1920s:

“Pokhara is a second city in Nepal—it would be more accurate to say it is the most important city outside the Kathmandu group. It contains perhaps ten thousand inhabitants and lies in a wide flat plain encircled by hills... The plain is covered with lakes of considerable size—the only real lakes in all Nepal—which are bordered with trees (1993:18).

Other early visitors too seem to have been impressed by the lakes (there are a total of seven within the valley) in and around Pokhara (see Kirkpatrick 1986[1811]).⁴ Development projects of various types including those on hydro power generation, irrigation, forestry, watershed management, soil conservation, fisheries, etc., have been investing resources in and around Fewa, Begnas and Rupa lakes in the valley.

Apparently, Pokhara was not on the list of urban places until 1952-54 census information was published (e.g., see Karan and Ishi 1996 Table 20 on p. 328; P. Sharma 1986). But this place which had a population of only 5,413 in 1961 had 95,286 people in 1991, and today it has a total population of 156,313 (see CBS 1995, 2002). The increase in Pokhara's population size could be attributed to: a) in-migration of people into the urban area from rural areas in the adjoining Hills; and b) annexation or inclusion of additional areas into the Town area which were until the mid 1970s classified as villages (see Sharma 1986).

The Pokhara visited by Landon and Kirkpatrick seems to have been less important in terms of its wealth and political status at that time. But Landon remarked that because of Pokhara's size, its fertile soil, and its geographical location in the central part of the country, it was “destined to play no small part in the future industrial development of Nepal” (1993: 18). Landon's prediction has come true to a certain extent since Pokhara today not only has some industries (although of small scale) but is one of the fastest growing municipalities as well as one of the most important administrative centres outside of the Kathmandu valley.

Today one can either travel by road or fly to Pokhara from Kathmandu and a number of other urban centres. The first aeroplane landed in Pokhara in 1952—perhaps towards the end of the year because Toni Hagen writes that in April 1952 when he went to Pokhara from Kathmandu on his way to Mustang, he “had to go the entire way on foot (10 days)” (1994: 57).

Historical accounts also reveal that the people of Pokhara were not quite ready to welcome foreigners in the past when the area was restricted for

outsiders. Landon alludes that there prevailed “...the traditional hatred of the presence of foreigners” (1993: 19) in the country and he indicates that such a feeling among the people had inhibited the Rana rulers from undertaking development projects which required the presence of European technical experts. Things are very different today.⁵ In fact, within 50 years after Landon visited Nepal, the country and its people saw foreigners and foreign aid go through a process characterised by some scholars as “a trickle turning into a torrent” (Mishra and Sharma, 1983). Pokhara valley has been a scene where a number of projects have been implemented during the past four decades or so which are mostly supported by foreign aid, international donors, etc. Such programs and projects have had far reaching consequences for the life and culture of the people as well as their environments and resources. The focus of this essay is on the implications of such environmental changes for the Jalaris who live in Begnas area today.

Migration and Settlement of the Jalaris

The survey information together with the contextual information provided by the Jalari informants in Begnas is used to argue that the urban pressure alienated the Jalaris from Poda Tole in Pokhara while other environmental changes happening around the same time in Fewa and Begnas area attracted them. Opportunities for earning a livelihood seem to be a critical force in making the Podes leave Poda Tole and settle elsewhere. Field information reveals that the places chosen by the Podes as their new settlements were not unfamiliar for them since they used to frequent these places for seasonal fishing in the past also. The elderly Jalaris recall that they used to come from Poda Tole to Begnas and Rupa lakes and the streams around here for fishing during summer time. They also remember that they had to travel all the way on foot before the Prithwi Highway opened in the early 1970s and later were able to take a bus up to Dandako Nak (about three kilometres away from Begnas settlement) and then walk from there on.

Migration of the Podes from Pokhara: By the mid-1970s, many Jalari families began moving away from the Poda Tole (now known as Naya Bazaar) after selling their homes and land property to the new settlers from the hills. They left their place in Poda Tole as *bikas* (‘development’ meaning the growth of the town) had begun to speed up in Pokhara and their surroundings. An elderly Jalari informant mentioned that they were unable to cope with or keep pace with such changes. The pace of changes in Pokhara was speeding up in the mid to late 1970s (increased migration) and a lot of ‘new opportunities’ were opening up for many. However, elderly Jalairs living in Begnas recall that they did not see anything coming their way. For instance, they could not start a teashop nor could they run a restaurant, or *pasal* (shop) because of their status as ‘untouchables’ besides being poor. The

caste-based society with its strong notions of purity/pollution would not approve such endeavours from Jalaris or similar people who were regarded as 'untouchables'. Most of the Jalaris concur that the only opportunity open for them was to sell their property for the cash offered by the Hill migrants and settle elsewhere where they felt comfortable and could find cheap or free public land to set up new living quarters. Accelerated urbanisation in Pokhara resulted in general the transfer of land ownership from the poor farmers and poor subsistence communities like the Jalaris to the new migrants who not only had money but were also willing to make investments.⁶

If we look at the movement pattern of Jalari households in Begnas, we find that a few (4 households or 11.8%) had already left Poda Tole and settled in the new place by the late 1960s. Incidentally this is the period during which the total Population of Pokhara—the place of origin for most of the Jalaris in Begnas today⁷—had quadrupled (i.e., between 1961 and 1971 the total population of Pokhara town grew from 5,413 to 20,611). Apparently, the Jalaris had already started to feel the pressure of urban population growth—which seems to be a factor responsible to push them out of the urban centre of Pokhara.⁸ From the 1970s onward, we see a steady out flow of Jalaris from their place of origin (see Table 1).

Table 1: Movement of Jalari Households from Poda Tole and Settling in Begnas by Periods

| Time Period | Moved from Poda Tole | Settled in Begnas |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Up to 1969 | 4 (11.8) | 4 (11.8) |
| 1970-1974 | 8 (23.5) | 5 (14.7) |
| 1975-1979 | 6 (17.6) | 2 (5.9) |
| 1980-1984 | 4 (11.8) | 3 (8.8) |
| 1985-1989 | 7 (20.6) | 7 (20.6) |
| 1990-1994 | 4 (11.8) | 12 (35.3) |
| 1995-1999 | 1 (2.9) | 1 (2.9) |

Source: Field Survey 1998. Note: The figures in the parentheses show percentages of total Jalari households (34) in Begnas under study. The percentages may not add exactly up to 100 because of rounding.

Information was also collected for the households under study with regard to their time/year of move from their earlier home and settlement in Begnas. Of the total households, 61.8% (i.e. 21 households) are reported to have settled in Begnas the same year that they left their place of origin—i.e. they migrated straight to Begnas from their homes. However, 13 households (38.2%) did not settle in Begnas soon after they moved away from their place of origin. Analysis of the survey data reveals that some of them spent a number of years in other places before they finally chose to settle in Begnas.⁹

Why did they take so long to decide on a place to settle? The opportunities for eking out a living by adopting fishing as a primary occupation seem to have been quite critical for most of these migrant households in making a decision about where to settle. A number of families reported having lived in Fewa Lake area before settling in Begnas while some others reported that they were shuttling between Fewa and Begnas area for a number of years. In fact, for many Jalaris, Fewa lake area may have been the place of initial settlement after they left Pokhara's Poda Tole since the first Fisheries Development Project in the valley was started here. Moreover, it may have been difficult or even very hard for all of the Jalaris to acquire land and construct new living quarters after they left their old homes.

The opening up of new opportunities for managed fishing activities in Begnas and Rupa was cited as the main reason for selecting the current place for settlement by 29 (85.3%) households. The remaining households came to settle here because of the presence of their relatives besides the fact that they also saw opportunities for continuing with fishing as their mode of earning livelihood. Most of the households (32 out of 34 or 94.1%) reported that they owned boats that are required for executing a number of tasks related to fishing in the lake. None of the Jalaris use their boats for other purposes like ferrying local passengers or tourists across the lake. They reported having invested anywhere from Rs. 3,000 to 13,000 (depending on the size and the type of wood used in making the boat; the wood from *Sal* and *Tuni* species was considered high quality and also was the most expensive) for buying or making each of the boats they own.

Settlement of Jalaris in Begnas: Pipletunda (referred to as Piple hereafter) is the main settlement of the Jalaris of Begnas area. Of the total of 34 households reported to have settled in Begnas today, 21 households were found in Piple. Of the remaining Jalari households, 6 were settled in Majhikuna, 3 in Libdi and 2 in Kandel Tunda of Begnas and 2 households were to be found in Jahankuna of Rupa lake area. Their houses are small—incidentally not much different from what they were used to in Pokhara—and generally single storied. They use stones/rocks and bricks mostly with mud mortar for the walls while galvanised tin sheets for roofing. Most of the houses are coloured red (by using red clay paste) while a few are white washed from the outside. The village premises in Piple do not look clean. The trails are often dirty since children do not seem to have been given to the habit of using latrines even when they are available.¹⁰

Some fruit trees—peaches, mangoes, pear, lemon, etc., are found here and there within the Piple settlement. The Jalaris of Piple are members of a local Community Forest Users Group (CFUG). Since most of them use kerosene for cooking (and they have access to electricity for lighting their houses), it is not clear what kind of benefits they may have obtained from their membership in the CFUG so far. Most of them keep chicken/fowls and pigs

for meat. They do not keep cattle or buffaloes. Except a few families, which either own some *khet* land in the area or work as agricultural wage labour during the farming season, Jalaris today make their living mainly from their engagement in fish farming and/or fishing.

The Jalari People: An Ethnographic Context

There is no detailed ethnography available on the Jalaris. Most of the time, any reference to them and their way of life is to be found in the research works on the Newars or the low caste people in the Kathmandu valley (e.g., Gellner 1995, Levy 1990, Nepali 1965, and see Toffin et. al. 1991). It appears that one and the same group of people referred to as Jalari or Poda in this study are known by different names in different places and social contexts. There are several terms used to refer to them in the literature, such as Po(n) thar, Podhya, Pore,¹¹ Poriya, Dyahla, and Deopala. Their physical appearance, language, and their traditional livelihood persuasions may suggest that these are one and the same group of people—perhaps sharing a common origin and culture. I will use the term Jalari—one preferred by those living in Pokhara today. However, I will also use the term Poda at times while referring to them in other contexts.

Poda people in Nepal in general have had limited access to agricultural land. As a socially and economically marginal people within a strictly hierarchical Nepali society which subscribed to the idea of people being 'pure or impure', clean or unclean, etc., Podas normally lived in the marginal lands in the outskirts of the urban or administrative centres (see Nepali 1965; Levy 1990). The Poda Tole in Pokhara was at the southern end of the municipality until the urban area itself expanded (starting with the construction of the airport in the early 1950s) and encompassed the Poda Tole within it. Another interesting thing to note is that Podas in Nepal seem to be some kind of urban community, in the sense that their population concentration and distribution has been found in places like Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur, Panauti, and Pokhara (all of which have been known as urban centres for some time). Finally, an intriguing fact about the Podas is that they have been in a situation of 'double vulnerability'—one, as socially discriminated people, and the other as economically poor (and one could argue that their social situation and poverty are interrelated). Unfortunately, this appears to be true for some other groups of people like Damai, Kami, Sarki, and Gaine that were also treated as 'untouchables' until not long ago. (see Caplan 1972, Chhetri 1999).

The Podas in Nepal: Traditional Context

As noted already, the Jalari people are found to have been referred by various terms in different places and contexts. In spite of the variety of the terms used to refer to them, they were characterised with some common features (see

Gellner 1995, Nepali 1965, Levy 1990). Let me mention some of these in brief.

The Jalaris or the Podas were placed towards the bottom of the social hierarchy of the Newars (see Nepali 1965: 150) or within the Nepali social structure (see Höfer 1979: 45, Gellner 1995: 11, Parish 1997: 168-169). Within the untouchable groups of people too, the Podas seem to have been placed towards the lower end, just above Chyame and Hara Huru, both of which were also categorised as groups of scavengers (see Nepali 1965). The Jalaris claim that their mother tongue is a dialect of the Newar language.

G.S. Nepali talks of Poda as one of the Newar castes that "are not allowed to have their dwelling places within the village boundaries" (1965: 177). He notes further, "The term 'Pore' is derived from the hereditary calling of public executioner. The principal occupations of the Pore are fishing, basket making and skinning of dead animals" (1965: 177). Talking about the interaction of Podas with other groups of people in the Kathmandu valley, Nepali writes, "As temple priests the Joshi and the Achar (*who are Newars themselves*) also come in contact with such unclean castes as the Kasai, Pore and Chyamkhala, since these castes are the Deo-palas (Temple care-takers) at these temples" (Nepali 1965: 180, italics mine). From G.S. Nepali's statement we get an indication that Podas were not the only people who have been assuming the role of temple caretakers in Kathmandu valley. Nepali notes that Podas in Kathmandu came in physical contact with other people "as the seller of baskets and fish" (Nepali 1965: 186).

Podas are referred to as a group of scavengers in Kathmandu (Regmi 1978: 254) and they have been traditionally employed as municipal sweepers in the urban centres or administrative centres in the country. One can still see Podas cleaning the streets of Kathmandu in the early morning hours. However, what Podas have been doing (or given to do) outside the Kathmandu valley to make a living and how they are placed in the social and cultural context around them remain little understood (since very little has been documented on Podas living in other parts of Nepal except for those in Panauti [see Toffin et. al. 1991]).

Of the various terms used to refer to the Podas in Nepal, the use of Dyahla is interesting. Levy writes that there is "an 'honorable' and polite term that can be used in reference or in addressing them, namely, Dya-la" (Levy 1990: 368). How did the Poda households in Kathmandu valley get this role to begin with? We do not have any historical or ethnographic information in order to answer this question. There is only passing remarks about their symbolic cleaning of the visible dirt as well as the invisible pollution (by 'taking in' and therefore absolving others of sins of killing fish or of prosecution of those who were given capital punishments). The ethnographers' interpretation of Poda's occupation as having a symbolic cleaning role raises a question: Is it the imperatives of making a living (and

as a very poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged people having no other choices) more critical and practical in influencing them to adopt such functions or persuasions? (see Parish 1997 for a brief discussion on this issue). Such questions remain open for future research.

Jalaris in Pokhara

In the Pokhara valley, the Podes today refer to themselves as Jalari.¹² They give two different explanations for adopting the name Jalari for themselves. One argument is that they make a living from the *Jal* (water). The Sanskrit word *Jal* meaning water is used along with *Aahara* (food) to make a compound word Jalari. That is, they eke a living out of water and thus consider it appropriate to call themselves Jalari. The second explanation is that they use *Jaal* (meaning a net) in order to survive and thus the name Jalari. Unlike their fellow community members in Kathmandu, the Pode people of Pokhara have been known as fishermen. They believe that their ancestors came from Kathmandu and claim that they are a sub-caste group within the Newar community. However, even the elderly Jalaris in Begnas today are not sure when and how their ancestors might have arrived to settle in Pokhara.

Gajurel and Vaidya (1984), in their discussion of the traditional arts and crafts practised by various groups of people in Nepal also give some details on the production technology of fishing nets by the Podes. They note that the Podes of Pokhara (this is perhaps the first reference to Podes living in Pokhara) make their own fishnets (by using the fibres of sting nettle) which are "largely used for catching fish in small ponds and rivers" (1984: 282).

In the past, one could have noticed a Pode throwing fishnets along the streams in the Pokhara valley while carrying a little *Pyarungo* (a bamboo basket, the size of a day pack and rectangular in shape that was used for carrying the catch) on his back. Their fishing activities were mostly in the shallow points of the rushing streams or in what Kirkpatrick referred to as (while talking of fishing activities in Rapti river near Hetauda) "some depths and pits in which a great plenty of fish are found" (1986: 35, italics mine). This (and the mode of fishing described by Kirkpatrick [1986: 35-36]) is not a common scene any more—at least not around Pokhara.

Pode men and women in Begnas confide that people from other communities still treat them as untouchables. I wonder if the adoption of Jalari as a new surname reflects an attempt on the part of the Podes to get out of such a social discrimination and stigma. In the past, the Podes as a group of people placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy, marginalised and poor are also said to have taken opportunities for receiving alms from Bahun-Chhetris and other caste/ethnic people soon after a lunar or a solar eclipse was over.

Demographic Profile of Jalaris in Begnas

Podes in the Kathmandu valley are placed in the social and cultural space within social and administrative system there as the sweepers employed by the municipalities, as keepers of some of the shrines, etc. However, those in Pokhara valley do not seem to have such ties in the local social and cultural sphere. Podes in Pokhara seem to have stopped being (if they had been in the past) an indispensable part of the urban system. This may be the reason why they could move away elsewhere (i.e., from the Pode Tole) without many people noticing their absence from their earlier settlement.

The Jalari people in Begnas today are similar to the Tibetan refugees in Pokhara in some respects who were studied by the author about a decade ago (see Chhetri 1990). Like the Tibetans, the Jalari people have been recent settlers in the Begnas area; they have been able to earn a living and are apparently doing better in economic terms than most of the other people living around them. However, most of these people do not legally own any land where they have built their houses today. The total population of Jalaris in the 34 households in Begnas at the time of field survey (June-August, 1998) was 174, with an overall sex ratio of 97.7 and showing an average household size of 5.1 persons. The smallest household consisted of a couple while the largest one had 11 members in it (see Table 2). There was no single person household among Jalaris in the study area. Although the average household size for the Jalaris in Begnas was 5.1, Table 2 shows that 62.6% of the Jalaris here lived in fairly large households—consisting of six or more individuals. The survey data reveal that at least 47% of the total households of the Jalaris were larger than the average household size for the whole community. More than 44%, on the other hand, consisted of households with a married couple living with only 1 or 2 children (20.6% and 23.5% respectively).

Table 2: Distribution of Households and Population by Size of Households, 1998

| Household Size | No. of Households* | Total individuals in Hhs** |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 11 | 1 (2.9) | 11 (6.3) |
| 8 | 2 (5.9) | 16 (9.2) |
| 7 | 4 (11.7) | 28 (16.1) |
| 6 | 9 (26.5) | 54 (31.0) |
| 5 | 2 (5.9) | 10 (5.7) |
| 4 | 8 (23.5) | 32 (18.4) |
| 3 | 7 (20.6) | 21 (12.1) |
| 2 | 1 (2.9) | 2 (1.1) |
| Total | 34 (100.0) | 174 (100.0) |

Source: Field Survey, 1998. Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages. * Percentages based on the total number of household (n=34). ** Percentages based on the total population of Jalaris (n=174)

Table 3: Age and Sex Structure of the Jalari Population Under Study, 1998

| Age Group | Male (%) | Female (%) | Total (%) |
|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 0-4 | 10 (5.7) | 12 (6.9) | 22 (12.6) |
| 5-9 | 12 (6.9) | 18 (10.3) | 30 (17.2) |
| 10-14 | 14 (8.0) | 11 (6.3) | 25 (14.3) |
| 15-19 | 4 (2.3) | 14 (8.0) | 18 (10.3) |
| 20-24 | 11 (6.3) | 8 (4.6) | 19 (10.9) |
| 25-29 | 10 (5.7) | 5 (2.9) | 15 (8.6) |
| 30-34 | 5 (2.9) | 9 (5.2) | 14 (8.1) |
| 35-39 | 8 (4.6) | 2 (1.1) | 10 (5.7) |
| 40-44 | 2 (1.1) | 3 (1.7) | 5 (2.9) |
| 45-49 | 1 (0.6) | 2 (1.1) | 3 (1.7) |
| 50-54 | 2 (1.1) | 3 (1.7) | 5 (2.9) |
| 55-59 | 3 (1.7) | - | 3 (1.7) |
| 60-64 | 2 (1.1) | 1 (0.6) | 3 (1.7) |
| 65+ | 2 (1.1) | - | 2 (1.1) |
| Total | 86 (49.4) | 88 (50.6) | 174 (100.0) |

Source: Field Survey, 1998.

The population structure of Jalaris in Begnas (see Table 3) reveals some interesting patterns. The majority of the population (i.e. 54.4% of the total) was less than 20 years of age at the time of the field survey. This suggests that the Jalari population here must have a high birth rate. But the incidence of mortality also seems to be high. If we look closely at the data given in Table 3, it becomes clear that 82.3% of the total population here was less than 35 years old and only 17.7% had survived beyond this age.

The longevity in this population appears to be rather low. No one had survived beyond age 65 as revealed by the household census conducted in 1998. In fact, in the female population, except one woman who was in her early 60s, there were no other female survivors above the age of 55. This also indicates that the life expectancy at birth must be very low for both males and females among the Jalaris in Begnas. However, I must confess that more focused research on the health, disease, mortality and other relevant demographic aspects could only help us gain a better understanding on the question and issues raised by the current pattern observed in their population structure.

Some interesting patterns are revealed by data on the marital status of the Jalari population by sex (see Table 4). There were a total of 41 currently married couples in the 34 households under study. About 22% of the currently married males were less than 25 years of age while the corresponding percentage for females was more than 41%. There is only one

case of "currently married" male in the age group 15-19 and below. Absence of never married among males can be seen only after age 35 while among females, the cutting point on this occurs much earlier (i.e., at age 20). Does this indicate that the age at marriage for males among the Jalaris is closer to 20 years? Among females too, about 33% of those in the age group 15-19 (n=14) were reported to be never married. However, there are no females reported as never married in the age group 20-24 and beyond. This suggests that all females among the Jalaris were married before they reached the age of 20. In contrast, few men (3) were found to be never married even in the age group 30-34, which suggests that late marriage among men is not an uncommon observation.

Table 4: Marital status by Sex and Age Group for Jalaris, 1998

| Age Group | Never Married | | Currently Married | | Widowed/Divorced | |
|-----------|---------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|------------------|---------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 0-14 | 36 (20.7) | 41 (23.6) | | | | |
| 15-19 | 3 (1.7) | 5 (2.9) | 1 (0.6) | 9 (5.2) | | |
| 20-29 | 2 (1.1) | | 18 (10.3) | 13 (7.5) | 1 (0.6)* | |
| 30-39 | 1 (0.6) | | 11 (6.3) | 11 (6.3) | 1 (0.6) | |
| 40-49 | | | 3 (1.7) | 5 (2.9) | | 1 (0.6) |
| 50-59 | | | 5 (2.9) | 2 (1.1) | | |
| 60+ | | | 3 (1.7) | 1 (0.6) | 1 (0.6) | |
| Total | 42 (24.1) | 46 (26.4) | 41 (23.6) | 41 (23.6) | 3 (1.7) | 1 (0.6) |

Source: Field Survey, 1998. * One male in the age group 20-24 was reported to be divorced.

Among the Jalaris in Begnas, there was only one case of a male divorcee reported. The widowed female and male population together was about 2% of the total population (2 male and 1 female were reported to be widowed).¹³

The Process of Change and Implications for the Jalaris

Changes and the Beneficiaries in Begnas: In relation to understanding the process of change in the total environment in Begnas area and the implications for people living here, a number of questions were used as guides in collecting information (in surveys as well as interviews). Some of the questions included: Who has benefited most from the construction of Dam in Begnas and the Begnas Tal Rupa Tal Fisheries Development Project? Who have benefited in general from all types of infrastructural developments in the area? What lies ahead for the Jalaris and for others? What type of picture will emerge in terms of occupational structure in the years to come in Begnas community?

Respondents in the household survey were asked to list the changes perceived by them (and their community members) as having influenced the

ways of life including the livelihood strategies of people in general. In the case of Jalaris, this was related to their fishing and fish farming as the main economic activity. The major changes that were noted by people in the survey are:

- Construction of a dam on Begnas Lake (completed about a decade ago)
- Construction of a motorable road linking Begnas to the Prithwi Highway about two decades ago
- The improved market access for fish and the setting up of a fish collection centre at Begnas (where the contractor buys off fish from the local fishers and fish-farmers)
- The increased popularity of pleasure boating in Begnas Lake during the past decade
- Setting up of hotels and restaurants in response to the increasing number of day time visitors and tourists in recent years

All these changes or developments are perceived by the Jalaris to have had a positive influence in general in their fishing and fish farming business. Table 5 summarises the responses of the household heads. Dam and road construction are seen by most of them (82.3% each) as the major development interventions which have had a tremendous influence on peoples' livelihood strategies and ways of life in the area. Many concur that if it were not for these two interventions, the Begnas Bazaar would not have been what it is today or in fact, some argue that it would have still remained a little known and small village.

Table 5: Changes/Developments Influencing Livelihoods of Jalaris in Begnas

| Changes/Developments | Total Responses | Percent of Total Respondents |
|----------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Dam Construction | 28 | 82.3 |
| Road Construction | 28 | 82.3 |
| Organised Market for Fish | 12 | 35.3 |
| Boating for Income Earning | 19 | 55.9 |
| Hotels and Tourists | 7 | 20.6 |

Source: Filed Survey, 1998

Note: The total number of respondents was 34, i.e. one from each of the Jalari households under the study. Individuals listed more than one factor influencing their livelihood opportunities.

Only about 35% of the respondents among the Jalaris considered the new and organised market for fish as a 'change' which have had any influence in fishing and fish farming. The arrival of tourists in the area for boating is seen by majority (about 56%) as an important influence.

The Jalaris consider themselves to be among the primary beneficiaries of the developments and changes that have come about in Begnas area during

the recent decades. Of the total, 32 respondents (94%) believe that the Jalaris themselves have benefited most from the fisheries development in Begnas and Rupa Lakes. Some argued that the 'contractor' (the person in charge of the Fish Collection Depot) could be considered as a primary beneficiary. Four respondents (i.e., about 12%) mentioned that the contractor and some well to do non-Jalaris who own large fish enclosures (i.e., fish farms) may have benefited more than any other groups of people. In general, however, the Jalaris agree that their community members are among the primary beneficiaries of the Fisheries Development Project in the valley. Most other people are seen by the Jalaris as secondary beneficiaries of this project. The Jalaris think that everyone who lives in Begnas area today has benefited equally from the other types of developments and changes listed in Table 5.

Access to Education for Jalaris: The younger generation of Jalaris is becoming more literate and educated in comparison to their elders. For instance, among males, those born within the past 30 years seem to have had better access to education (see Table 6 for details).

Table 6: Educational status by Age-Groups and Sex among the Jalaris in Begnas, 1998¹⁴

| Age Group | Illiterate | | Literate | | Primary | | Lower Secondary | | Secondary | | Total | |
|-----------|------------|--------|----------|--------|---------|--------|-----------------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 5-14 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 19 | 18 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 26 | 29 |
| 15-29 | 8 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 8* | 6 | 25 | 27 |
| 30-44 | 8 | 11 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 15 |
| 45+ | 9 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 5 |
| Total | 29 | 38 | 6 | 7 | 26 | 22 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 76 | 76 |

Source: Field Survey, 1998. *Includes one young boy (age group 20-24) who was going to college at the time of the survey.

Of the 51 males between the ages of 5 and 29 years, only about 24% are reported to be illiterate. Among those that are literate and/or educated, about 50% have attained primary level education, 10% have lower secondary level education while 14% have secondary level education. One Jalari male (age group 20-24) was going to college at the time of field-survey. In the near future more Jalari youths may be going to college because a number of young boys and girls were close to finishing high-school education in 1998 and it could be assumed that some of them would go on to receive the college level education. These should be considered as significant achievements in the face of the fact that some older Jalaris like Juthe could not continue school beyond

primary level because of a discriminating and harassing environment which prevailed in the school system for Dalits like the Jalaris until not long ago.¹⁵

Among the females too, those who are less than 25 years of age are better educated than the rest. Of a total of 56 females in the ages 5 to 29, more than 39% (22 individuals) are reported to be illiterate and the same percentage (i.e. 22 individuals) are said to have primary level education. It is interesting to note that 5% of the females in the above mentioned age group have lower secondary education and about 11% (6 individuals) have achieved secondary level education. This, again, should be regarded as an impressive figure for the "lower caste" people like the Jalaris who did not have an easy access to education in the past. There were social, economic and cultural barriers prevailing in the Nepali society which were responsible for depriving the "lower caste" people from education in the past. Moreover, females from such communities would have hardly imagined having access to education in such a discriminative social environment.

Livelihood Strategies of Podes: Then and Now

In recent years the economic opportunities for the Jalaris seem to have become much better in the Pokhara valley along with the development of Fisheries Development Projects in Fewa, Begnas and Rupa lakes. The Jalari people I interviewed in Piple (in 1998) revealed that most of them would have some savings deposited in the Banks.¹⁶ Harka, an elderly man estimated that each Jalari household in Begnas today should be earning a gross income between Rs. 5,000 to 30,000 per month during the fishing and fish harvesting season.¹⁷ Of course, he noted that the investments of each household on fishnets and other equipment (including wooden boats) have also been quite substantive.

In the past, Podes seem to have been taking up various kinds of odd jobs in order to make a living. We do not get an impression through the available information on these people that they were into farming. In a study of the Poda community consisting of 33 houses (with a total population of 145) carried out in the late 1970s in Panauti, it is reported that "In order to procure grain and vegetables, the Panauti Podes sell their fish, basketwork and ducks. In winter, from December to March, they migrate southwards to Panckal region (altitude: 550 m) and barter the fish they have caught in the local rivers for rice" (Toffin et. al. 1991: 117). From my own observations in Panauti during the early 1990s, I recall that most of the people there are into intensive farming—producing major crops like paddy, wheat, potatoes, etc. But, apparently the Podes, who live among the farmers in Begnas, do not seem to have adopted farming as their primary occupation.

Most of the works that talk about Podes mention that they have been a community of fishermen, sweepers, temple guards, etc (Gellner 1995, Levy 1992, Nepali 1965 and Toffin et. al. 1991). Talking about Podes in Panauti,

Toffin writes that they "derive the major part of their resources from fishing. They fish in rivers, ponds, irrigation canals and even rice fields when they are flooded" (Toffin 1991:117). It is also reported that Podes would "beg for grain or money at the time of certain festivals" and from their Newar patrons "receive the clothes of the dead and the rice dishes offered to the spirit of the departed soul seven days after cremation" (Toffin 1991: 117). The elderly key informants in Pokhara concurred that Podes in Pokhara were also getting alms from people belonging to Bahun, Chhetri, Gurung, Magar and other castes (i.e., all those that were considered 'clean castes') during special rituals including the 'purifying bath' people would take in a nearby river or stream soon after an eclipse was over.

Occupational Changes and Satisfaction

Many households have more than one member engaged in fishing as a livelihood strategy.¹⁸ No primary occupations are reported for those who were below 10 years of age at the time of the survey. Of the 14 males in the age group 10-14, only 2 are reported to have adopted fishing as their primary occupation. Similarly, among females, of the total of 11 individuals in the age group 10-14, only 4 have adopted fishing as primary occupation (see Table 7). The survey data indicate that 57.5% of the total Jalari population in Begnas were economically active in 1998.

Of the five males whose primary occupations were reported as 'service', one each were in the Nepal army and government service in Pokhara, 2 were employed in private fishery business and one individual was employed at the Fisheries Development Project in Begnas.

Table 7: Primary Occupation of the Jalaris in Begnas by Age Group and Sex, 1998

| Age Group | Fishing | | Regular job/Service* | | Total in the Age group | |
|-----------|---------|--------|----------------------|--------|------------------------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| 10-14 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 11 |
| 15-19 | 4 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 14 |
| 20-24 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 11 | 8 |
| 25-29 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 5 |
| 30-34 | 5 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 9 |
| 35-39 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 2 |
| 40-44 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| 45-49 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 50-54 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| 55-59 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| 60-64 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|----|----|---|---|----|----|
| 65-69 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 70+ | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 47 | 48 | 5 | 0 | 63 | 58 |

Source: Field Survey, 1998. * This includes those who work in public or private organisations where they get monthly salaries.

A further analysis of the economic activities of Jalaris by age group and their relation to the household heads reveals some interesting trends. Except 3 Jalari household heads, others have reported fishing as their primary occupation. Those who are in 'other jobs' also are heavily engaged in fishing activities—but in spite of that, they would like to emphasise the fact that they have a 'new' kind of job with a regular and fixed income. Having a service or a regular salaried job becomes a matter of prestige for the Jalaris since they did not have access to such positions in the past other than sweeping and/or scavenging.

There are indications that Jalaris in Begnas could be moving into other types of occupations for making a living. More than 32% (11 households) of Jalari are very satisfied with their current occupation while 58.8% (20 households) stated that they are fairly satisfied. Only 8.8% (3 households) reported that they were less satisfied with what they are doing for a living. When asked to give reasons for their level of satisfaction with the current work (*byawasaya*), most of the Jalaris gave more than one reason (see Table 8): that they do not have other options, it gives them good and sufficient income for a living, that you are your own master, and that fishing is suited to their traditional skills which they have learned from their parents.

If we look closely at the information in Table 8 it is revealed that 58.8% (20 households) are into fishing and they claim that they do not have other options. Since they did not have access to education in the past and could not have run a tea shop or sold edible items as shopkeepers because of their 'untouchable' status, their argument holds true within the prevailing social and cultural context in Nepal. A question raised by some Jalaris in Begnas was: "If fish sold by our people could be consumed by anyone, why is there a taboo on receiving other food items from Jalaris?" This question really points at one of the number of paradoxes to be noticed between the principle and practices prevalent in the social and cultural contexts of Nepal.¹⁹

Table 8: Satisfaction with Current Works: Level and Reasons for Households, 1998

| Reasons* | Very Satisfied | Fairly Satisfied | Less Satisfied | Total |
|----------|----------------|------------------|----------------|----------|
| 1* | 1 | 3 | 3 | 7 (20.6) |
| 1,2 | 1 | 8 | | 9 (26.5) |
| 1, 2, 3 | | 1 | | 1 (2.9) |

| | | | | |
|---------|-----------|-----------|---------|------------|
| 1, 2, 4 | 1 | 1 | | 2 (5.9) |
| 1,4 | | 1 | | 1 (2.9) |
| 2 | 5 | 4 | | 9 (26.5) |
| 2, 4 | | 1 | | 1 (2.9) |
| 3, 4 | | 1 | | 1 (2.9) |
| 4 | 3 | | | 3 (8.8) |
| | 11 (32.4) | 20 (58.8) | 3 (8.8) | 34 (100.0) |

Source: Field Survey, 1998. *Many gave more than one reason for their satisfaction with what they are doing for living. 1= No other option; 2= Good or sufficient income; 3= You can be your own master; 4= Suited to skills possessed already.

Of the total of 34 households in Begnas, 64.7% (22 households) reported that they are satisfied with fishing as an occupation because they have been able to make sufficient income from it for their family. A total of 14.7% household stated that their current occupation is suited to their traditional skills—i.e., they already have adequate skills for engaging themselves into fish farming and fishing for making a living. For some Jalaris (5.9% of the households), their current way of making a living is satisfying because they can be their own masters—i.e., it is considered a good thing to be self-employed.

Sources of Fish: The Jalaris in Begnas reported that they obtain the fish for selling into the market from various sources. Table 9 lists the major sources reported to have been used by Jalari households under study.

Table 9: Distribution of Jalari Households by their Use of Various Sources for Fishing

| Sources of Fish | Number of Households | Percentage |
|----------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Begnas | 34 | 100.0 |
| Begnas, Rupa | 23 | 67.6 |
| Begnas, Rupa, Fewa | 20 | 58.8 |
| Begnas, Rupa, Fewa, Others | 4 | 11.8 |

Source: Field Survey, 1998.

All households reported using Begnas Lake for fishing. Many of the households have been using other sources too besides Begnas. The majority (67.6%) reported using other nearby lakes such as Rupa. Besides, it is interesting that many (20 households, or almost 59%) reported that they were visiting Fewa Lake for fishing. Key informant interviews and group discussions revealed that a number of Jalaris either own huts (to stay overnight when visiting there) near Fewa or would go there and stay with

relatives during their fishing trips. It was not clear from their information whether the Jalaris who have settled in Fewa were also making similar fishing trips to Begnas area. Of course, a young Jalari man revealed that some of his relatives who lived in Pokhara were joint-owners of a few fish enclosures in Begnas (i.e. fish farming).

Very few households (11.8% or 4 households) reported using other additional sources. This includes the 3 other known lakes (Maidi, Dipang and Khaste) located within the Pokhara valley and various rivers and streams in the valley. It is evident that the Jalaris use various sources to obtain fish in order to maximise their income from this work. Other sources are generally used to catch local species of fish, which are valued by the Poda themselves as well as their customers for their taste and/or medicinal values. People here claim that local fish have a strong flavour (*Tikkhar*). The exotic varieties yield more, are easy to catch/harvest, but are considered to be less tasty in comparison to the local varieties. A local *Baam* fish (Eel) is sought after since its meat is believed to have medicinal values.

Most of the Jalari households (85%) reported that they sell their fish catch to a contractor at a collection centre as well as occasionally selling directly to the shops, restaurants and hotels in Begnas or to the casual individual customers who come there early in the morning from other places including Pokhara city.

Almost all Jalaris agree that there has been a change in the amount of fish available for harvesting after the construction of the dam in the Begnas Lake. Some argue that the amount of fish available may have either remained the same or slightly diminished in recent years. However, their arguments are contested by most of the people in the Begnas study area. Fishing was ranked as the primary source of income (and therefore very important as a livelihood strategy for their household) for the household by all informants in the Jalari household survey.

Perceived Changes in the Quality of Life

Except one, all Jalaris households reported that today they are able to eat better quality food and live a better life than in the past (i.e. when they lived in their place of origin). All of them noted that their average income for each month has gone up (no figures were reported). As evidence of their increase in regular incomes, they note that they have been able to give education to their children—i.e. send them to schools. In our informal discussions, many Jalaris also revealed that they are able to eat fish more frequently now (because of a better catch in the lakes—including their own cages and enclosures). Some perceive that the health conditions for the family members have also improved—i.e. they can afford to access better health care facilities. However, this claim made by the Jalaris needs to be seen against

the fact that very few Jalari men and women were surviving beyond age 55 as shown in Table 3.

Table 10: Improvements in the Conditions of Life: Perceptions of Podes

| Perceived Changes | Mentioned by (Hh) | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Income has gone up | 34 | 100. |
| Can afford good and full meals | 33 | 97 |
| Able to send children to school | 18 | 53 |
| Able to get medical care when needed | 11 | 32 |

Source: Field Survey, 1998. Note: Respondents from each household had given more than one response to the question on things that have improved in the lives of the Jalaris in comparison to the past. On the issue of income they were asked whether their income had gone up.

Apparently Jalaris are doing fairly well in making a living with improvements in fishing opportunities. Many of the Jalari households (14 households or more than 41%) have reported that they have been able to make savings from their current *byawasaya* (work or business) in recent years. About 50% of the total households have reported that they were able to invest their saving in buying Khet (2 households or 6%) and Bari (15 households or 44%) after they settled in Begnas. Similarly, nearly 20% (7 households) have made second investments also (see Table 11) which certainly indicates that the Jalaris who may have been very poor in the past are beginning to accumulate some wealth now.

Table 11: Investments made by the Jalari households from their savings

| Items of Investment | Investment I | Investment II |
|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Khet | 2 | - |
| Bari | 12 | 3 |
| House | 1 | 1 |
| Business | - | 1 |
| Other | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 16 | 7 |

Source: Field Survey, 1998.

Some interesting features should also be noted here. From my field observation as well as the information given by the Jalaris themselves (key informant or the group interviews) it was clear that a substantial amount of their income has been spent on buying nets, hooks, as well as in preparing the enclosures and cages for fish farming. Furthermore, even though most of the Jalari households have been investing a significant share of their income in providing education to their children, this does not appear to them as any

kind of investment. Such expenses—since they are part of regular household budget—are perceived by most of the Jalari people as regular expenses (as opposed to the idea of seeing the household spending on education of their children as an investment for their future). Perhaps this difference in perception—i.e. particularly seeing the money put into education as ‘regular expense’—is partly responsible for many parents deciding against spending their regular income on their children’s education.

Choice of Occupations: Changing Patterns

There are indications of changes in the choice of occupations made by individual Jalaris. All spouses (33) of the Jalari male household heads are reported to have adopted fishing as their primary occupation (one of the household heads is a widower). A number of children in the community are reported (11 boys and 7 girls) to have already adopted fishing as their primary occupation (of the total of 42 boys and 45 girls). Two Jalari young men have a regular office job.

Early in the morning most of the days, it was observed that the young children (10-15 years in age) were helping their parents in setting up cast nets and/or fishhooks in the lakes. They would also help their parents in fishing related works after they returned from their schools. On a Saturday, during a field-trip in May-June, 1998 I remember buying fish from two young boys (one of them may have been hardly 10 and the other was about 12 years old) who were fishing in the Kandel Tundo side of the Begnas lake all by themselves. This is an indication that the young ones do contribute to the household economy during their time away from school. The survey data shows that most of the children are reported as not having adopted any economic activity until the age of 14. This is perhaps an acknowledgement among the Jalaris today that children are supposed to be in schools and are not to be considered to be full time income earners.

In the household survey, Jalari respondents were asked to give information on the traditional occupation for their household and their parents, occupation of the respondents before and now, and the occupation they like their children to adopt. The results summarised in Table 12 gives an interesting indication. Traditional occupation or the parental occupation for all Jalaris in Begnas was fishing. Among the respondents and the household heads today, more than 85% have reported fishing was their primary economic activity before they came to live in Begnas. Only some of them were in regular jobs or were working as wage labourers.

Table 12: Occupations: Past and Present and Preferences for the Future

| Occupation | Traditional | Respondent's own Change | | Preference for Children | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------------------|------------|-------------------------|------------|
| | R's Parents | R's Before | R's Today | Son | Daughter |
| Fishing | 34 (100.0%) | 29 (85.3%) | 31 (91.2%) | 4 (11.8%) | 1 (2.9%) |
| Service | | 3 (8.8%) | 3 (8.8%) | 24 (70.6) | 2 (5.9%) |
| Army | | | | 2 (5.9%) | - |
| Medical | | | | - | 4 (11.8%) |
| Teaching | | | | - | 2 (5.9%) |
| Wage Labour | | 2 (5.9%) | | | |
| Not Reported | | | | 4 (11.8%) | 25 (73.5%) |

Source: Field Survey, 1998.

The preferences of occupations for children are indications of the changing perceptions about works and a reflection of a desire for a change. More than 70% of the parents want to see their sons take up ‘service’ after they finish their education. Only about 12% of them would like to see their sons take on fishing and fish farming as their major economic activities. More than 73% of them did not give any response to the same question in relation to their daughters. Of those who responded to this question, some would like to see their daughters become public servants, others would like them to go into teaching or nursing jobs. Psychologically, the Jalaris seem to be looking for a change in their ways of life including the modes of their livelihood. Whether this is good for them cannot be judged now. What is striking though is the fact that a number of their sons and daughters who are either in their teen ages or older are reported to have already adopted fishing as their primary economic activity.

About 42% (73 out of the total of 174 Jalari individuals in the study) of the Jalari population was reported to have adopted no economic activity or they were listed as economically ‘not active’. About 71% of these (N=73) were less than 10 years old while 26% were 10-14 years old and the remaining fell in the 15-19 year age group. Of the total economically active population (N=101), 95% (96 individuals) are reported to be into fishing and/or fish farming and the remaining 5% are in ‘service’. Incidentally, an equal number of males and females were reported to have adopted fishing as their primary economic activity. No females have entered ‘service’.

Conclusion

This article has suggested how environmental changes and ‘development’ have meant different things to different groups of people in terms of their access to resources and the resulting livelihood strategies. On the basis of empirical data I have argued that the wheel of ‘development’ as it spins, has sent a centripetal force towards some groups of people but a centrifugal force towards others. Similarly, change in the environments (i.e., physical/natural and socio-cultural, political, economic, etc.) have resulted in different

responses from different groups of people. Why such a difference is observed at the empirical level is a potent research problem—of significance to theoretical debates in anthropology in relation to human populations, their environments and related processes.

Specialised livelihood options for many communities including the Podes have brought them to a situation where competition and uncertainty abound. Fishing is no more the occupation of the Jalaris only. The Jalaris in Pokhara have not been known for possessing good and specialized skills in agricultural farming activities. In the past it was they and few other groups of people (like the Kumals, Majhis, etc.) who had specialized in fishing as an occupation. Bahun-Chhetris in particular would not consider fishing for earning cash/income. To begin with, these people, unlike the Jalaris themselves, did not have all the skills required to adopt fishing as a livelihood strategy (i.e. making and mending of the nets, techniques of throwing or casting nets in the waters, knowing the places and best periods for catching fish, etc.). Besides, the traditional fishing techniques did not always guarantee a catch. Thus it was regarded as an unreliable source of income and was considered good for those with little or no land resources but a plenty of labour time to spare. Finally, Bahun-Chhetris or most others would have considered it not befitting their social status to adopt fishing for earning income or a living (because fishing was regarded as a lowly job). Today, people who belong to the so-called high castes too have adopted a number of such lowly occupations or economic activities. The handsome amount of cash income involved in some of the economic activities is a primary factor in the adoption of an occupation by people of all castes/ethnic backgrounds rather than judging such activities with the criteria or traditional ideas of clean vs. unclean, polluting vs. non-polluting, etc. I have reported elsewhere about how non-Tibetans and particularly Bahuns and Chhetris too adopted carpet weaving once the economic gains from this trade became attractive (see Chhetri 1990).

Today, it would be appropriate to distinguish between fishing and fish farming. Fish farming (of any type) has been an economic activity adopted by farmers in Pokhara not long ago. Fishing is, of course, an activity on which the Jalaris and few other people are supposed to possess the required skills and therefore hold an advantage over the Bahun-Chhetri farmers. It should be noted here that the Bahun-Chhetris would still consider 'fishing', as an activity not suited to their caste/social status while fish farming as a 'new or externally sponsored' economic activity gets accepted as 'clean'. *Bikase* things, as they are perceived, cannot be polluting, unclean, profane, etc. (raising improved variety of pigs called *Bangoor* by people of all castes/ethnic groups today is a good example).²⁰

As can be observed in Begnas today, some non-Podes have already adopted fish farming as a primary source of their household's income. Of the

many cages and enclosures in Begnas and Rupa lakes, most are owned by non-Podes (i.e. fish farming is being adopted by others). So the competition for shares in the pie of the fish market for Begnas is on—and Jalaris families alone are not the stakeholders now. Of course, Bahun-Chhetri and others have not yet adopted fishing of the type done by Jalaris—i.e. casting nets. It is the Jalaris who have so far held the licence for harvesting fish outside the private cages and enclosures (i.e. in the common areas in the lakes) in Begnas (for which they have to follow certain rules). Also, the Bahun-Chhetri farmers reported that they employ Jalaris at the time of harvesting fish from their enclosures.

Notes

1. Tharus in the newly developing and urbanizing Tarai areas could be considered as those following the centrifugal forces while the Hill migrants are pouring into the centres. Some people are drawn towards the 'centre' by the process of urbanization and development and these very processes drive others away. What kind of people are they and why can't they continue to stay on? Perhaps we have not asked this type of question in migrations studies to date.
2. As a child in the late 1950s, I remember visiting a matches factory with my grandmother in Nagdhunga—which was way outside on the south from the Pokhara Bazaar and that was the only thing which was very close to the then Poda Tole.
3. Vinding writes: "Pokhara was established in 1752 by Newar of Kathmandu at the invitation of the rulers of the petty state of Kaski" (1998: 362). He goes on to cite Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon (1980: 124) in the footnote as a support for his statement. I hope these authors mean the establishment of Pokhara as a market and not as a settlement as such because the settlement in this valley is reported to be at least 600 years old.
4. See the section on Routes and Distances where Kirkpatrick gives the travel routes used in those days between a number of important places (to and from Kathmandu as well) with interesting remarks. The seven lakes in the valley are known today as: Fewa Tal, Begnas Tal, Rupa Tal, Mairi Tal, Dipang Tal, Khaste Tal and Mandre Tal. Of these, the Fisheries Development Project in Pokhara covers the first three which also happen to be larger in size than the rest.
5. Places like Kathmandu, Pokhara, etc., today have a fairly large number of resident expatriate staff employed by the various projects or international organizations—directly hired and sent to Nepal from the countries of the origin of aid as a part of the package.
6. The extent of land transfers and changes in land use plus consequent changes in social relations in Pokhara within the last 20-30 years can be a research topic in itself.
7. Of the 34 Jalari households in Begnas, 27 reported Poda Tole or Naya Bazaar as their place of origin. Of the remaining, 2 came from Palung (one during the 1970s and the other during the 1990s), and the remaining 5 came from other places within Pokhara Municipality mostly during the 1990s.
8. In contrast to the general trend in migration, we see that Jalaris are migrating from urban areas to the rural areas. Perhaps a community's livelihood strategy

- and the socio-economic status of its members are important factors influencing their decisions in choosing a direction and destination for the move. This issue can be an interesting piece of research on its own right but is not within the scope of this paper.
9. Two households reported to have spent 4 years in transition—i.e. having left their place of origin but not getting settled anywhere on a permanent basis. Some of them (5 households) spent 5 to 10 years in transition while the remaining households spent more than 10 and up to 18 years to make a decision to get settled in Begnas. Whether some of these households will still move elsewhere in the near future remains an open question.
 10. The situation would have been much worse if the Jalaris did not keep pigs and dogs, which seem to do most of the job of cleaning the village premises of such material.
 11. Levy writes that the word Po(n) used ordinarily to refer to the Podes, “has a pejorative quality” and therefore they “use a relatively neutral term “Pore” (in Kathmandu Newar, “Poriya”; in Nepali, “Pode”) to refer to themselves” (Levy, 1990: 368-369). However, we see that the Podes are still in the process of adopting more neutral and honourable surnames to refer to themselves.
 12. A number of caste/ethnic groups have, in the recent decades, started using surnames which do not sound derogatory any more as their earlier identity labels. But, the new surnames often tend to retain the occupational descriptions of the caste/ethnic groups in question. Does this indicate the process for the genesis of new caste/ethnic identities—starting with a new label? Is this process adequate and strong enough towards achieving or reaching a ‘seamless’ society, i.e., one devoid of social or ritual hierarchies?
 13. On widowhood: Among certain communities of caste ethnic groups like the Rai, Gurung, and Tamang women could become widows at an early age when their husbands die in wars or while on duty in the so-called peace-keeping mission for UN. How significant (in # or in %) is widowhood caused by this factor vis-à-vis other causes (including natural deaths) of deaths could be an interesting study in its own right. Comparisons could be made across caste/ethnic groups and by age of the surviving as well as dying spouses.
 14. I feel that it is necessary to explain why the age groupings were done the way they are in this table. A separate group was deemed essential for those less than 5 years of age—most of them considered below school going age. The next age group (5-14) would show most of those who are in school. The age group up to 29 years has been given special attention because it is my belief that access to education for people like the Jalaris has changed significantly during the last three decades just as for most of the people in the country. The educational achievements of those in the age group 30-44 would indicate how accessible were the schools or education in general for Jalaris in the post-Rana regime period. Attending school or gaining education for common people in the country was almost a taboo until not long ago.
 15. Apparently, the situation has not changed much in favour of the Podes and most of the ‘untouchable’ community throughout the country. Talking about the Podes in Panauti, Toffin, et. al. (1991) write that the younger generation is waging a social battle against the status quo minded local dignitaries. It is disheartening to

learn that “Pode children are not allowed to attend the public schools” (Toffin et. al. 1991: 115-117).

16. It was mentioned that some households might have 2-3 lakh rupees deposited in their bank accounts in Pokhara. This may be an indication that accumulation of wealth is gradually happening among Jalaris.
17. The normal fishing season is considered to be from October to February—i.e. during the cooler months. This is different than the traditional fishing season—which was perceived to be during the wet months of June to September when flooding in the streams was supposed to yield larger volume of catch.
18. Only 3 individuals in the whole population have reported as having a secondary occupation also. The survey data indicate that none of the Jalari individuals have adopted more than two sources of earning income or a living.
19. See also Tingey (1994) for a discussion of paradoxical position of Damai being ‘impure and auspicious’ simultaneously.
20. In my study on Tibetan refugees in Pokhara (Chhetri 1990), I have noted that Bahun-Chhetris did not do carpet weaving related activities before. It was perceived as an unclean work (done by Bhote people)! But now, Tibetans have to compete with others including the Bahuns and Chhetris in their carpet/handicraft business.

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