

A Village Remembered: Western Nepal May 2013

by Geoffrey Clarfield (January 2015)



Introduction

Let us call the village Karapur. That is not its real name. We will call it by its invented name to prevent interested readers from descending on the village, and out of respect for the villagers. Karapur is not that different from villages like it. It is just one of many villages that can be found on the banks of the West Seti river. For those with an adventurous spirit the road in and out and up down this remarkable Himalayan river valley, is well worth the effort.

The road to the village of Karapur begins in the district capital of Dadelhdhura which is perched high on a forested ridge covered with pine trees, and whose slopes are dotted with villages and settlements, whose brown and white houses stand out in clusters on hillsides and whose terraces rise from the valley, like massive but regular stairways, constructed by and for the giants that populate Hindu mythology and who are often the heroes and villains of so many Nepali rituals.

The road to Karapur is paved, and despite some steep areas with thousand foot drops on one side of the road, it is a thousand times less perilous than the secondary, unpaved agricultural road across the ridges to another village with a different name, overlooking the Seti river and where we had just spend a few days visiting a research team.

Occasionally there are patches of unpaved road on the way and it is necessary to slow down and take them in first gear. It is not for nothing, that when local peasants are asked about development needs they inevitably talk about roads. Road expansion and transport are often mentioned as key impediments to an improved local economy.

For that reason we made sure that the Toyota Land Cruiser that my employers had rented to back up this month's field trip would be earmarked to pick up one of my supervisors which would later take him on the difficult road from Dadelhdhura to a different village, a village thousands of feet above the Seti river.

We drove down the road from Dadeladhura, the district capital of Dadeladhura district, one of the four districts that may be affected by a hydroelectric dam proposed by the Nepali government. It was a sunny morning. We passed buses and different kinds of vehicles in various states of repair, and whose brakes often make a screeching noise as they round corners and hairpin bends, some of them with passengers on the roof or extra passengers on the side, hanging on with grim determination. One can imagine that the alternative may be a walk of a day or two. It would appear that out of poverty or choice, many people, mostly men, do not mind taking the risk. As we followed the spiral of the road ever downwards, it became hotter and more humid until we found ourselves driving along the south side of the West Seti river, as this (downstream from the proposed dam site) area is a meander that goes east west before turning south again.

On either sides of the road, fields of ripe wheat were being harvested by women in bright red dresses and red bandanas, cutting the wheat with the standard curved sickle whose form, my Nepali colleague Shiva keeps reminding me, has not changed much since the dawn of agriculture in the fertile crescent, some ten thousand years ago.

I mention this not out of ethnographic curiosity, but out of an interest in rural agriculture for this tool and method is still the most sustainable and effective way to cut wheat, given the availability of labor and the inappropriateness of introducing tractors to places like terraced fields where they just cannot go. Not surprisingly, this is also the time of the New Year and the New Year Festival or Bishu Parva in Nepali, as the new year (not surprisingly) marks the harvest of the annual wheat calendar.

Closer to the settlements but sometimes in the fields as well, stand large "hay poles" where villagers store the hay that they use to feed goats, cows, oxen and buffalo. They have a unique shape and remind me of a character in the Dr. Seuss book, *On Beyond Zebra*, that my parents read to me when I was young, and in turn I have read to my own children. Despite the hard life that is lived here, the haypoles create a unique and surreal landscape for the outside observer.

At the River's Edge

As we were making good time we stopped the jeep and found a path that took us down to the West Seti river, just across from Barpata village where we knew that two researchers who were doing survey work a couple of days earlier.

As you climb down the path of the small roadside cliff you arrive at a wide riverside beach with large areas of fine white sand, bordered by large expanses of rocks and pebbles, some too

difficult to lift but some small and flat enough to send skipping across the river's surface. Upstream to the left, the river was flowing fast and to our right there was a large bend in the river, a large boulder and then rapids. We threw enough stones into the center of the river to determine that it was at least six feet deep and would be a tough swim. It would also be perfect for white water rafting, as the beaches could also be used to camp.

As we were sharing the beach with cows and oxen, despite the fact that oxen are not bulls, one of them started charging us and we chased it away with a walking stick. Farther down the river we would later see young boys leading large water buffalo to the river's edge where they would submerge themselves, loll about and avoid the heat of the day. Nearby, young boys would also swim freely not far from the bulls and with a beach dotted with animal droppings, both fresh and dry.

We finally arrived at the roadside teashops that are clustered just off the highway on and across from the entrance to the pedestrian suspension bridge, which connects Karapur to the road and the road to Karapur. As you walk across the suspension bridge villagers go back and forth and you are presented with an impressive view. Below you and to the left and the right is the Seti river, flowing strongly with small rapids to your right, a sandy beach on the other side and sheer rising rocks on the roadside edge of the river. Most of the village houses are clustered above a small cliff upon which the exit from the pedestrian walkway allows you to enter the village.



Author above the West Seti River

The village houses appear to the eye as a strip of red and white painted low lying buildings with slate roofs or alternatively, grey stone built houses of two stories, constructed in a way where there is often an open working patio on the second or third floor, where men and women often sit, or use for various household chores including sorting and separating foodstuffs.

Among the houses there are stone walls and paths that lead in different directions until you pass through these layers of dense houses and before you is an open working area for threshing and then, a flat area of fields beyond which, are two or three large trees beside a small temple, and then further on, stone terraces with fruit trees like papaya and places where villagers store firewood. I would pitch my tent there and one night experienced a violent thunder storm from inside my tent and which I describe later.

Behind you on the walls of the houses, are hooks where a variety of plows and rakes are hung

in a long line, reminding a westerner like me of a musket above a fireplace. Facing you is a steep forested mountain, filled with bright green trees where the villagers collect wood and fodder; a community forest which is also home to jackals and wild boar.

Architecture Without Architects

The colors of the houses, the soil, the beach and the mountain blend in and out of each other naturally. They are pleasant to look at. There is clearly an ancient aesthetic going on here in this indigenous form of peasant architecture. All the houses are similar, but no two houses are identical. They have identical parts but the shapes and angles and combinations differ from house to house making for continuous variety.

In this village you often feel as if you are in an Escher etching as the use of space is different than that in the West: animals are kept on the first floor, people live on the second floor where they cook, eat and sleep in different rooms. Not every house has a second floor balcony, and many have them have it at different levels. Sometimes even elderly women can be seen on the roof working, sitting or chatting. Once you get used to it seems perfectly natural, but at first it is unique and disorienting.

I ate a number of meals on the second floor of one of these houses. I had to climb a stone stairway to get there. It was a sculpture in and of itself, as each step was a flat boulder of different shape. The second floor room was cool in the afternoon and pleasant in the evening. The stone stairs set off the vertical and horizontal lines of the house.

I dwell on this point for this village and villages like it in the West Seti, would have merited a chapter in any one of the books published by that scholar of vernacular architecture, founded by that forward looking New Yorker from the 1950s, Bernard Rudavsky, who to this day remains the guru of so many 20th and 21st century architects. He believed that the indigenous architecture of the non-industrial world was better adapted to the rhythms of daily life and interpersonal sociability. In any plan to settle or resettle people from the West Seti to a new place, the nature and function of their domestic architecture needs to be taken into account. It is not just aesthetics, but a way of life and a use of space and color that is hundreds, if not thousands of years old.

An Eco Tourist Asset

I emphasize this point because it is also an unrecognized eco tourist asset. What I mean by this is that what experts in rural development call "poor," adventure tourists, National Geographic, Discovery Channel and members of the well heeled Explorers Club in Manhattan,

would call remote and beautiful. (Funnily enough, when our driver was negotiating hair pin bends in the road he would comment in Nepali by saying, "I feel like I am in a Discovery Channel documentary.") Combine this with hiking and a traditional highland Hinduism, which breaks the stereotypes of the West of a pacifist, vegetarian Hinduism (as my colleague Krishna reminds me, these Hindus sacrifice animals in abundance at the their temples and send soldiers to join the Royal Gurkhas). All of this area is a major eco tourist asset.

The four districts in and around the dam could attract a high end visitor who would be willing to put aside a significant portion of their travel fee towards community development. I have discussed this with my other colleague Shiva who agrees that it is a totally unrealized asset. It is not just my Western imagination.

There are two or three layers of housing as you move away from the cliff across the small plain which is the village territory. Just below the houses in a strip that looks over the river are the houses of the Dalits (untouchables). Just above the Dalits we met some temporary migrants from the Terai (the southern plain of Nepal) who fish the Seti during the months of March, April and May. They get 3-5kg of fish each a day which they sell for 300 rupees a kilo. Clearly, this line of business will not be viable when and after the dam is built. They are considered "indirectly affected" in the brave new international terminology of resettlement jargon, as they do not permanently live there.



Looking down at the River Seti

Folk Religion and the Sacred

As you walk through the paths between the houses of the village you come to three tall trees that are about a hundred feet high and where there stands a small Hindu Temple. It is about 12 feet high, made of layers of stone with a sloping slate roof. Inside it is a Trisul or trident, a symbol of the God Siva, but the villagers insist that it is actually a village temple to the goddess Devi. In front of it stands a stone slab that acts as a table and beside it a small cement pillar, which once carried a trisul that is now inside the temple.

When we had the chance to speak to some of the women. Many of them said that they worship a different spirit, the God Vishnu, at the Chautara (village meeting places), which are built around trees and function as the village square, where anyone can go sit, relax, sleep or chat. I suspect that although they are worshipping the spirit, they just might be worshipping the tree as well.

One night as I lay down to sleep in my small pup tent an enormous wind engulfed my tent, followed by bright lightning, stupendously loud thunder and a rainstorm that pummeled my tent. I lay there fascinated at the volume of the thunder, as it was louder than some African thunderstorms I had experienced and the canyons nearby acted as loud speakers. For a few minutes I was quite frightened. I now understand why the villagers believe that thunder comes from the God Indra. I recalled Zeus the thunderer and Poseidon with his Trisul like trident.

When I first arrived, I set up my pup tent beside the temple, just close enough to be in eyesight of the houses of the village in case of emergency (and for security) and just far away enough for me not to be living cheek and jowl with most of the domestic animals that are kept on the ground floor at night. We then walked towards the terrace fruit trees just below the community forest and decided to walk to either end of the village to get a "grand tour" of the place.

Smaller and Smaller Plots

As we walked to our left we crossed numerous fields, all clearly delineated in longitudinal plots that moved from the cliff side toward the terraced orchard area beneath the wall like hill of the community forest. Each plot was delineated by a furrow and also set off by stones put in key points in the furrow to insure that there was, and is no misunderstanding as to which plot belongs to whom. Clearly, land plot sizes are not getting bigger with each passing generation and just looking at them made sense of the massive male out migration from the village.

Buffalo, oxen and goats grazed freely on the stubble of the village fields. We hoveled to the footpath just above the river and passed a line of houses that ran from the path towards the mountain. There were also a few houses in front of the terraced orchards. Finally, we came to a small building where the local miller charges people to grind the corn and wheat of the villagers. There was also a Dukan, (local shop), where the owner's small son was watching a Nepali movie on an improvised DVD machine. We could also see rows of empty beer and gin bottles as well as a local brew called Theula, which is cheap and of high alcoholic content. Later, we heard from some of the wives of migrant workers that drinking among the men is a growing problem. Above the mill is an open space where young teenage boys were playing a board game call Carom board. I have yet to see any girls or young women playing, as they seem to be consumed by domestic work or, if they are lucky, schoolwork.

Towards the School House

We walked back across the fields and continued to pass the houses, which are clustered, in

meandering rows. In front of this main concentration of houses are a smaller cluster of houses near the orchards and green gardens that are irrigated by a channel at the foot of the orchard. Then the village opens up into more fields that spread out from the foot of the hill to the edge of the river.

We walked across those and arrived at the school, which has classes from Standard One to Eight. It was closed because the school year begins in April and ends March. They have ten to fifteen days off until the next school year begins. Despite the proximity of the river, despite the fact that the suspension bridge has been there for the last nine years, and despite the fact that Karapur is not officially a village, but legally part of a wider municipality, there is not one tap or any running water in the village. Only four or five houses have pit latrine toilets and the beach serves as a toilet for up to 100 households. A tiny rubber hose emits a slow flow of water in the schoolyard and since it was holiday time, this is where we washed our hands and face in the mornings and the evenings that we stayed in the village.

Despite the picture post card beach, river and view, the reality of up to five hundred people a day using the beach for a variety of purposes was a bit off putting. Clearly, there is a need for a public health campaign in this village with regards to personal hygiene and public health. One afternoon I asked an elderly woman if the health officers had suggested that they boil their drinking water. She said they did, but the habit had not caught on. She then complained to me bitterly of long term stomach upset.

Researchers

When we reached the village there were already research assistants who had been active there for a few days. Krishna is a 26-year-old research assistant (RA), upper caste urban male who has just completed his requirements for a master's degree in anthropology at the sociology/anthropology department of Tribhuvan University.

The other RA is a young 25 year old upper caste female called Netra, whose family is from this area but who was raised in Dhangadi town in the Terai. She has completed her master's degree at the same department.

Kalpana is a young married woman with two children. She is around 35-36. She belongs to a land rights organization where she is treasurer in Baitadi. Prem is a 46 year old, father of three and an expert rural surveyor. The local assistant is a young 18-year girl who finished Grade 10 comes from the Karapur and helped the team gain access to and the confidence of the villagers. Her name is Dhauri.

By the time we arrived they had already been there eight days and they will remain for another 13 days in order to carry out more survey work. Researchers from Kathmandu supervise them.

Participatory Rural Appraisal

After having lunch in on the second floor of house we entered the back room where people sleep and where there are few flies where Netra, research assistant and Kalpana, were finalizing the social map chart. They showed us different charts: social mapping, resource mapping, preference ranking, a mobility map, a relationship map, timeline, seasonal calendar and income-expenditure analysis. They seemed very focused and detail oriented.

Social Mapping

These are the highlights:

- Coverage: East School, West: Mill, North: Community Forest and South: River and Road
- Settlement: 100 households, differentiated by caste group, Dalit, migrant workers, and women headed households.
- Public buildings: 4; School building, temple, health post, children's centre
- Agricultural land: irrigated or rain fed farmland in the east, west and north
- Community Forest: on the north side
- Walking road: from school to Mill including other paths in settlement
- Temple and Trees: on the north side of village
- Dalit settlement in lower part of village
- A tap in school area
- Health post: in the west of the village near to Mill area

Resource Mapping

The map prepared by, focused on natural resources like the forest, agricultural land, a local quarry, herbs, sand, river, the beach etc.

Mobility Map

In order to explain the mobility of local people, the chart is classified into various categories.

- Education
- Health
- Marriage and social relations
- Religious places and pilgrimages
- Employment
- Shopping
- Migration
- Legal assistance and aid

Except in the case of employment and religious visits, which extend deep into India, a small number of people have visited Haridwar, a religious place of India.

Local people's mobility is limited (most of the peoples' access is only as far as Dipayal, Silgudi, Dadeldhura, and Dhangadi). However, in the case of male employment, people have been working in Korea, Malaysia, Qatar, India, etc.

Relationship Analysis

The relationship map prepared by the team explains the relationship of individuals and institutions with local leaders, the health post, the municipality office, school, forest users group, Federation of Forest User Group, etc. Based on the nature of the organization and the people's need, the relationship graph shows either single line and double line connections with various institutions.

Preference Ranking

In order to prioritize the needs of local people the following preferences were elicited in order of importance:

- Irrigation

- Drinking water
- Vocational training
- Education

Income and Expenditure

The sources of income and expenditure are mentioned as follow.

- Service-e.g. school teachers
- Foreign employment
- Wage labor
- Selling herbs

Source of expenditure

- Food
- Clothing
- Health treatment
- Festivals
- Mobile
- Education

Timeline

The survey team captured a brief timeline of the village with its major events. The timeline covers the important events that have affected the villages from 1957 to 2013. The first event mentioned in the timeline was a national election campaign when B.P. Koirala visited the village and two leaders Shiva Ram Pant and Dr. K. I. Singh were competing for the post of member of the Lower House.

Seasonal Calendar

The seasonal calendar follows the major stages of the agricultural cycle from planting to the harvesting of major crops like paddy (rice), wheat, and maize with some exploration of green vegetable and mustard.

A New Phenomenon

As I had pitched my tent beside the temple under the three tall trees I was told that I was the first foreigner to ever stay in the village. None of the villagers had ever seen a pup tent and they surrounded me and the tent, laughing, commenting and feasting their eyes on this new phenomenon. After we had eaten our evening meal the field workers came to bid me good night. I sprayed the inside the tent as we are in the lowlands and there are insects everywhere and, the local health authorities warn us that this is a malarial area. They ask the villagers to sleep under mosquito nets but there is not one in use among the 100 households in this village.

I waited ten minutes, unzipped, zipped up and settled in for the night. I wondered how these villagers would fare when a small town to house the dam workers may be built in the area. Would there be anyone or any organization to facilitate the exchange or would they left to the vagaries of these temporary (two to five years) urban settlements with few women and many outside male workers? As I fell asleep I could hear voices in the distance, occasionally a truck from across the river on the highway, a bit of wind and securely protected from malarial mosquitos and any other kind of insect, I fell asleep.

Morning Has Broken

Just before sunrise as the light penetrated my tent I was serenaded by a chorus of birds including one that had a variation of the song of a bird that lived near our house when we lived in Nairobi, Kenya but whose song was one note longer. That was interrupted by about four or five barking dogs. Clearly, I was a new phenomenon in the village for them and they surrounded my tent for about half an hour barking. Nothing I could say or grunt would stop them. Although I had a walking stick in my tent at the time I decided to wait it out as I doubted that they had been vaccinated and, I also assumed they were not rabid. I was probably right on both accounts and they eventually went away.

I then unzipped my tent and looked out at the village. A few women had risen early and were crouching at the edge of the field watching me as they combed their hair. A few old men were sitting near their houses smoking their "cheeroots" traditional cigarettes and dressed in the topi, vest and pantaloons of traditional Nepali men. I could see smoke rising from fires in the courtyard that were probably cooking tea and within a few minutes large water buffalo,

oxen and cows began emerging from the first floors of the houses on to the field and towards the community forest. They were accompanied by small children directing them with herding sticks.

I had chatted with these same children (mostly boys) the day before and their ages were anything from nine to fourteen. It was clear that they had grown up without sufficient vitamins and protein as they all appeared stunted. Given the fact that their parents report that the farms cannot provide enough food for a full year, this did not surprise me. From a development point of view this is a major challenge.



West Seti Villagers

(It also reminds me of the story of Coptic sociologist Henry Ayrout who was an expert on Egyptian peasants. He describes a medical visit to a village. After all children were diagnosed and treated one kept on coming back to the doctors and insisting that he was sick. It turned out that that child was the only healthy one in the village and as a result, he felt that there was something dreadfully wrong with him. In the case of Karapur, vitamin and protein deficiency seems to produce stunting which is prevalent in the village and perhaps up and down the river. It is also known that this inhibits cognitive development so once they reach adulthood their only option may be to go to India. Personally I find this very sad, as I believe there are vocational alternatives to going to India.

A Boy's Life

As the day gets hotter the young boys move their animals to the fields, leave some of them there and then drive them down the path to the water. The buffalo loll in the water close to shore with only their heads above water, waiting out the heat of the day. The young boys swim and play, very often betting who can swim to the other side and avoid drifting into the rapids. I was told that one or two children drown each year in this area as a result of these kinds of wagers. Towards the end of the day the boys begin to bring the animals up the cliff, and as the sun begins to go down they are returned to the first floor of the houses from which they came.

It is an odd thing for an outsider to walk through the village as on the first floor of each house there is an open window which frames cows, water buffalo and oxen, each one of them looking as if they are sitting for a portrait. Then, the majority of the village male children seem to be free. One evening about twenty boys took advantage of a pile of leaves that had fallen from the trees above the temple where I had put my tent and took turns burying each

other with leaves. It occasionally led to short lived fist fights of about twenty seconds and then they were back at it again. Shortly after, another boy dragged a dead jackal around by a rope tied to the neck in a triumphant display of man's mastery of the wild.

A Girl's Life

Girls live differently. They rise early, help their mothers prepare food, help them air out the blankets in the early morning sun, sweep the floors, watch over their siblings, cut the wheat in the fields, bring it back to the threshing floor in front of the houses and as I witnessed for two full afternoons, go through the stages of separating the wheat from the stalks and from the chaff, bagging it and taking it to the miller for grinding. They also go out to the forest and cut grass for animal fodder returning with bundles sometimes twice their size. In the evening it is food preparation, child rearing and eventually to sleep a couple of hours after sundown. Women are always busy, yet men seem to have leisure.

A Village Without Men

What struck me most about the village was the absence of men. There were only two or three men there between the ages of fifty and seventy. One old man had been a watchman for a famous Indian cricketer in Mumbai for twenty years and now is retired in this village. When I asked him, "What is the main difference between Indians and Nepalis?" without batting an eyelid he said, "Nepalis are basically honest and Indians are thieves."

Having looked at some of the medical literature on Western Nepal it is clear that the experience of being a low paid, low status watchman, in a large Indian city does not build self-esteem. Associated with this is drinking, gambling, not sending remittances and worst of all syphilis and AIDs. In a study done on returning men in Western Nepal from jobs in Mumbai, in 2001 researchers found 8% of men HIV positive and about 30% with syphilis.

From the Headmaster's Point of View

Early one morning we were washing our hands and face at the tiny water pipe in the village. The school was closed but the headmaster was in his office. He graciously gave us time to interview him and the conversation is summarized here. His name is Jit and he is the Headmaster of the Lower Secondary School (Grades 1-7 inclusive) in Karapur.

I introduced myself and my field assistant/translator. To simplify the process, I said everyone we meet is talking about the proposed West Seti dam and both researchers and the government want to know what life is now like in the Far West and what are the people's hopes

and expectations from the project.

At first, I asked him to explain to me what all the charts on the wall were as I was new to Nepal and have not visited schools here. From right to left he described the lists of the Teacher and Parents Association, the grades of the students, differentiating the results of Dalit from Non-Dalit Students and male from female (these were colored bar charts), the annual calendar of the school, the teachers' roster, a political map of the world, portraits of four anti Rana political martyrs, the daily teaching calendar and colored tourist photos of noteworthy places in the Far West such as, Bahurani Mountain in Bajhang, Karapur bridge, dancers from the far west, the Gaura Praba festival of Dadeldhura and Khaptad National Park. He told us that the school now has 225 students, 8 teachers and one office assistant in this lower secondary school.

As we had seen a small "kulo" or irrigation channel on the north side of the fields below the forested mountain side I used that to talk about agriculture. He explained that the channel was quite recent and had been built in the village to address a local desire for irrigation, as other villages in the area were better situated and had irrigated lowland "khet" areas. They managed to get the channel built, but the flow is not well regulated and the villagers are disappointed. He confirmed the local terms for irrigated and unirrigated land and lower land of irrigation channel is called Khet, irrigated land, and upper part is called Pakho, non-irrigated land but their desire for Khet was not working out as they had hoped.

However, he did say irrigated land is good for green vegetable gardens and we saw a number of them in the village with healthy looking cabbage plants in abundance. He said the neighbouring village of Ataba has the same problem and explained that villagers are not agriculturally self-sufficient. He said that food security varies from 3 months to 7-8 months depending on the weather. Overall, he said that despite the area of irrigated land being generally smaller than unirrigated, irrigated areas provide three times as much food as does unirrigated land. He pointed out that the irrigated land supports, rice, wheat, maize, peas, mustard and other vegetables whereas the unirrigated land is used to grow millet. Their water source is not the Seti River, but a small mountain stream from where they have directed a channel to supply their traditionally styled but recently implemented village irrigation channel.

He said that if there would be increased irrigation, then the village people could increase the volume of production and reduce the gap in food security. He added that physical infrastructure like a channel does not necessarily increase irrigation. The channel was built with a government budget and advocated by villagers seven years ago. The demand for the channel was from the people, lobbied at the municipality and supported by the DDC.

A List of Needs

His list of immediate development needs elicited by researchers from the villagers:

1. Proper drinking water – a tap sufficient for school children, instead of the tiny pipe that now exists. In his opinion villagers drink river water even during the time of the monsoon when the river turns brown and climbs up the river bank. He emphasized that drinking Seti River water is not what the people want, but what they are forced to do from lack of alternatives.
2. Irrigation – it is limited and must be expanded.
3. Toilets – there are only in four or five houses in whole village that have them. Open defecation is practiced everywhere. He lamented that the villages here are unaware of the health hazards and that other villages have NGOs/INGOs which are working on this problem.
4. Most of the people in the village have kidney problems (stones) which he believes comes from drinking the local water. This was confirmed when we were talking to women at the threshing floor who complained about stomach ailments.

He felt the project should help with:

- Electricity
- Making the town a real, as opposed to a declared municipality
- Better education
- Health facilities

He feared that:

- The proposed dam could break causing a local catastrophe
- Once the flow is reduced to 10%, the low level of water in the river water will become even more polluted and animals and human beings will suffer in various ways.

His personal recommendations include:

- Electricity
- Vocational Training
- Irrigation water that will come from the reservoir (which he believes could only come from about twenty kilometres from the village)
- Employment; he emphasized that people need different kinds of skills to take advantage of the new opportunities that may be opened up with the dam. If people are educated and skilled they should be eligible for official jobs whereas unskilled people should get unskilled jobs based on availability. The concern is that affected community people should get first opportunity to work in the project areas.

Life History of a Teacher

Headmaster Jit was born in Gaun village in 1972. His father was a construction worker. He is one of 6 sons. Three of his brothers are now in India, another is in the Nepal Army, while another works as a construction worker.

He completed his secondary level in Tikha village, and continued his studies in the district capital of Dipayal. Although he had wanted to go to a better school, his family could not afford it. He then earned his Intermediate degree from Doti Campus. While he completed his intermediate degree, he also worked as a wage laborer in construction work.

One day, while he was working on the house of a chairman of the local school management committee, he heard about a vacancy in a local school. He expressed interest in taking the job with the Chairman of the School Management Committee and requested him to publish a public notice for the vacancy of schoolteacher, which they did.

Five people applied for the post and a series of interviews were held to select a teacher. He won the job and has been there since 1999. After six to seven years of teaching as a temporary teacher, in 2007 the Teachers' Service Commission announced that he had tenure. He was then promoted to the position of headmaster (2007 was the first time the Teacher Service Commission opened internal competitions for teachers already in the system).

When asked about the immediate future of Nepal as a country he hoped that in 20 years, if people will have the basic infrastructure in place, then citizens should be living above the poverty line. Quality of life will be enhanced and the minimum needs of people will include proper drinking water, education, irrigation and employment. Transportation will reach across

the country without differentiating rural from urban areas.

He explained that 60 per cent of the villagers were affiliated with the CPN UML. The Nepali Congress holds around 30 percent of the vote in the community. Other parties capture about 10 percent of supporters in the community. In general he feels that inter party competition and its impact on development projects has been mostly negative.

For example from his point of view he explained that in 1991 the Nepali Congress Party was in power. Its leaders promised to build a suspension bridge linking the village to the other side of the river where the main road is. They did not carry out their promise. In a later election the UML were elected and they managed to get the bridge built, thus most villagers switched their loyalty to support the CPN-UML. He explained that this bridge was built between 2001-2003. Personally, he told us that when he was a student he was involved with a sister student organization affiliated with the Nepali Congress Party. As it now stands he neither supports the Congress Party nor the CPN UML. He is undecided and appears to be skeptical.

During our discussions he was thoughtful, forthcoming, serious and clearly valued the limited success that hard work and good fortune had brought his way. His concerns for the villagers and the future of the area appeared to me sincere and clearly thought out.

A Fight Between Two Villages-Young Men

In the late afternoon we were about to go over and watch the women threshing and storing their grain when all of a sudden all the women downed their tools and rushed towards the center of the field. There, about four or five armed policemen were trying to talk and move on with a young male villager, who had lent money to another villager in a different village, been lured to his village in the hopes of repayment, had been confined and threatened, escaped, returned with a gang of supporters and then the Nepali police arrested his debtor and came to Karapur to speak to him.

As the mostly Nepal police tried to do their jobs they were mobbed by the women of the village who started yelling and screaming and gesticulating wildly in defense of their native son. This went on for about twenty to twenty five minutes as he police slowly moved across the field away from the crowd with their "person of interest." This incident, while interesting in and of itself, may also explain why there was such a dramatic absence of men in the village during our visits they were engaged in an inter village feud triggered by debts and creditors.

A Visit to the Chautara

Karapur has two large trees near the school that overlook the river and that is built up with stones so that they provide the two Chautaras that are village meeting and resting places common to Nepali villages and, which are the functional equivalents of “village squares” or banyan trees in villages that are built on flat land and common to South Asia. Trying to avoid the full heat of the sun we found ourselves sitting under the two Chautara at the base of two large shady trees near a mother of four. Her name was Pasupati.

She is a young woman (28), a mother of four children, who looks old beyond her years. She is the head of her household in the absence of her husband who is working in Mumbai, India, as a cook. She explained that her family had very little land and the harvest from her plots provides only about two months food for her family of four children. She explains that she needs to work as a wage laborer in construction related work to feed her children. She complains that her husband drinks and becomes boastful when he returns as being a Lahure or foreign worker is prestigious in local society.

Nevertheless, she lives in what locals consider to be a good house that was built with her own effort with \$1000 support from her husband, plus loans from neighbors and relatives. She needs to repay around \$2000 to a supplier in Dipayal, who provided cement and other construction related goods to her on credit. In her own words, she is carrying a debt around \$9,000-10,000, which is the cumulative amount of her loans requested during the building construction, its interest and money spent on food, clothing, education and health costs for her children.

She told us that she thinks it will take more than ten years to repay her loans and expects that when her sons are old enough they too will go to India as laborers or Lahure. It is not a thrilling scenario for her.

As she seemed quite run down we asked her a counterintuitive question, “What gives immense pleasure in your life?” She replied:

- The day she will be out of debt
- Her children will be able to get quality education
- Better jobs than in India
- A plot of land that would be sufficient for the survival of her family.

We asked her how many households have debt like her family. She replied that out of 100 families in the village, only 8-10 are poor and they have similar conditions as her. In her

opinion the rest are better off.

Conclusion

There is a beauty to rural Nepal. The villages look as if they were designed by avant-garde painters. The villagers dress in traditional, colorful clothes. They follow a rich variation of local Hinduism. They are surrounded by forests and mountains and they are not aspiring to a foreign culture. If they do it is that presented by Indian Bollywood films and not an unattainable American lifestyle. Yet like all traditional agriculture villages anywhere in time, there is ignorance, poverty, limited horizons and out migration.

The cities of Nepal may be cramped, polluted and noisy and lack the beauty and tranquility of rural Nepal. But as the medieval German proverb goes, "City air makes free" and a growing number of villagers in Nepal and all over India are taking their chances in the megacities that now are emerging across all of South Asia. The future is uncertain.

Geoffrey Clarfield is an anthropologist at large.

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