

**PARK, HILL MIGRATION
AND
CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD LIVELIHOOD SYSTEMS
OF
RANA THARUS IN FAR-WESTERN NEPAL**

Lai Ming Lam

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
NOTES ON RANAS, PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSCRIPTION	vi
SPECIAL NOTES	vii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF PLATES	xi
ACRONYMS	xiv

PROBLEMS AND THE PROJECT

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL INPUTS.....2

Conflicts of Contemporary Conservation Practices.....3	3
<i>A Global Perspective: Conflicts in Developing Countries.....3</i>	3
<i>A National Perspective: Conflicts in Nepal.....5</i>	5
<i>Contemporary Conservation Movements.....7</i>	7
Engagement of Anthropology and Conservation.....10	10
<i>Recent Anthropological Studies on Conservation.....10</i>	10
<i>Inadequate Anthropological Inputs in Nepal's Conservation Studies.....13</i>	13
<i>Limits to Recent Anthropological Studies on Conservation.....15</i>	15
Theoretical Framework.....18	18
<i>Livelihoods Perspective.....18</i>	18
<i>Household Perspective.....20</i>	20
<i>Theory of Practice.....23</i>	23
<i>Power Dynamics and Agency.....25</i>	25
Thesis Structure.....27	27

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY.....30

Introduction.....30	30
Household Survey, Participant Observation and Case Study.....30	30
The Rana-Maoist Interactions in My Research Area.....36	36
Reflexivity.....38	38

CHAPTER THREE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AREA.....46

Introduction.....46	46
The Kanchanpur District.....46	46
Government-activated Resettlement Programs and Forest Loss.....48	48
<i>The Transformation of Landownership.....50</i>	50
The Creation and Expansion of the Park.....51	51
The Resettlement Program of the Park.....54	54
Rauteli Bichawa Village.....57	57
<i>Old Rauteli Bichawa Village.....58</i>	58
<i>New Resettlement Area - Dhokka Block.....62</i>	62

Socio-Economic Background of Four Study Settlements.....	63
<i>Geographical Location and Demographic Composition</i>	63
<i>Settlement Distribution Landscape</i>	66
<i>Size of Landholding and Household</i>	67
<i>Food Security Situation and Economic Activities</i>	69
<i>Security Situation</i>	70
Conclusion.....	72

LAND AND ITS MEANINGS

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBSISTENCE AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LAND AND LIVELIHOODS.....74

Introduction.....	74
The Subsistence Agricultural System of Rana Tharus.....	76
Sukala Forest Resources and Rana Tharus' Livelihoods.....	81
Sukala and Local Politics.....	87
<i>The Jimidar System: Accommodated and Cooperative State-Rana Tharus Relationships</i>	87
<i>Jimidars and Hierarchical Rana Tharu Society</i>	88
The State, Sukala and Rana Tharus Livelihood.....	91
<i>From Common Forest to the State Park</i>	91
<i>From Ancestral Land to State Land</i>	99
Conclusion.....	106

CHAPTER FIVE

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF LAND AND LIVELIHOODS.....108

Introduction.....	108
Feeling at 'Home'.....	109
Dislocation and Feelings of Nostalgia.....	110
Ratueli Bichawa- 'Living Inside [the Park] is good' (Sabai Bhitri Raamro Chha).....	114
Dhokka Block - 'Nobody Will Like It' (Kasaile Pani Mann Paraaudaina).....	117
<i>'Not enough food here' (Yahaa Khanna Pudaina)</i>	117
<i>'The place is so narrow' (Thaau Saaguro)</i>	120
<i>'The place is so dangerous' (Thaau Khataraa Chha)</i>	122
<i>'No help is available' (Sayaaga Paaudaina)</i>	125
Implications for Livelihoods.....	128
Conclusion.....	129

CHANGES IN LAND, CHANGES IN SOCIAL RELATIONS

CHAPTER SIX

LAND, PAHAARIS AND RANA THARUS.....132

Introduction.....	132
Social Exclusion and Caste.....	134
The Importance of Land in Ethnic-High Caste Group Relationships.....	137
Hill Migration and Changes in Landownership.....	138
<i>The Reasons for Pahaaris Gaining Land</i>	139
<i>The Reasons for Ranas Losing Land</i>	142
New Economic-Political Environments, New Social Relations.....	147
<i>Relationships of Pahaari landowners- Rana Tenants</i>	147
<i>Local Political Power Transformed</i>	148

Caste and Constructing of 'Otherness'	150
<i>Pahaari Perception of Ranas</i>	151
<i>Rana Perception of Pahaaris</i>	154
<i>Social Conflicts in Daily life</i>	156
Conclusion	158

CHAPTER SEVEN

LAND AND ASSOCIATED CHANGES IN

RANA THARU HOUSEHOLDS.....160

Introduction	160
Traditional Rana Household Structure	161
<i>The Concept and Practice of Badaghar Households</i>	162
<i>Patrilineal System and Land Inheritance Right</i>	164
<i>Traditional Household Management System- Mukhiya</i>	166
Household Transformations	167
<i>Literature of Household Analysis</i>	168
<i>Household Economic Livelihood Approach: Changes in Land, Food Security and Households</i>	170
Hill Migration, the Park Expansion and Changes in Rana Households	173
Conclusion	185

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHANGES IN PRODUCTION, KINSHIPS AND GENDER RELATIONS.....187

Introduction	187
Traditional Production Relations of Rana Society	188
Changes in <i>Kurmaa</i> Relations and New Production Relations	191
Gender Relations and Gender Division of Labour	198
<i>A Critique of Gender Studies</i>	198
<i>Gender Division of Labour in Traditional Rana Society</i>	201
Changes in Livelihood and Implications for the Status of Rana Women	205
Conclusion	212

CHAPTER NINE

LAND, LIVELIHOOD AND RANA THARU

IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS..... 214

Introduction	214
Ethnicity and Livelihood	215
<i>The Formation of Ethnicity</i>	215
<i>The Engagement of Ethnicity and Livelihood</i>	217
A Historical Perspective of Ethnic Movements in Nepal	219
<i>Ideologies of Sanskritization and Indigenesness</i>	219
<i>Ethnic Movements in Tharu Societies</i>	221
<i>An Alternative Rana Reform Movement</i>	224
<i>A Critique of Analytical Approaches to Ethnic Relations in Nepal</i>	225
Identity Transformations in Rana Society	227
<i>Multiple Identities as Social Climbing Strategy</i>	227
<i>Cultural Adaptation and Preservation and Identity Consciousness</i>	232
Conclusion	239

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER TEN

LOSS OF SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS:

A CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY CONSERVATION PRACTICES.....242

The Park as a Site of Economic Production and Social Relations.....244

The Park as a Site of Social Transformations and Reproduction.....247

Hope for the Ranas' Future.....249

Implications for Conservation Policies.....251

APPENDIX.....254

GLOSSARY.....256

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....258

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Lai Ming Lam and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that conservation ideology has led conservation practice over the last quarter of a century, the removal of local residents from protected areas in the name of biological preservation remains the most common strategy in developing countries. Its wide-ranging impacts on displaced societies have rarely been properly addressed, particularly in regard to the establishment of parks. This thesis is based on 15 months fieldwork carried out among a group of displaced park residents known as Rana Tharus in the country of Nepal. They have long lived in Royal Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in the far-western part of that nation.

This thesis is largely inspired by recent academic advocacy that conservation-induced dislocations on rural communities are having a serious influence on policy implementation. Such advocacy is leading to more effective and pragmatic park policies. West, Igoe and Brockington (2006) point out that park residents are an indispensable part of protected areas and their cultural and economic interactions with parks occur in diverse ways. Without a full understanding of these interrelationships, any kind of forced conservation policies will be doomed to fail and cause severe disturbances to people's lives. Like most protected areas in developing countries, this thesis shows that the unplanned resettlement scheme of Shuklaphanta failed to mitigate the socio-economic losses that Rana Tharus experienced due to their displacement. The ethnographic data notes that when attention is paid solely to the economic losses experienced by Rana Tharus, the social costs such as social exclusion, loss of culture, and psychological depression are rarely addressed in the dislocation program. An inadequate understanding of the links between protected areas and local livelihoods is one of the major causes for the continuation of park-people conflicts including Shuklaphanta.

In this thesis, I demonstrate how the displacement and other social changes have gradually diminished the social and economic livelihoods of the Rana people. I argue that many of these social impacts were unexpected because Rana Tharus actively responded to all these changes by putting new social relations into effect. As a result, significant social transformations have occurred in contemporary Rana Tharu society. The undivided household unit was no longer their first preference when the new economic realities made themselves felt, and gender and patrilineal kin relationships became more tense. The traditional labouring system (*Kamaiya*) that existed between wealthy and poor Rana Tharus declined due to increasing poverty. All these had erased their ability to maintain sustainable livelihoods that they had previously enjoyed. Moreover, substantial loss of landownership had made it impossible for Rana Tharus to share equal social, economic and political status with the new migrants - the twice-born Pahaaris.

These accumulated and unforeseen results of conservation practices can only be well understood if a holistic analytical perspective is adopted. This thesis borrows the concept of sustainable household livelihood system and the social theories of practice, power and agency to explore the dynamic relationships between conservation, local livelihoods and culture. The stories told by the Rana Tharu provide some important lessons. I argue that dislocation programs should be put aside or at least closely reviewed if their hidden social impacts are not well understood or at least lead to some form of compensation. Such action may prevent the further expansion of park-people conflicts which are shown to hinder conservation efforts of Shuklaphanta and local sustainable livelihoods.

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Shiva, you are my irreplaceable companion and without your unconditional help and spiritual support, I feared that this study might never have been completed. Furthermore, many Nepalese people who assisted me had many concerns about going to the western region of the country, which has been described as a major Maoist area of activity. I could never forget your parents' words about my life: 'Shiva, she comes from far to visit our country, you should help her as much as you can.' I remembered during our fieldwork that we faced many problems but we solved them together. My fieldwork consisted of wonderful and risky moments, and the pressure far exceeded that which a junior researcher like me could manage. I recalled on several occasions we were in the midst of a war: we were stuck on a bus for four days because of confrontations between Maoists and the security forces on the highway. We were awoken by bombing at night in the village; your life was seriously threatened by the Maoists and we were interrogated by one of the Maoist leaders. However, your positive attitude towards life inspired me to be brave and to face those challenges. Your words, 'We can do it. We can do our best' gave me the greatest encouragement and assuaged my anxiety. It is really beyond description how you shared my stress. My debt of gratitude to you is deep.

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ideas come alive and enable me to tell a meaningful story. John, thanks for directing my attention to the importance of understanding the adaptable nature of household livelihood. Michael, thanks for your introduction of theory of practice to me. Andrew, thanks for your advice regarding rural livelihood, which fuelled my interest in exploring the influence of contemporary conservation practices on local sustainable livelihoods. These invaluable inputs and suggestions made a large contribution to this thesis. Moreover, I must give my full appreciation to Mr. Phillip Thomas for editing my grammar and expression so that this thesis became more readable.

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For the completion of this thesis I must extend my thanks to my new-born baby, Owen. I remembered that your companionship during the final stage of thesis writing was the greatest encouragement for me. Looking how you grew larger and larger in my stomach, my mind and body were fuelled with much energy. I know that without your emergence I could not have finished the thesis on time.

I am grateful to the following institutions for their generous financial support of this thesis: Ford Foundation, University of Adelaide and the Discipline of Anthropology. I am also very grateful to the local people in Nepal who participated by telling me their stories. Indeed the fieldwork experience changed my way of thinking. I understood that every person can respond to social and environmental changes in certain active ways no matter how socially deprived his or her situation is. More importantly, I hope that the life stories of the Rana Tharus that have been

collected for this thesis will inspire conservation policy planners to search for more effective park management strategies and finally those Park residents' livelihoods can be secured.

This thesis, hopefully, is not an end but a beginning, and will encourage scholars to do more in-depth studies in the near future. Such is my ambition.

NOTE: With the consent of Ranas who agreed to be interviewed, most names shown in this thesis are real except for a few which are pseudonyms, in order to protect their privacy. All the photos included in this thesis were taken by the author.

NOTES ON RANAS, PRONUNCIATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

The name 'Rana' is a confusing word particularly for those readers who have knowledge regarding the history of Nepal. It generally refers to the Rana family who ruled the Kingdom of Nepal from 1846 until 1953. Jang Bahadur was the first ruler of this dynasty. His original family name was Kunwar but he took the title Rana, after an old title denoting military glory used by Rajput princes in northern India. His descendants took this name as their family name. The downfall of this dynasty did not diminish the family's influence. Today, they still control most of the government's administrative positions. However, 'Rana' as it appears in this thesis mainly refers to the indigenous Rana Tharu community unless otherwise stated. This confusion is due to problems of translation. In written English, there is no difference between the Rana rulers and the Rana community but in the Nepalese language (i.e. written Nepali - Devanagari script) and pronunciation, they are different. For distinction purpose, I use the 'Rana family' to refer the rulers. In addition, I chose not to call them Rana Tharus because I found that they strongly resisted being called 'Tharus'. The fact was that they distanced themselves from other Tharu groups through their claim of being Rajput descendants. For a detailed discussion of Rana self-identity see Chapters Six and Nine.

Both the Nepali and Rana language were used in interview situations. Because the Rana language is an unwritten language, I usually translated what was said into the closest Nepali pronunciation. When I transcribed the Nepali words, I consulted R. L. Turner's *Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of Nepali Language* (1997 reprinted version). To make the thesis more readable to non-Nepali specialists, most interview contexts (both Nepali and Rana language in originality) were translated into English.

SPECIAL NOTES

My major fieldwork finished in December 2005. Since then there have been three major developments that may have long-term implications for Ranas' livelihoods. The first one constituted the dramatic political changes leading to the end of the 240-year-long absolute monarchy and Nepal becoming a democratic republic on 28th May 2008. After 10 years of civil war the Nepalese government and the Maoists concluded negotiations successfully on 9th November 2006. On 19th January 2007, the Maoists agreed to disarm (during my latest trip, I was told by locals that there were no more Maoist activities in my study villages). The constituent assembly election was held on 10th April 2008 and the Maoists became the biggest party. In the first assembly meeting, all political parties unanimously agreed to abolish the monarchy and the unpopular King Gyanendra was ousted from the royal palace. However, these changes have not stopped the political turmoil in Nepal and nor ended most people's economic hardships. Recently, the Maoist party warned that it would refuse to join the new government because it held an unfavourable attitude towards the first president, Mr. Ram Baran Yadhav from the Nepali Congress Party. What are the implications of these political developments on Ranas' livelihoods? Only more insightful and longitudinal research work can answer this question.

Recently, I have read an interesting article written by Nepalese scholar Nina Bhatt (2003). He analyses the relationships between the Nepali kings and the park management. There is no doubt that Nepali kings contributed much to Nepal's early conservation efforts. The creation of the first national park - Royal Chitwan National Park - in 1973 by King Mahendra and the establishment of the largest national conservation organisation (King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation) were good examples. However, he also points out that the effectiveness of park management is often linked to different political contexts. The multi-party political system of the 1990s had adverse impacts on conservation efforts because officials worked only for the benefit of their own party or alliance. As a result, officials were not interested in working in remote areas where most Parks are located. Compared to the pre-1990s monarchy the park authority received less attention and resources. Today, the downfall of the Shah Dynasty has

enormous implications for the Nepalese people and the future of their country's park management. There is an urgent need for further research to investigate what these implications are.

The second change was the reinforcement of park management on the south-west side buffer zone villages. The Chief Warden of Shuklaphanta, Tikkram Adhikari, said to me in our interview that a few army camps would be set up very soon in this region in order to stop illegal resource use activities. One of the army camps would be located in the Dhokka Block buffer zone forest area. The implementation of this policy may result in restrictions to forest resources and impact adversely on the local people's livelihoods. This ambitious park management strategy was still in the planning stage when I revisited the field in December 2006, but the Ranas' response to it would be worthy of more follow-up study.

The third change was the rising political unrest in the Tarai region. In an earlier study done by Gaige (1975), he pointed out that conflict and tension had long existed between the plains people and hill people. My discussion in Chapter Six and Chapter Nine has also clearly demonstrated that social, economic and political exclusion was deeply felt by the Ranas and twice-born Pahaaris. As a result, although the ten year-long Maoist insurgency has now been resolved, the Madhesis movement which emerged in mid-January 2007 has rapidly become a major potential risk to peace in the country. Madhesh in Nepali means Tarai and the Madheshi community includes Maithilis, Bhojpuris, Awadhis, Tharus and other smaller tribal groups. In contrast to the three dominant hill castes (Brahmins, Chhetris and Newars) who constituted 36% of total population in Nepal but occupied 89.2% of position in civil service, the Madheshi community accounted for 32% of the population but occupied only 8.4% of positions in the civil service (Karna 2007). They are now asking for the same rights as Pahaaris following a century of neglect. The on-going violent conflicts occurring in the Tarai region not only affect the daily livelihoods of Tarai people, but also shape the development of ethnicity among Tarai communities. Due to the limitations of this thesis additional research work is needed for finding out what the Rana community's future is.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Status of Protected Areas of Nepal.....	7
Table 3.1 Land Utilization of Kanchanpur District.....	49
Table 3.2 The Performance of Eighteen Commissions regarding the Park Resettlement Project	55
Table 3.3 Resettlement Locations and Land Distribution.....	56
Table 3.4 The Distribution of Ranas in Rauteli Bichawa in 2000.....	61
Table 3.5 Resettlement History of Dhokka Block.....	63
Table 3.6 The Number of Rana Households in the Four Study Settlements.....	66
Table 3.7 Size of Rana Landholdings in Four Study Settlements.....	68
Table 3.8 Household Size in Four Study Settlement.....	68
Table 3.9 Food Security Situation of Ranas in Four Study Settlements	69
Table 3.10 Economic Activities of Ranas in Four Study Settlements.....	70
Table 4.1 The Agricultural Cycle of Rauteli Bichawa Ranas.....	77
Table 4.2 Seven Types of Timber Used by Ranas.....	83
Table 4.3 Four Common Grasses Used by Ranas.....	83
Table 4.4 Using Dry Grass and Dung Cake for Cooking.....	95
Table 4.5 Land Utilization of Pachan Rana's 3 Kattas Land.....	103
Table 4.6 Seasonal Impacts and Coping Strategies of Pachan in Different Agricultural Cycle.....	105
Table 5.1 Food Sufficiency of Dhokka Block Ranas.....	118
Table 5.2 The Debt Situation of Dhokka Block Ranas.....	126
Table 7.1 The Household Structure of Four Rana Settlements.....	174
Table 7.2 The Characteristics of <i>Badaghars</i> in Four Rana Villages	175
Table 7.3 Comparison of Household Size, Land Productivity and Food Security in Four Study Rana Villages.....	177
Table 7.4 Household Partitions in Four Rana Villages.....	178
Table 8.1 Labour Division Between Rana Men and Women.....	203
Table 8.2 Decision-maker(s) of Household Matters in a Rana household.....	203

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Households as an Adaptive Unit.....	22
Figure 3.1: Nepal and the Location of Kanchanpur District.....	47
Figure 3.2 Location of Royal Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve and Fieldwork Sites.....	53
Figure 3.3 The Population of Rana Tharus in India and Nepal.....	60
Figure 7.1 The Development of the Bhogy <i>Badaghar</i> Household.....	182

LIST OF PLATES

CHAPTER ONE

Plate 1.1 The extensive grassland landscape of Royal Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve provides a paradise for Swamp Deer and other wildlife. However, its establishment and expansion has resulted in the displacement of thousands of families.....1

CHAPTER TWO

Plate 2.1 This was the historic temple which Pamela could visit very often before the establishment of the Park. Her feelings about the cultural significance of the Park were therefore included in my study.....35

Plate 2.2 This was the famous Rani Lake inside the Park.....35

Plate 2.3 In order to gain secure livelihood, Pachan's family developed very complex coping strategies which offered me an excellent year-round case study. A good friendship was established between his family and me. Toward the end of my fieldwork, his wife gave birth to a baby boy.....43

CHAPTER THREE

Plate 3.1 Kanchanpur has the highest population density in the Tarai district. The construction of the East-West Highway divided the Park and human settlements were rapidly established in the forest area.....49

Plate 3.2 The signboard at the entry gate of the Park Headquarters, listing the endangered wildlife species that inhabit the Park.....52

Plate 3.3 The total length of this newly built muddy and stoned track was 25km. It was the only way for Rauteli Bichawa Ranas to travel to the town legally.....59

Plate 3.4 Due to political insurgency, the forest area of the Park next to Dhokka Block was seriously threatened by local logging activities.....71

CHAPTER FOUR

Plate 4.1 The present landscape of Rauteli Bichawa Ward 3.....73

Plate 4.2 Monsoon is the most important planting season for Ranas and involves most household members.....79

Plate 4.3 A Rana using his oxen to make the land suitable for planting.....79

Plate 4.4 *Sukala* forest provided excellent grazing place for Ranas particularly from Iymilia and Jhilmila.....82

Plate 4.5 Many old Rana males are skilled in using different grasses from the *Sukala* to make tools.....84

Plate 4.6 Rana women's handmade basket.....84

Plate 4.7 A Rana woman from Iymilia fishing in a river next to the *Sukala*.....85

Plate 4.8 Vagat Rana acted as *Jimidar* and leader of Rauteli Bichawa Village.....90

Plate 4.9 Lack of fuelwood: Bhajhadra's wife changed to mixing dung cake and dry grass ('stick-like') as a fuelwood substitute.....95

Plate 4.10 Gaas is still the main material for making roofs. Every year, people will repair their roofs before the monsoon season.....98

Plate 4.11 In order to reduce rice purchases, Pachan's family consumed wheat in the early dry season (before wheat harvesting). After harvesting, he would return some wheat to friends and kept the rest for his family.....106

CHAPTER FIVE

Plate 5.1 Due to the shortage of rice, *Roti* became part of the Rana daily diet.....119

Plate 5.2 The Rana settlement distribution in Dhokka Block was close but they seldom visited their nearby kinsmen's or neighbours' houses.....120

Plate 5.3 This was the Darak *Holi* party I attended at night.....124

Plate 5.4 Bursa *Holi* was one of the most popular parties I attended.....124

CHAPTER SIX

Plate 6.1 Performing the traditional Rana *Holi* dance is not only for festive occasions but also symbolizes the Rana identity and their resistance to new realities.....131

Plate 6.2 Within fourteen years, Air successfully ran the first grocery shop in Iymilia and owned more than two and half *bighas* of land.....140

Plate 6.3 During the time I stayed in Iymilia, I taught village children basic English and children from different castes were welcome. However, after a few lessons, more than half the students were Pahaaris and while the number of Rana students declined.142

Plate 6.4 In the Rana tradition, the groom and the bride are carried by this bamboo-peacock fur made vehicle '*Doli*' (Rana language). It cost more than Rs 1,000.....145

Plate 6.5 Marriage is one of the most important social occasions in Rana society. All the relatives and the entire Rana community are involved.....145

CHAPTER SEVEN

Plate 7.1 Due to having no male heir, Vagat (wearing white shirt and sitting on the bed) saw no point in owning substantial landholding so he sold most of his land.....165

Plate 7.2 Like the Laxmi Rana household (the middle-aged woman wearing purple shawl) in Jhilimila, the main reason why they could able to maintain *Badaghar* household was because her husband was the only male heir in the household. Therefore, despite experiencing some food shortages, the household partition had not yet occurred.....176

Plate 7.3 The ex-Bhogy's *Badaghar* household broke up into several smaller jointed-type and nuclear households after the displacement. Bhogy (on right, seated) now lived with his two married sons' families. (The person sitting on the left was not one of Bhogy's household).....184

CHAPTER EIGHT

Plate 8.1 This *Kamaiya* boy worked for an ex-Rana *Jimidar* family for economic survival.....190

Plate 8.2 Due to lack of household labour, it was common for Rana children to help their parents by working in the field.....193

Plate 8.3 Just transplanted rice seedlings were dead after few days because there was not enough labour to monitor the irrigation.....194

Plate 8.4 The mother (left) helped in the field and this lightened the young couple's heavy workload during the critical planting time.....195

Plate 8.5 Household members were the major labour source for most Dhokka Block Rana families.
.....195

Plate 8.6 The Rana (behind) and the Brahmin exchanged labour for many years.....197

Plate 8.7 Nowadays, most Rana women actively work in the field.....207

Plate 8.8 Although the government launched classes to improve the literacy of Rana women, few of them are able to attend regularly due to their heavy workload.....208

Plate 8.9 Fuelwood collection has become the job of a new generation of Rana women since the establishment of the Park.....209

CHAPTER NINE

Plate 9.1 During the marriage ceremony, the Rana groom still holds a knife (right hand) to symbolize the warrior status of ancient times.....229

Plate 9.2 Traditionally, on the day of *Bhaaitikka*, Rana females will give hand-made flower necklaces to their brothers for blessings.....233

Plate 9.3 Influenced by Pahaari culture, Ranas now also pray to cows during the *Dipalwaali* festival.233

Plate 9.4 Few young Rana males wear traditional clothing (long-white dress with red decoration) when performing the Holi dance on the last day of the festival in Iymilia. This was the only time I saw the male traditional clothing throughout my one and half year long fieldwork period.....234

Plate 9.5 Most Rana women now wear saris, even during the largest festival - *Holi*.....235

Plate 9.6 No matter how difficult it is to wear *Gangriya* and to put silver rings on their legs, Ranas still showed their great excitement and enthusiasm in showing their custom to me.....238

Plate 9.7 Wearing *Gangriya* has become a cultural performance symbolizing the Rana identity.....238

CHAPTER TEN

Plate 10.1 A group of Rana children in Dhokka Block were happily performing the traditional Holi dancing. However, the continuation of cultural practices in the future is uncertain while their livelihoods are under serious threat.....241

ACRONYMS

ACA	Annapurna Conservation Area
BZUGC	Buffer Zone User Group Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
KMTNC	King Mahendra Trust Nature Conservation
KTWR	Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve
PAs	Protected Areas
PCP	Participatory Conservation Program
RANA	Rana Tharu
RCNP	Royal Chitwan National Park
RNA	Royal Nepalese Army
RSWR	Royal Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve
VDC	Village Development Committee