

Changes in Ecological Relationships of Argali Magars

Man Bahadur Khattri*

1. Introduction

Nepali society and culture is identified as diversity of various caste, ethnic and indigenous people, and their colorful cultural practices. The Magars of Argal are one of them. The ethnographic description and various studies show that the Magars of Nepal are the most diverse ethnic group themselves. This diversity is associated with only on regional cultural practices. However, they are also recognized themselves with different local lineal clans.

Ecologists seek to establish relationship between population and their natural environment. Cultural ecologists focus their study on human populations and their adaptation to their immediate environment primarily through socio-cultural means (Kottak 1974:19). Human beings like all other animals must maintain adaptive relationships with their ecosystems in order to survive, although they achieve this adaptation principally through the medium of culture (Keesing and Strathern 1998:105). Cultural ecology as a concept and method coined by Julian Steward (1955) means the study of the processes by which a society adapts to its environments. Cultural ecology suggests what aspect of a society we should focus on the study. It also looks local variation of culture in order to adapt environment locally.

In this article I have looked the relationships of inter-ethnic and inter-ecological gradients, which mediated by social-cultural mechanism i.e. *ista mitra* (fictive kin relationship). *Ista* has played role to with local production and different socio-cultural of two different ecological setting. It tries to demonstrate how socio-cultural processes transform when rice gets closer market access. The ethnographic data suggest to argue that fictive kin relationship is caused by the multiple uses of rice began in Argal. Similarly, social and geographical relationships are developed on the basis of cultural institution like kinship; but its limitation varies according to culture of an ethnic group. I argue that not only the state rules and regulations, market system but also with the internal changes brought the present social cultural system in Argal.

In the past, rice cultivation was limited due to technology and knowledge of the variety of rice, which possibly grown in up-land regions. Rice cultivation has become one of the important social and cultural transformations in most of the hill region of Nepal. I have also focused on social, economic and cultural aspect of rice. The major focus is given on the complex interaction of environment, technology, population, settlement pattern, work group composition, food production and consumption.

The Magars and their neighbor caste people especially Bahun, Chetris and various groups of Dalits differ with certain cultural practices but all people of Argal practice similar economic activities. Different caste and ethnic people of different ecological gradients use fictive kinship to incorporate the lacking social network for better survival in a subsistence economy of the rural area. Fictive kinship, *dajubhai* system, matri-cross cousin marriage, and the labor exchange system, *hudda* are tied closely as the cultural patterns of the Magars. Communal sharing of Magar is one of the main features of all these social organizations.

2. People

According to census 2001 the total population of Magars in Nepal is 1622421, which consists 7.1 % (CBS 2003:97). Total population of Argal is 2490 where as male are 1,158 and female are

* Teaching Assistant in Anthropology at Mahendra Multiple Campus Baglung

1332 (CBS 2002:45). Magars are seen earliest Sanscritized ethnic group among other Tibeto-Burman language family (Sharma 1977), but a contradiction exist when we look at the total population they share and their human development index. If we observe in the *Khuwa*¹ of Galkot area of Baglung district, Argal, Hila, Tara and Majkharka are the most densely settled areas by the Magars. The Magars of these areas are slightly different in their religious cultural practices. However, they are very close neighboring group, they have slightly different dialects and practice different rituals in different seasons, but they follow similar subsistence patterns.

The caste groups include Bahun, Chettri, Sanyasi and the Dalits². The people in Argal have diversity in cultural practices and their identity, which desire to occupy a specific niche (Barth 1981:3). The Magars are the dominant ethnic group from time immemorial. They are exploiting the land and forest resources along Puwadhune Khola and Tara Khola valley. According to Bista (1967) as mother language some Magars speak Tibeto-Burman dialect, some speak Nepali and few speak Tibetan, some speak all three, but all speak Nepali at least as second language. According to the elderly people, the village name Argal is related to their original homeland from where they migrated. According to them, they migrated from a place called Argali, which lies, in Palpa district. However, they are not clear why and when they left Argal, and again it is also possible that they migrated from Argali of Pyuthan to Palpa and at last to Argal at present. Because a place called Argali lies in Pyuthan district, where no Magars household was found at present. The distance from Pyuthan and Argal is not far. Pyuthan area can also be another possible area where Argali Magars might have migrated, however, it is difficult to verify.

Spoken language, myths, rituals, and cultural affinities are the main sources for tracing the ethno-history and place of origin of an ethnic group. Argali Magars have lost their mother tongue at present and adopted Nepali language as their lingua franca. It is true that there has not been serious and systematic study conducted in Argali of Palpa and Pyuthan. There are some Tibeto-Burman origin name of places, which probably the sign of the remains of Magar language³ in Argal. This means when they migrated to the present Argal they were speaking Magar language. There are some assumptions that the lost of Magar language must be because of the rules or conditions laid by the government. In order to support this assumption there is no oral or written history in Argal. These areas were mostly occupied by Magars until 1900 A.D. and other caste and ethnic group migrated in Argal not long ago, who could influence their language. Similarly it is difficult to justify that these Magars were migrated from Argali of Pyuthan district, because no Magar household was found there. I tried to raise questions on their origin, language and cultural affinities, which will help indicate the geo-socio-political constraints they had in the past, which ultimately indicates the adaptation process.

Argal VDC is composed of many other groups with different culture co-reside in the same areas in symbiotic relations of variable intimacy. Beside Magars Blacksmiths, Tailors, Cobblers, Chhetris, Bahuns, Chhantyal, Shiris, Sanyasis reside in Argal. Blacksmiths were the much earlier settlers of Argal, probably along with the *char-thare Magars*⁴. Besides *char-thare Magars* there are other Magars who migrated Argal later are termed as *pasuwa*⁵. The purpose of the study was not to disintegrate their population on the basis of their successive migration to Argal, therefore all the Magars of Argal are in a single category for the research purpose conducted by

¹ Regmi (1978:860) defines *khuwa* as a homestead assigned to a civil or military officer as his *jagir* or salary. But there is no evidence that the civil or military settled permanently after his retirement in Argal. But became a resource for many types of goods and services for local political elites and moneylenders.

² Blacksmiths, Tailors, Cobblers and Woodcarver.

³ Wasdi, Himdar, Simthar, Wava, Doldi

⁴ The most earlier settlers among the Magars, they includes Osasa (Gharti), Nausa (Gharti), Pulisa (Gharti) and Pun

⁵ Roka (Sinjali, Ramjali), Naisa (Gharti), and Thapa

Khattri (1995). One of the reasons is the later comer Magars are assimilated to the *char-thare Magars*.

These sub-groups are also further divided into *jethi-pare* and *kanchhi-pare*, on the basis of polygamous marriage. Before 1990 A. D., they were writing their surname as Gharti, Roka, Pun, and Thapa as the influence of Nepalization, but later with their consciousness on ethnic identity they begin to write their surname like, Osasa, Nausa, Pulisa, Pun, Sinjali, Ramjali Magar. In this regards many of the people also change their citizenship certificate to change their surname. The ethnic identity became much more important for them to be organized in a single ethnic group with their own biological distinctiveness.

The population of the Argal VDC shows the majority of the Magars in totality which constitute 49.23%, Chhetris 18.34%, Bahuns 11.67%, Blacksmith 7.88%, Chhantyal 3.96%, Tailor 3.39%, Cobblers 2.70%, Thakalis 0.43%, Shrishes 0.43%, Goldsmith 0.6%, Woodcarver 0.95%, Sanyasies 0.34% (Khattri 1995:33). Bahun and Chhetris, who migrated mostly from Bihun and lower parts of Galkot of Baglung district confine in Sile and lower region of Argal, however few settlements or households of Bahuns and Chhetris have settled in upper slop of Argal. They, “high caste”, play crucial role in Argal, however their population is less compare to the Magars. The Magars and Dalits or “low caste” people have been settled down in the middle and upper range and occupy diverse ecological gradients. These settlement patterns suggest the socio-economic life condition of the people of that area. Some cultural institutions are also related with these types of social setting. The geographical pattern of residence is socially and culturally distinct features of Argal VDC.

3. The Area

Argal Village Development Committee (VDC) lies in the mid-north-west of Baglung district. The geographical feature of Argal lies in a hill area with the altitude of, the bottom 1420 meter above sea level (masl) which is a border area with Harichaur VDC, of Baglung district, and on the top the Thami 3000 masl, which borders to Baranja VDC of Myagdi district. The settlement area lies between 1550-2200 masl; but the main settlement area lays around 2050 masl. People cultivate local rice and a few people have been settled down in the area of altitude 1550-1700 masl. The area between 1700-2200 masl is main settlement area, where Magars and other caste group settled down and cultivates maize, millet, soyabeans, beans, amaranths, hemp during the summer; and wheat, barley, and pea during winter. The land from 2200 masl and above is mostly covered with public forest. Most of the slope of land is directed toward West and East, which provide sun heat helps Argali people have diverse vegetation with good quality. Rainfall has not been measured systematically and accurately but during summer season especially mid July to mid September monsoon brings a lot of rain sometimes it affects the villagers from the flood. During the winter snowfall occurs up to three times, but in the lower region snow remains hardly for a day. The snowfall during the winter is the source of water for animals, vegetations and crops. The successful harvest of the winter crops depends upon the timely snowfall as well.

Natural resources are important to the people for their livelihood. Natural resources in Argal are forest, land and water, which are used frequently. Forest resource is used for multiple purposes like fodder, fuel, fertilizer, food, fiber, timber, agricultural implements, and utensils. Forest products are partly used by them and partly exchanged with the low land settlers of different ethnic groups. Domestic animals are maintained for milk, meat, manure, draft and other economic and social purposes. Livestock are property often become part of social status in the community. Raising the number of livestock depend also on availability of quality forest resources, which is closely associated with the area of settlements. In many cases livestock also has become part of social network especially with the ox and dairy products such as clarified butter produced in Argal. Forest resources lies mostly in upper region and have better access to the Magars due to

their settlement and their knowledge of such resources. Land is one of the vital or key stone resource, by which social nexus is built. It determines economic life, cultural behavior and social network of the people. Land resource is used extensively for economic purposes, like construction of house and cattle shed and cultivate of various types of crops. Crop cultivation depends upon the quality of the soil, which again is determined by the altitude of the place, irrigation facility and direction of the land's slop. As a water resource, Argal has one stream/*khola* and other several fresh water sources, which is mainly used for drinking, hygienic activities, irrigation, micro hydro electricity. Besides that people of Argal have utilized several stone quarrying mines, which is particularly used for roofing of houses and cattle shed. They are used in the village themselves and sold to neighboring villages. Some Magars involve also in stone quarrying. The availability of all these resources and geographical condition play a vital role to develop social and cultural network of different people of different ecological gradients.

4. Cultural Ecological relationships

Evolution of society and culture is a complex system. To develop a new cultural practice involves relationships of many complex systems. Symbiotic social and economic relationship between diverse ethnic and cultural groups of different ecological gradients has explicitly elaborated by Fredric Barth (1969, 1981). Similar co-adaptive systems have been evolved in Argal as well. Social systems among different ethnic groups based on economic and local environmental conditions are quite important and unique in Argal.

Adaptive systems are the products of their experiences in order to cope with local environment. Therefore, adaptive systems include all the socio-cultural processes of the study area (Khattri 1995:3). Human ecologists agree that adaptive systems differ according to their natural conditions, availability of the resources and its dynamic uses in the community. Gurung (1996) argues that not only local environment determines the cultural strategies to adopt local environment but is also influenced by local, regional, national, and international political economy. In Argal the environment of one ethnic group is not only defined by the natural condition but also by the presence and activities of the other ethnic groups. From ecological perspective to recognize population, economy, and relationship of different ethnic/caste people, environment and the social cultural system as a whole is very important. Human ecology focused on the inter-dependencies which emerge in people's actions and reaction vis-a-vis each other and vis-a-vis the natural environment. On the one hand, this interaction is significantly structured by culture (knowledge and organizational skill, value and ideology, ideas and identity, social obligation and legitimate authority, etc) members of particular communities bring to the interaction. On the other hand, it also effects and affected by processes in the nature like energy conversions and circulation of nutrients (Haaland 1993).

5. Economy

The Argali Magars are subsistence farmers. They are traditionally depended upon agriculture and animal husbandry. Since last 60 years, their economic and social life has changed dramatically. In the past the Argali Magars had a certain communal ownership over land. The village chief or *Mukhiya* had the right of land distribution. This pattern has changed gradually with the implementation of the state rules in the area, at the same time the private ownership of land was institutionalized all over Nepal. Nowadays every family owns a few numbers of livestock and a piece of land. Similarly, cultivation pattern and livestock raising practices changed widely. About 60 years ago Argali People practiced slash and burn cultivation. The major features of such cultivation were as mentioned by Burman (1990: 334); 1) rotation of the field, 2) slash and burn operation of vegetable species, 3) keeping the land fallow for a number of years for regeneration of forests, 4) use of human labor as chief input, 5) non-employment of draught animal and 6) use of simple implements (Khattri 1995: 46). Beside these prominent features the other secondary

features includes livestock's number was higher and herding in the common forest was evident, trans-human herding practiced, limited use of secondary product, the major crops were chino dhan (*Panicum miliaceum*), radish (*Raphanus sativus*), barley (*Hordeum volgare*). The family was more in extended in its nature. Kinship and religion were other dominant institutions in Argal.

But at present cultivation system are quite different which are characterized as, permanent area for cultivation, seasonal cropping, intensive cultivation using plough, irrigation, wedding, manure, small number but diversity of livestock with stall-fed system, rice cultivation started locally, trans-human herding is stopped, crops type has changed. Population pressure became one of the most leading factors, which forced people to adopt intensive cultivation. Population pressure builds up, not only by natural growth of the local population but also from the migration. The Bahun and Chettris were migrated from Bihun and low land areas of Galkot area to Argal in order to search pastureland at the beginning and later they settled down permanently mostly in Sile and lowland area where most fertile land exists such as Ragdom and Ankhet area. Their entrance to Argal VDC was facilitated by the fictive kinship. They adopted the permanent cultivation on a certain areas, built terraces, started to grow many crops.

Livestock production system has changed slowly, but dependency has not changed. Livestock production was numerically more in the past, but these days' people keep only a limited number with stall fed system. One of the reasons is their children started to go to the school. The other reason is that many adults go to foreign countries to work and support their subsistence economy. Mostly elderly, sick, women and children stay in the village. Therefore, they felt difficulties to handle large number of livestock. Similarly those who were mostly dependent over community forest reduced the number of their livestock because of a regulatory harvesting in order to prevent resource degradation. Thus community forestry has restricted trans-human herding.

Major crops produced in Argal are: maize, millet, rice, wheat, barley, radish, turnip, potatoes, beans, soybeans, Amaranths, hemp (bhango). Because of the various reasons they have changed the cultivation patterns. In order to feed family they need to grow maize, millet, wheat, barley and peas in higher altitude area, where radish and turnip during the summer and potatoes during the winter were dominant crops. These days' radish and potatoes got little importance however; they are grown in multi crops production system.

Settlement pattern is associated with the resource distribution and its uses of the local community. The main settlement of Magars is clustered. The settlement pattern of other groups is dispersed. The majority of Argali Magars occupy middle area, which was settled when they came first to Argal. The eight gods and goddesses were surrounded the settlement. These shrines were placed in order to protect from evil spirit, and keep on fertility of people, livestock and crops. Settlement patterns dispersed later due to population growth, changes in resource use pattern, and migration of the other groups of Magars, and Bahuns and Chettries from Bihuns and settled in Sile. The upper part of Argal was occupied as the seasonal or secondary settlement during summer for pasturing livestock in the past. These days the upper part has turned into the permanent settlement of various ethnic groups, however the Magars are dominant. Many upper areas were used to grow radish in the summer and potatoes in the winter in past, but now other crops dominate in both seasons. The past subsistence pattern was better adapted with two types of settlement. Similarly, this pattern of settlement, resource harness was linked with the limited population of the Argal. This niche was also suitable with fictive kinship relationship, which was facilitating to exchange radish with rice or paddy and various needed materials for their household consumption.

The local devices are used in agriculture production, which include plough, hoe, sickle, bamboo baskets etc. The trend of adoption new technology is relatively lower. Fertilizer used is mainly

animal manure, which is primarily compost. The traditional fertilizer is seen more sustainable from human's and animal health and nutrition for land. People mostly depend upon local seeds for crops. Agricultural practices of Argali people is more subsistence type, they do not use high yielding varieties as well as specialize in a single crop in a particular season. Similarly, very limited amount of sugarcane is produced and consumed in Argal. Cardamom is the only one cash crop produced and a few people are cultivating in different parts. In Argal cardamoms is produced about 200-300 kg yearly.

Co-operation is one of the main survival strategies of the Argali subsistence farmers. We can observe co-operation in activities such as crops production, distribution, and ritual activities. The prominent labor exchange organizations in Argal are *hudda*, *parma* and *khetala*. The *hudda* is a group of people organized to exchange their labor on rotational basis of need, *parma*; is labor exchange system between two or three household which is more temporary in its nature; and *khetala*, hired labor usually from neighbor.

6. Rice and Social and cultural nexus

Rice is a very important food item for most of the Nepalese people. Rice plays a significant role in socio-economic lives of most of the people of Argal. Rice is grown geographically conditioned area. Rice is an important food item. Acquiring food is one of the major subsistence activities of many ethnic groups of Nepal. Some food items are valued higher for socio-cultural reasons but not necessarily because of scarcity. People of Argal use rice for eating, offering to the gods, and goddesses, shaman's rituals as *akcheta*, a major and feast item during the festivals and ceremony, as an entertainment item to the guest. Therefore, it helps maintain social prestige. Rice is also must for *tika*. Rice is food item for old, sick, and children. Since it has multiple uses and scare in the society it turns to be a prestigious item, therefore people build social and cultural mechanisms to acquire and manage it. Such mechanisms were adopted internally through *dajubhai* system and externally fictive kinship. In traditional subsistence economy they have even developed a complex social network of relationship with different caste and ethnic groups in order to acquire rice to their household.

Rice is grown from the Tarai (100masl.) to Hill (3050 masl.) of Nepal (Mallick 1982: 17). Rainfall is one natural condition for determining vegetation in an area. Rainfall is not equally distributed to every region and season in Nepal. A certain variety of rice plantation requires certain level of rainfall and temperature. Germination of rice requires 10-15⁰c and for plantation 20-37⁰c. The growth duration requirement is 144-185 days, in which the last 30 days in which c. 200 hours sunlight is needed for optimum rice plantation (Ibid). Therefore, rice plantation should begin with the on set of monsoon about June to 21 Sept. Rice production in Argal is not constraint by rainfall in general, but the altitude, which determines the temperature for germination, and growth of rice plant. Wind movement should also be favorable for rice production. In mild wind movement, more CO₂ is obtained by rice plant. This helps to increase photosynthesis (Mallick 1982: 31).

Silange dhan, hill/mountain variety of rice is planted in Argal recently in a wider level, however it was produced in a small scale in dry land, which was called *ghaiya*. With the help of Lutheran World Service, an irrigation canal is built in Argal about 13 years ago. After development of irrigation cannal many Magars households started to cultivate *silange dhan*, which was difficult to grow earlier. Similarly, it has been significant to weaken the network of fictive kin relationship.

7. Life cycle and other rituals

Life cycle rituals are performed to a person from birth to death. Life cycle ritual is also considered as the indicator of caste and ethnic identity in Nepal. The way life cycle rituals are performed also relate with resource management inside household and in the community. In this context, the nature of feast, their environmental constraints, time or season of performance are the main focus of analysis. The major life cycle rituals of Argali Magars are birth naming, *putputai* (celebration of first son birth) *pasni*, (rice feeding) *guniu cholo dine* (for female), *chewar* (first hair saving for boy), marriage, *chaurasi pooja* (a ritual performed when an individual survives up to 84 years or 1000 full moons, it is latest practice due to influence of Bahuns and Chetris), and death rituals. Death ritual is performed in two different periods, one right after the death and another starts on the 24th–26th of Kartik (November) each year. The Magars give high priority to some rituals such as *putputai*, marriage, the last part of death rituals on the basis of gathering of relatives and expenditure made for rituals. Participants include household members, relatives and also involve neighbors regardless of caste identities (See details Khattri 1995).

The other types of rituals of Argali Magars include farm gods and goddess, other Hindu gods and goddesses like Devi, ancestral worshiper. All the rituals belong to fertility of the individual, household, and the community (Khattri 1999). These rituals vary with time and season and participation of the household. All rituals demand rice as a ritual item; however the amount is not needed as life cycle rituals and ancestral worship. From the view point of people's relationship in different ecological gradients marriage is one of the most important life cycle rituals. Therefore, I would like to shed light on some aspects of marriage of Argali Magars.

Marriage is one of the fundamental institutions, which helps reproduction, keeping descents on, nurturing children and running economic and social organization of the society. The Magars follow matri-cross cousin marriage. On the basis of marriage system their social network is quite narrow by its significance and scope. It has direct impact upon the survival and movement. Marriage enhances social network. The scale of network seems to be depended upon the types of marriage. Marriage system of the Magars, Bahuns, Chettris and Dalits differs and consequently its social relation has affected their life and survival strategies. It can be argued that the development of fictive kinship relation between the Magars and other caste groups is associated with marriage system. Bahuns and Chettris follow clan exogamous marriage, which usually occurs in different places and more frequently in the low land area where rice is produced. Similarly, Bahuns and Chettris of Argal do not cultivate radish and turnip at the scale of Magars households.

The relatives of the Argali Magars have settled down closely to each other and they share similar environmental conditions. It also has further implication on the economic production and exchange of the society. But on the other hand Bahuns, Chetris and Dalits marry their children to different places than Argal and other similar geo-physical environment, which seems to be focused on economic opportunity as well. They generally prefer marrying their daughter to the relatively lowland areas where rice is grown. The lowland settlers are also attracted to highland hard working and honest girls. But on the other hand fictive kinship helps people to be organized in cross-cultural and cross-social and political strata of the society in which Magars are tied. A social and cultural network of Bahun, Chettris, Magars and various groups of Dalits is built.

Magars follow different types of marriage such as: Thulo Bivaha, which needs lot of rice to feed their relatives and neighbors. They manage to collect the needed amount of rice with the mechanism of *dajubhai*, locally developed. But Bahun Chetries do not practice system of exchange as Magars do.

8. Fictive Kinship

Kinship normally restricts to the horizontal ties of consanguinity and affinity. In order to cope with social, economic, political and natural environment many caste and ethnic people of Nepal have developed and bound in fictive kin relationship. The fictive kin relationship is widely practiced in Nepal (Messerschmidt 1982, Shrestha 1971/72, Hitchcock 1966). The term used to denote these types of relationship also differs by regional, ethnic origin differences and the nature of relationship Messerschmidt (1982) *mit/mitini*, Shrestha (1971) *ista*, Hitchcock (1966) *mit*. In case of Argal, *mit*, *mitini*, *ista* and *saina* are the common term for fictive kin relation. The basis of relationship is economic, ritual, religious, social and political. The economic need is fulfilled primarily through exchange of rice with local product of radish and turnip. The other materials produced in low land and usually exchanged with people of Argal are such as millet, wheat, maize, chili, ginger, turmeric, mat, various types of fruits. Fictive kinship has become more effective to those places where marriage and other institutions do not support the present socio-economic condition. According to Messerschmidt (1982:5) *miteri* is a form of fictive kinship widely encourage in multifarious social setting of the Himalayas. The *miteri* allows the alternative to forming fictive kinship ties between members of these endogamous groups and allows bonds of association to flourish vertically, between all levels. Shrestha (1971) has studied *ista* relationships in the Thakuri people of western Nepal, many kinds of *ista* i.e. similar meaning with *miteri*, such as *hitako ista*, *mate ista*, *dharma ista*, *sangi mit* and *baisali* (the meaning are respectively, close friend, soil relative, religious relative, friend, deep relative). All these types of *ista* signify close and closer social relation respectively. The relation between these *istas* depends upon the nature of trade networks. Hitchcock (1966) also refers to *mit* as ritual friend with “high caste” i.e. the Magars and “untouchable caste”. Fictive kinship in Nepal can be classified into two categories, i) ritual brotherhood, ii) mutual economic and social relation mostly formed for exchange. In the first category the relationship is based upon ritual processes, which is relatively permanent. Its basis of origin may be desire of economic benefits for both parts or some times it can be only one sided. Kinship becomes strongly attached; rites and rituals are strictly followed if informed. In the second categories of the fictive kinship is more temporary and directed toward more economic benefit. Its permanency remains until economic interest is fulfilled, the affection or emotion effects only at the level of sorrow, but it does not go in the depth of observing ritual. Both types of fictive kinship are practiced by Argali Magars. The second category is more evident and the first category is the base to grow or build social net. Fictive kin relations usually occur among inter-caste such as Bahuns and Magars, Bahuns and Chhettri, Bahun/Chhettri and Dalits. This type of fictive kinship is to removed misfortune of one's life. The economic exchange is termed as reciprocity. The first category of fictive kinship is built more on the generalized reciprocity. Because calculation is not made equally and immediately, but return is made in many other forms in different period. Both types of fictive kinship were practiced effectively, when people lacked market access nearby.

Another social bond has also been developed between those who hold the upper hill lands and lower hill settlers in Argal. The main purpose is to grow some radish during the monsoon season, for the return they receive some grains or many of them are already tied up with the fictive kinship relation. Earlier the motivation for the radish production was to exchange paddy in the lower areas like Harichaure, Banskhola, Hatiya, Kadebans etc, and Bihun, Pala, Bhimpokhara, Titaure, Baglung bazaar, Balewa of Baglung district and Pang of Parbat district, where people did not cultivate radish. The exchange mechanism was a fictive kinship network. Since the population of Argali Magars rise up and they had to occupy the semi-permanent to permanent settlement. It is important to understand how a social and cultural institution develops and decay according to the social cultural and economic conditions.

People started to cultivate vegetables in many parts of Baglung and Parbat districts. They even started commercial vegetable farming in these areas, which includes off seasonal vegetable farming. Similarly, cheap rice is imported from the Baglung bazaar after it is linked with road,

which is also another major factor of change in Argal. People carried all types of load on their back in past but these days some people have bought mules for transportation and most of the people use them as pack animals. Similarly, some people began to hold small trades in village and use of cash has become a major part of their life. These days the nature of exchange has changed, this happened due to the impact of agricultural development in lowland area. Argali people started to sell food items such as potatoes, soybeans, amaranths, hemp, pea, and items of radish and turnip directly to the market for cash. Argali people buy food and other items from market, which were exchanged with low land settlers in the past. Cash based exchange of present is felt easier than kind based exchanged of past. The social and cultural value social bond of past which was tied with fictive kinship is felt well by all the people of up hill and low land settlers, but it has become weak and almost dissolved at present. Many young people left village for India and Arabian countries to work. Some of them also have been to Japan, Germany where people can earn more money than in India and Arabian countries. All these factors affected the change of the economy and social relation in Argal. Those people who were called by their only name and not respected when calling them, these days have become rich and they are called by their name respecting rich person such as *phalano sahu* etc. Earlier people were more dependent upon the geophysical factors as the limiting factor, but these days technology, social and cultural relations became limiting factors, which has determined the changes in the occupation, economy, and cultural and social relation.

Traditionally some materials were exchanged extensively via fictive kinship. The Argali Magars used *Mula ra koirako chana*, cut and dried as chain of radish and turnip as the main item for exchange rice or paddy with people of various parts of Baglung and Parbat districts. Radis and turnip is mainly sown, weed, and collected by women they even do cutting and drying activities. Some male also get involve in cutting and drying. Women also visit different places to exchange *chana* with paddy. They usually go in a group, a few male may join. They visit either their own *saina*, or husbands' *mit* or *miteri* relative of a family. Some without *saina* also visit these places merely to exchange paddy. The visit likely takes place two or three times of a year from either side. Besides radish and turnip's product the other major items, which are produced and exchanged with low land settlers, are staple food grains (maize, potatoes, soybeans, beans, amaranths, hemp, barley, pea etc.); livestock (buffalo, ox, goat, sheep) and ghee as dairy product; handicrafts such as local bamboo products (*dala dali*, *doko*); agriculture implements such as *halo/juwa* and wild mushrooms. Similarly, Low land settlers exchange besides rice or paddy and other staple food items such as maize, millet and wheat; fruits (banana, orange, pears), spices (ginger, turmeric, chilly); *gundri* (mat) to sleep or sit and other materials as major items of exchange with Argali Magars. The medium of exchange was not only exchange in kind but in cash as well.

Cultivation of radish and turnip seems as the identity of Magars women, *dala dali* basket weaving is almost has been the identity of the male Magars. They weave while they go for grazing livestock, village meeting, and cultural ceremonies. They are busy weaving all most all time from early morning to evening even in the dim light of fire. Both male and female are part of the community, *daladali* and *mula ra koirako chana* are part of fictive kinship and symbiotic relationship between two different ecological gradients in Argal.

9. Dajubhai system

Dajubhai or brotherhood is one of the major co-operative systems among the Argali Magars. *Dajubhai* usually means relationship among the blood relatives. Argali Magars apply it in wider meaning and involves also wife's sister's family and helping households of any caste. They have five types of *dajubhai* such as *accaise*, *ghotare*, *nagare*, *kaisorope* and *sagaune*. *Accaise* and *ghotare* are close and related by blood. *Nagare* is that brotherhood links with wife's sister's

family and *kaisorope* and *sagaune* are helping brothers but in the degree of relationship *kaisorope* is very close. These kinds of brotherhood are developed as a mechanism to mobilize local resources of the kin group for immediate need. These types of relationship are built to cope the situation when rituals are expensive, difficult to arrange all types of materials and enable many people to participate in rituals. The contribution for the ritual varies according to the degree of closeness. *Accaise dajubhai* are the most close and obliged to contribute the highest amount of money, rice, liquor, and labor, but *ghotare*, *nagare*, *kaisorope* and *sagaune* help less than *accais*. The Argali Magars perform death rituals within three days of a person's death. It makes family quite difficult to arrange all the necessary materials specially rice, money, and labor within three days, but it becomes easier to collect from many households in a smaller amount. Due to the tradition of sharing the ritual cost sometimes it happens that ritual performer could save some rice, liquor (see for detail Khattri 1995: 63-64). At the same time all households could perform any ritual with a standard. It also facilitates an egalitarian form of economic and social life in the community. It helps collect, consume, and share needed rice for feast. *Dajubhai* systems exist up to now. Fictive kinship and *dajubhai* systems are adapted in order to sustain subsistence economy of Argali Magars.

10. Conclusions

People adapt into the environment with the help of social and cultural mechanisms developing themselves. Argali Magars have developed many social and cultural strategies in order to harness external resources via fictive kinship, and *dajubhai* system mobilize local resources within kin groups and neighbors, which helps them adapt to that particular socio-economic condition. Since early 90s fictive kinship system has been weakened due to motor road and market access to Baglung bazaar, restoration of democracy, Maoist insurgency, and emigration for employment. *Dajubhai* system, still plays a crucial role even though changes in socio-economic systems. Fictive kinship has lost its ground at the same time market system encroached to the community. Despite, other reasons like similar crops are produced in Argal, and other people started selling for cash rather than exchange with kind, particularly rice as they did in the past. Therefore, it is not easy to contrast social and ecological systems. The socio-cultural and natural conditions and ecological relationship of Argali Magars led me to agree with the theme of Haaland (1995).

'The important point with the ecological approach is that it can be used to conceptualize how the interplay of processes in the nature and processes in social life shape people's life conditions, i.e. it helps us to understand the interdependencies which emerge in people's interaction in relation each other and in relation to elements in natural environment. This interaction is structured by the culture participants have acquired. It is meaningless to ask whether social life is determined by culture or by nature- it is of course determined by the way people cope with nature by activities, which they have learnt, i.e. by the culture. Social life is shaped by the interplay of culture and nature. The same culture in different natural environment will lead to different social life, while different cultural traditions in the same natural environment will lead to different forms of social life' (Haaland 1995:1).

The ethnographic facts suggest that three crucial factors have involved in bringing changes. One is the development of market system, which is facilitated by the road access to Baglung bazaar; and second factor is that Argali people have adapted a variety of rice, which can be cultivated in the higher altitude and where regular irrigation facility is not available. This variety of rice cultivation was further encouraged, when people built an irrigation channel with the technical and

financial assistant of Lutheran World Service. It does not mean that all the Magars families became well off with the rice they needed, after rice cultivation in some areas, but it helped to reduce the tension as they had experienced in the past. Lastly, agricultural development in the lower area where people learn to grow and consume fresh vegetable reduced demand of dried items of radish and turnip. Similarly, the *dajubhai* system, which is built upon, the dependence of the insiders themselves, seems to be sustainable for longer period than the externally depended fictive kinship system. Therefore, it helps to argue further strongly that environmental and economic conditions are the base of a society, in which local social and cultural system develops. Its wider implication would be the external resources are fragile and linked with many factors and local resources are more reliable, therefore people should develop socio-cultural mechanism to develop and manage local resources appropriately which can be suitable for local environment. Similarly, social and cultural systems are developed not only due to internal causes but many external causes play crucial role. Therefore, people develop adaptive mechanisms not only due to local geophysical environment but to adapt external causes which forced people more to change their norms and values accordingly.

References

- Barth, F. 1981, *Ecological Relationships of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North Pakistan*. In Features of Person and Society in Swat Collected Essays on Pathans, Selected Essays of Fredrik Barth Vol. II London: Routledge and Kagen Paul.
- Bista, D.B. 1967, *People of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak
- Burman, B.K. Roy 1990, *Critical Appraisal of Shifting Cultivation Farming Technology and Various Approaches* PP 334:342 in Himalayan Environment Economy and People (ed) S. C. Singh. New Delhi: R.K. Publication.
- CBS, 2003/4, *Statistical Year Book*. Kathmandu: HMG/NPC Secretariats.
- CBS, 2002, *Population of Nepal. Village Development Committes/Municipalities Population Census 2001*. HMG/NPC Secretariats.
- Gurung, O.P. 1996, *Customary System of Natural Resource Management among Tarami Magars of Western Nepal*. A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
- Haaland, G. 1993, *Development of Diagnostic, Policy-related and Measurable Indicators for Sustainability on Reginal Level, Exploring the Meso Scale* (Unpublished and presented to UNESCO Seminar).
- 1995 Personal Fax Letter to Man Bahadur Khattri. Unpublished
- Hitchcock, J.T. 1966, *Magars of Banyan Hills*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Kawakita, J. 1989, *People of Nepal Himalaya*. Kathmandu: Lush Press.
- Kessing, R.M. & Strathen, A.J. 1998, *Cultural Anthropology: A contemporary Practice* (3rd ed.). Harcourt Brace College Publisher. USA.
- Khattri, M. B. 1995, *Adaptive Systems of the Magar People: An Ethno-ecological Case Study of Argal VDC of Baglung District*. A Dissertation Submitted to the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Anthropology. Kathmandu. Tribhuvan University.
- 1999, *sacrificial Places: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of the Ritual Landscape from Argal VDC, Western Nepal*. A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Sociology/Anthropology Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Philosophy in Archaeology. Bergen. University of Bergen, Norway.
- Kottak, C. P. 1974, *Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity*. New York: Random House Inc.
- Mallick, R. N., 1982, *Rice in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Kala Prakasan.

- Messerschmidt, D. A. 1982, *Miteri in Nepal: Fictive Kinship Ties That Bind*. Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies Vol. 9 (1) pp 5-43.
- Molnar, Augusta 1981, *Economic Strategies and Ecological Constraints: Case of the Kham Magar of North West Nepal*, In *Asian Highland Societies*. C. V. Furar Haimendrof (ed) Delhi: Sterling Publishers (P) Ltd.
- Regmi, M.C. 1978, *Landownership in Nepal*. Barkley: University of California Press.
- Sharma, P.R. 1977, "Caste, Social Mobility and Sanscritization: A Study of Nepal's Old Legal Code" In Kailash, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 277-299.
- Shepherd, Gray 1982, *Life Among the Magars*. Kathmandu: Sahayogi Press.
- Shrestha, B. K. 1971/72, *Jan Jivan: Diyar Gauko Thakuriharu, Karnali Lok Sanskriti* (in Nepali), (Livelihood of Thakuri of Diyargaun, Folk Culture of Karnali). Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy.
- Steward, J.H. 1955, *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution*. University of Illinois Press.