

**Masculinity, Modernity and Bonded Labour: Continuity and  
Change amongst the Kamaiya of Kailali District, far-west Nepal**

**Matthew William Maycock**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of Kamaiya masculinities in the context of the Kamaiya recently having been freed from a system of bonded labour, in Kailali district of Nepal's far-western Terai. The Kamaiya are a sub-group of the wider Tharu indigenous ethnic group. Prior to 2000, the majority of the Kamaiya were bonded labourers. In 2000 the Kamaiya system of bonded labour was formally ended. The main purpose of this thesis is to explore various aspects of Kamaiya masculinities as they are changing as a consequence of the transition to freedom. This is a context shaped to a great extent by the recent Maoist People's War (1996-2006).

The main contribution this thesis makes is to scholarship on masculinities in South Asia as well as transitions from bonded labour to modernity. In focusing on Kamaiya masculinities following freedom this thesis contributes to research that explicitly considers masculinities in development studies research. Considering masculinities as the focus of study illustrates how men's gendered experiences of bondedness and freedom constitute an illuminating perspective on these transitions and modernity more broadly.

Centrally this thesis responds to the question: what happens to masculinities following freedom from a system of bonded labour? This is not a question that appears to have been asked within existing research on bonded labour generally, as well as research on the Kamaiya system specifically. This question is answered by exploring a variety of ethnographic material collected through two periods of fieldwork in Kailali district in 2009 and 2010. Fieldwork was focused generating the material for analysis through ethnographic methods, principally interviews and participant observation. These methods were focused on men's experience and testimony of the Kamaiya system, the transition to freedom and post-freedom experiences. This thesis is based on in-depth studies of six Kamaiya men and their narratives of these transitions.

Key words: masculinity, modernity, ethnography, bonded labour, Kamaiya, Nepal.

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## **Use of Tharu/Nepali Words, Currency and Calendar**

Both Nepali and certain Tharu languages are written in Devanagari script. In changing Nepali and Tharu words used in this thesis into roman script, I have followed Turner ([1931] 1990).

During the two periods of fieldwork in 2009 and 2010 one British Pound was worth between 115 to 128 Nepali Rupees (NRs).

Throughout I have used the Gregorian calendar, changing dates to this when certain sources used the Nepali calendar.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ADB: Asian Development Bank  
BASE: Backward Society Education  
BNAC: Britain Nepal Academic Council  
CA: Constituent Assembly  
CBS: Central Bureau of Statistics  
CPA: Comprehensive Peace Agreement  
DDC: District Development Committee  
DFID: Department for International Development  
FKS: Freed Kamaiya Society  
GAD: Gender and Development  
GDP: Gross Domestic Product  
GEFONT: General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions  
INGOs: International Non-Governmental Organisations  
IRs: Indian Rupees  
KPUS: Kamaiya Pratha Unmulan Samaj  
NA: Nepali Army  
NC: Nepali Congress  
NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations  
NLSS: Nepal Living Standards Survey  
NPC: National Planning Commission  
NRs: Nepali Rupees  
PLA: Peoples Liberation Army  
PW: Maoist People's War  
RPP: Rastriya Prajatantra Party  
SLC: School Leaving Certificate  
UCPN(M): United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)  
UML: United Marxist-Leninists  
UNMIN: United Mission to Nepal  
UN: United Nations  
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme  
VDC: Village Development Committee  
WID: Women in Development

YCL: Young Communist League

## **Chapter 1 – The production of Kamaiya masculinities**



**Plate 1 - Kamaiya Freedom Day Protest, 17th July 2009**

The Kamaiya are a group of formerly bonded labourers who share their name with the Kamaiya system of bonded labour from which they were freed on 17th July 2000. Plate One was taken on the ninth anniversary of the day on which the Kamaiya were formally freed, which was a hot midsummer's day. Many Kamaiya had travelled from all over Kailali district, including my two fieldwork sites, to protest about their continuing plight and marginalisation, by disrupting the city traffic. The protest comprised two lines of people, men to the left and women to the right, with children running between them. This anniversary and the protest that happened on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2009 is important for a number of reasons, not least as this study is focused on what happened after the day in 2000 when the Kamaiya were freed. As I show below this is a day of great symbolic importance for the Kamaiya, and constitutes a significant juncture in the lives of many Kamaiya.

This thesis is an ethnographic account of masculinity in two Kamaiya communities in the Kailali district of far-west Nepal. I begin with an account of a Kamaiya protest on Kamaiya Freedom Day in 2009 in Kailali's district headquarters, Dhangadhi. Freed

Kamaiya from all over the district came together to highlight their continued problems. I start with this protest for a number of reasons, not least because it gave me the opportunity to see how this community represents itself and the issues that it faces to the largely ambivalent wider public. The protest was successful in that it disrupted transport in Dhangadhi for a day, but it generated little interest from the press, INGOs or NGOs.

July 17<sup>th</sup> is a day of great celebration for the Kamaiya as the anniversary of the day they were freed from bonded labour. Their transition from this system of labour to freedom and its implications for their masculinities constitute the central focus of this thesis. Focusing explicitly on Kamaiya men and masculinities, I explore the various opportunities and problems, changes and continuity associated with certain masculine performances following freedom from a system of bonded labour.

Starting with Kamaiya freedom day is important for a number of reasons as the process of freedom and the implications of this for the Kamaiya community are important reasons why I have chosen to focus on the Kamaiya in this thesis. This is a group who were prior to 2000 bonded labourers and who were very much defined by their roles within this system (as I consider in more detail in Chapter Four). That this group have gone through such a significant transition provides an opportunity to explore what the implications of such a change are, particularly for Kamaiya men's gendered identities. Focusing on the Kamaiya provides a perspective not only on bonded labour, but the transition to freedom for this community and subsequently what freedom is like for this group. Furthermore, this is a sub-group of the wider Tharu ethnic group who have not been the subject of significant research to date, so focusing on the Kamaiya represents an opportunity to contribute to research both on the Kamaiya and the Tharu. As I consider in Chapter Four there is research on the Kamaiya system and some aspects of the transition to freedom, although there appears to be little in the last few years that focuses on the implications of freedom some nine years after this group were freed. Furthermore, there has been little consideration of the implications of the recent Maoist People's War (PW) for formerly bonded groups such as the Kamaiya.

The transition from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) has created a space within development studies in which men and masculinities have begun to be an explicit focus of research, as opposed to being considered neutral, unmarked or ungendered (Flood, 2004, Jones, 2006). This thesis builds on a growing body of literature within development studies on research into masculinities (cf. Chant and Guttmann, 2002, Cleaver, 2002, Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994, Cornwall and White, 2000, Cornwall et al., 2011, Jackson, 2001, Jones, 2006, Pearson, 2000, Pringle et al., 2011, Sweetman, 1997, 2001, White, 2000, Whitehead, 2000). What makes this literature specific to development studies and distinct from the masculinities literature generally is a concern with men from the 'Global South's' position within and experiences of, the development process. Despite this literature, men's gendered identities have been neglected both in mainstream development studies research as well as in research on Nepal. This is not to say that men are not included, particularly in ethnographic research, but they are rarely explicitly considered as gendered beings. This thesis explores and illuminates the gendered experiences of a specific group of men, the Kamaiya, who are going through significant transitions and attempting to find ways in which they can occupy certain positions of masculinity within a locally unfolding modernity. Throughout all of the previous research on the Kamaiya (and the wider Tharu ethnic group) there has not been an explicit focus on masculinities although this is something that this thesis places at its core.

As Sharma has indicated, masculinity has not until recently received significant attention in South Asia, despite the gender 'awareness' of the NGO and academic sectors in the region:

For a long time, South Asian men have been treated as universally given, ungendered objects and have rarely been examined as gendered (Sharma, 2007a: 33)

This study attempts to contribute to this growing area of research and explore the gendered experience Kamaiya men. Adopting ethnographic methods situates this thesis within the 'ethnographic moment' in masculinities studies (Connell, 2007, 1). This ethnographic moment is reflected in the body of literature on masculinities in

South Asia (cf. Charsley, 2005, Chopra et al., 2004, Chopra, 2004, Chowdhry, 2005, Derne, 2000, Osella and Osella, 2000, 2006, Sharma, 2007b, Srivastava, 2004). While there is a growing body of work on South Asian masculinities, this tends to be quite India-centric, with relatively little research on masculinities in this region located in Nepal, or more specifically in the Terai or southern plain in which this research is located. Furthermore, while there is a significant ethnographic literature on the Tharu and Kamaiya (which is considered in Chapter Four), none seems to have been influenced by the above literature on South Asian masculinities and has placed men's gendered identities as the main focus of this research.

The frequent absence of men and masculinities from the development studies literature is also reflected in most of the literature on bonded labour (again this is considered in more detail in Chapter Four) and situations following the end of certain manifestations of bonded labour. This thesis contributes to such literature by highlighting the contribution that a consideration of masculinity can add to the analysis of such transformations and emergent social relations in these contexts.

In the paragraphs above I have identified several gaps in the literature that are considered in more detail in Chapters Two and Four. This thesis constitutes an effort to contribute to such gaps, principally the ones relating to the literature on South Asian masculinities not having considered the Tharu and Kamaiya, the literature on bonded labour as well as the Tharu and Kamaiya not having considered masculinity. Following Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994) and Chopra et al's (2004), influential ethnographic approaches to masculinity, this thesis attempts to unpack and illuminate, from the understanding that masculinities are multiple, how Kamaiya masculinities are composed and performed. This creates space to consider how masculinities influence each other and to interrogate the influence of certain hegemonic forms (mainly Brahmanic) on subaltern (Kamaiya) masculinities. I explore how subaltern masculinities are marked as a function of their subaltern position; they have to justify themselves and do so through constant interaction with hegemonic masculinities.

This thesis explores the implications for Kamaiya men of their transition from a system of bonded labour to a wage labour existence in the wider context of locally unfolding

modernity. I explore how they are producing and reproducing their gendered identities through three main prisms: bodies, work and family. The transition has brought with it a changing and increasingly complicated landscape of imagery and possible realities of masculinity. I show how Kamaiya men and their gendered identities are evolving and in some ways becoming more complicated following their freedom, and illustrate what it means to be a Kamaiya man, and to be seen as a successful man, are changing. While Kamaiya men are negotiating their masculinities in a changing framework, the hegemonic status of Brahmanic masculinities (despite these masculinities also changing) has been consistent through these changes.

The Kamaiya are a specific sub-class of the Tharu ethnic group, who were formerly predominantly bonded labourers, so they are a class within a caste. They are largely located in the mid and far-western Terai (southern plains) of Nepal. Bonded labour is a system of slavery. Although many Kamaiya were 'freed' from this system in 2000, their community still faces high levels of unemployment and illiteracy and multiple and often overlapping forms of discrimination. Despite being freed over ten years ago, many Kamaiya have not received either land or support from the state or NGO/INGOs. The implications of freedom and the response of the state and other actors (such as NGOs INGOs) provide fertile ground on which to consider how masculinities evolve in response to such a profound change and its aftermath.

The fact that the Kamaiya were freed in during the Maoist People's War (PW) (1996-2006) at a time of intense fighting is a further formative factor for the contemporary Kamaiya masculinities that I explore. Due to their recent freedom and to their position in prevailing class and caste structures, the Kamaiya have a specific perspective and set of experiences of the PW and post-conflict Nepal. I consider change and continuity in Kamaiya masculinities in relation to these and other events through the prisms of the body, work and family.

Having identified a number of gaps in existing literature and the way in which this thesis is positioned in relation to these gaps through a justification of the focus on Kamaiya masculinities, below I outline the research questions and structure of this thesis.

## **Research questions**

The overarching question that this thesis sets out to explore is what happens to masculinity following freedom from a situation of bonded labour. The main purpose of the study is to illustrate the relevance of masculinities in improved understanding of such transitions, by investigating the various ways in which my male Kamaiya respondents are adapting and responding to their transition to freedom and how this transition has changed their masculinities in the two settings outlined above. I approach this via the three foci of bodies and consumption, work, and family, which provide different perspectives on Kamaiya masculinities following freedom. These three foci cumulatively facilitate a perspective on the changing ways in which Kamaiya masculinities are formed through interaction with other, mainly Brahmanic, masculinities. The nature of the interactions between subaltern and hegemonic masculinities is of critical relevance: in each of the chapters that follow, they emerge as a consistent influence shaping post-bonded Kamaiya masculinities.

The central research questions guiding the overall shape of this thesis are grouped around the three discussion chapters. The first focuses on the impact of the transition to freedom on bodies and consumption.

### **How have the links between Kamaiya bodies and Kamaiya masculinities changed following freedom?**

Chapter 5, the first chapter in which I present my fieldwork material, explores how bodies and forms of consumption shape and influence Kamaiya masculinities, focusing on the forms that embodied masculinities are taking following freedom and the factors that influence such manifestations. I introduce Kamaiya men from both fieldwork sites in this and the next two chapters. Beneath this overarching question are the following sub-questions:

- What were the implications of being in the kamaiya system for embodied kamaiya masculinities?
- How do kamaiya men reconcile their bodies with changing images of male bodies following freedom?



- Following freedom, how do patterns of consumption influence embodied kamaiya masculinities?
- How does aging influence embodied kamaiya masculinities?
- How has the position of the *guruwa* and 'traditional' tharu approaches to health been influenced by modernity?

### **How are working patterns changing following freedom, and what implications does this have for Kamaiya masculinities?**

In Chapter 6 I explore changing patterns of work and forms of movement influenced by these changes following freedom and how these changes are shaping Kamaiya masculinities. I discuss how the movement that is now possible for this group is shaping Kamaiya masculinities. Following freedom, these influences on masculine identities are more complicated and variable than was the case within the Kamaiya system. Beneath this overarching question are the following sub-questions:

- To what extent does owning or not owning land shape Kamaiya masculinities?
- How are new forms of work shaping Kamaiya masculinities?
- How are the changing literacy levels affecting Kamaiya masculinities?
- What are the implications of increased potential for movement for Kamaiya masculinities?
- To what extent do movement and changing patterns of work contribute to the transition from boyhood to manhood?

### **What are the Implications of modernity for Kamaiya masculinities in family settings?**

This chapter focuses on aspects of the Kamaiya men's social lives, with an emphasis on the family setting. I consider how various types of relationship between Kamaiya men and women are changing, with a focus on marriage and how such relationships influence Kamaiya masculinities. I end with an account of how fatherhood in Kampur *basti*<sup>1</sup> is changing due to increasing assets to inherit as well as being influenced by

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning of *basti* in Tharu essentially means settlement, smaller and perhaps assumed to be less permanent than a village although the label is used in quite different ways in different contexts. For the

those in the nearby Kampur PLA cantonment. Beneath this overarching question are the following sub-questions:

- How are relationships between Kamaiya men and women changing following freedom?
- Are non-marital relationships any different following freedom?
- What are the aspects of continuity and change in Kamaiyan marriage practices?
- How do Kamaiya men discuss love and arranged marriage, and what is the significance of this?
- How is modernity changing Kamaiya fatherhood?

I conclude this introduction with a brief outline of the thesis structure.

### **Thesis structure**

The theoretical, methodological and contextual chapters follow this introduction, and then the three main chapters explore aspects of my fieldwork material. These later chapters are structured around the research questions outlined above.

Chapter 2, the conceptual chapter, outlines the three central concepts that I have used to guide the exploration of the material in the three main discussion chapters. I outline how I use masculinity, agency and modernity to shape and guide analysis of the Kamaiya men's accounts of their lives. The three main chapters (5-7) combine these theories with material accumulated during the two periods of fieldwork to engage with the research questions above.

In Chapter 3, I outline the setting of the research and the specifics of the multi-method methodological approach that I used to collect various types of material during my fieldwork, and discuss ethical issues pertaining to this research.

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higher castes this seemed to be a pejorative term while for the Kamaiya living in each of the *bastis* considered in this thesis there was a certain pride associated with the term.

Chapter 4 presents an outline of the context in which this thesis is located, both in relation to the literature on bonded labour (principally focusing on India and particularly on research by Jan Breman) and to literature relating to the Kamaiya system. I engage with both these groups of literature on bonded labour, highlighting that a close and explicit consideration of masculinity in these contexts can be illuminating. This leads to an outline of a historical account of Kamaiya masculinities.

Chapters five to seven have been outlined above in relation to how the research questions shape these chapters. The discussion of Kamaiya masculinities in chapters 5-7 that focus on bodies, work, and family contribute to both the development studies literature and that on bonded labour.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis and focuses on the theme that runs throughout the preceding chapters: how Kamaiya masculinities are shaped and influenced in various ways by Bahun<sup>2</sup> masculinities.

In the next chapter I discuss the concepts that guide the analysis of the rest of the thesis that follows, beginning with a conceptual outline of masculinity.

## **Chapter 2 - Concepts**

This chapter discusses three central concepts: masculinity, agency and modernity, which guide the analysis of the Kamaiya men's accounts of their lives. The next three chapters combine the theories considered here with material accumulated during the two periods of fieldwork to engage with the research questions above.

Throughout this thesis I attempt to intertwine the theories outlined here with the material that follows. Each of these three theories is implicated in each of the chapters that follow. In the sections below I situate them in relation to how they are framed generally, locate them in a Nepali and/or South Asian context, and give examples of how they come together to enable analysis of the material that follows.

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<sup>2</sup> Bahun is the Nepali colloquial term for Brahmin.

<sup>3</sup> Prosser highlights one of the principal critiques of gender identity through discourse from transsexual

Although the three concepts guide the analysis to a great extent at different times in the following three chapters, masculinity is the principal theory and analytical tool that I use in this thesis, and I explore this first.

## **Masculinity**

The way that I consider masculinity in this thesis provides the main analytical tool through which I explore a great deal of the material that follows, and is at the core of my exploration of the Kamaiya men's narratives. Masculinity is multiple, variable and contested, and Cornwall and Lindisfarne's description of it provides a good starting point:

[Masculinity is] neither tangible nor an abstraction whose meaning is everywhere the same. In practice, people operate according to many different notions of masculinity. (1994, 12)

This helps to locate the focus on certain practices and behaviours through which we can view male gendered identities. The focus on masculinity as variable also moves the analysis beyond thinking about it as fixed and complete. Contradiction and complexity, partly caused by the interaction of gender with other discourses of identity, are embraced within a broader anthropological context in which gender discourses vary significantly both within and between cultures. Discourse shapes gender:

The experience of gender, of being an engendered subject, is given meaning in discourse and in practices which those discourses inform. (Moore: 1994a: 143)

Discourse, as it is developed here, has a number of dimensions, not least in indicating that gender is a process and is necessarily 'never fixed or finished' (Moore: 2007: 115). Moore identifies a disparity between dominant cultural categories and the day-to-day experience of gender relations (ibid: 145), thereby indicating one of the limits of discourse and the necessity for locating discourse in wider processes of societal

change.<sup>3</sup> This thesis explores the implications of modernity in this context: does modernity increase or reduce the range of masculine subject positions available?

The availability of specific discourses in a given time and space are clearly important considerations from this perspective. Some positions in discourse become 'hegemonic' (as I consider below), and therefore result in specific constellations of discourse positions relating to the predominance of certain constellations of masculinity.

This necessitates a consideration of why some subject positions are occupied and others not in a historical context that defines the parameters of such choices in making some positions more attractive (and hegemonic) than others. Wendy Hollway's (1984) conceptualisation of 'investment' is an important means by which to understand why particular subject positions are occupied when a broad range of positions relating to masculinity are available. For Hollway, investment replaces choice which facilitates a move away from thinking about subject positions being occupied as a consequence of rational choice (ibid, 238). The self is established through investment in a range of subject positions over a period of time (Moore, 2007, 118). Such investment is somewhere between emotional commitment and vested interest, and relates to both the perceived and the real benefits that a specific position provides:

...investment is a matter not just of emotional satisfaction, but of the real, material, social and economic benefits which are the reward of the senior man, the good wife, the powerful mother or the dutiful daughter in many social situations. (Moore, 1994, 65)

The institutionalisation of power is particularly important here, as it contributes to making some positions more desirable than others. Hollway contextualises this notion of investment in certain subject positions with the idea of intersubjectivity: i.e. one is always positioned in relation to the other people about one.

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<sup>3</sup> Prosser highlights one of the principal critiques of gender identity through discourse from transsexual experience: 'Whether gender "outlaws" are contesting the heterosexual matrix, they depend and rely on the reinstatement of gendered identities' (1998, cited in Mac an Ghail and Haywood: 2007: 40).

Masculinity interacts formatively with other forms of social identity and cannot be considered in isolation. This is the major reason behind the plurality of masculinities. Within a focus on gender and conflict, Cynthia Cockburn (2007) outlines the notion of intersectionality<sup>4</sup> to explore how gender interacts and informs the shape of a range of identities, incorporating race and class. Intersectionality matters in my research as this provides a way of thinking about the complexity of the interactions of various forms of identity. For example, throughout this thesis I consider the multiple ways in which constructions of caste and ethnicity are critically important to identity, and play a vital role in constructions of Kamaiya masculinities.

Having outlined how masculinity is considered and how this relates to discourse, I now consider how multiple masculinities are configured. I begin with an examination of Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and its usefulness of in the South Asian context. I critically engage with hegemonic masculinity and examine which parts of the theory will be useful in subsequent chapters, and conversely which aspects of it need reworking in light of the material that follows. For Connell, hegemonic masculinity is:

...one form of masculinity rather than others that is culturally exalted...

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy. (Connell, 2005, 77)

This helps to clarify the dual function of hegemonic masculinity, i.e. the domination of certain masculinities over femininity generally and certain configurations of masculinity, for Connell sees hegemonic masculinity as dominant over 'subordinate', 'complicit' and 'marginalised' masculinities. One of the many forms of masculinity that she describes is protest masculinity (2005, 109), which, she argues, contests the current hegemonic form for dominance. Hegemonic masculinity is reliant on these

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4 Although Cockburn wasn't the first person to discuss intersectionality (cf. Crenshaw, 1989).

various manifestations of masculinity and the negative implications of being non-hegemonic (sometimes feminising such positions):

Hegemonic masculinities define successful ways of 'being a man'; in so doing, they define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior. (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994, 3)

Consequently, hegemonic masculinities are the standards by which other masculinities are measured, which is perhaps one of the more important and useful aspects of this theory. This provides a way to explore the influence of dominant forms of masculinity within context in which the vast majority of masculine performance does not always refer to the dominant style. One of the central aspects of being a man relates to how hegemonic masculinity is negotiated, appropriated and, at times, resisted. This opens up the possibility of diverse responses to hegemonic forms and diverse masculinities. This specific site of negotiation is problematic in some regards.

Connell (2005) developed the a notion of hegemonic masculinity to give a account of how certain (hegemonic) forms of masculinity predominate over others in specific places and times. This has become the preeminent way of theorising relationships between multiple masculinities. Connell's contribution is important. She states that masculinities are multiple, and that masculine identities are influenced not just by relationships between women and men but also by relationships between men. Her theory of hegemonic masculinity is essentially an account of how various masculinities interact with and influence one another within a framework in which they are constantly competing with and challenging one another.

Ultimately, I consider Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity as useful in the analysis of the material that follows: consistently in the material presented I consider how subaltern Kamaiya masculinities respond to, at times reject while at others appropriate hegemonic Brahmanic masculinities. However, Wetherell and Edley (1999) indicate that in many local settings, being a man may actually be configured around performances of masculinity that find coherence in being distant from local manifestations of hegemonic masculinity, as Osella and Osella (2006) report from

Kerala and to which I return below. Such responses do not necessarily change the hegemonic position of certain masculinities in specific localities, but they do change how we theorise subaltern masculinities. I carry this theme through chapters 5-7 that follow.

Having outlined how masculinity is considered theoretically in this thesis, I now discuss what this means for this research in far-west Nepal. To meaningfully utilise the theory of hegemonic masculinity outlined here, it is necessary to establish which masculinities are hegemonic in my fieldwork sites. This equates to a focus on Brahmanic masculinities, the outline of which provides a context from which to consider how Kamaiya men negotiate their subaltern masculinities, which form the focus of the chapters that follow.

### **Brahmanic Masculinity as Hegemonic Masculinity**

The theoretical outline above raises a number of questions. If we accept that there are multiple masculinities, which of the diverse manifestations of masculinity in far-west Nepal can be considered hegemonic? To respond to this, section I outline here how Brahmanic masculinities in Nepal and South Asia are viewed in the literature to provide a perspective on how such masculinities are considered hegemonic.

Osella and Osella have asked the crucial question of whether Brahmanic masculinities can be considered hegemonic in relation to Malayali men in their research in Kerala. In their analysis they initially combine Connell (2005) and Dumont's (1980) positions to reach a perspective indicating that Bahun men and Bahun masculinities (referring to purity cf. Dumont) can be considered the hegemonic form (2006, 6). For the Osellas, Brahmanic masculinity is:



...socially high status associated with control, detachment, power and ideologically utterly separated from and unavailable to the feminine.<sup>5</sup> (2006, 49)

Bennett complements this position with her research on gender ideologies amongst high-caste Bahun and Chettri communities in Nepal. She reports a certain strain of Hinduism that focuses on the importance of purity and asceticism for men, which is integral to the gender ideologies within these communities (Bennett, 2002, 126). There is a tension here between this ideology and the imperative of getting married and having children, especially sons, which men have to negotiate. Despite the hegemonic status of these masculinities it is interesting to consider how they are feminised in various contexts in response to locally-defined challenges to the hegemonic position.<sup>6</sup> Ahearn (2001) explores how Magar men who divert from the normative path to adult male status (which involves joining the army) and focus on education tend to be feminised. The process of feminisation likens men to high-caste men, who are viewed along the following lines:

...studious [Magar] boys were likened to high-caste Bahun and Chettri boys, who despite their higher ritual (and often economic) status, were seen as weaklings. (Ahearn, 2001, 70)

We see here how certain masculinities are configured in relation to Bahun (and Chettri) masculinities and how, in this instance, this configuration results in the feminisation of Bahun boys. Importantly, as Ahearn states, this does not actually change the higher status of the Bahun, boys but is more a reflection of Magar boys negotiating these hegemonic forms. In this and the following two chapters I explore

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5 Mahatma Gandhi is perhaps the most obvious example of such a configuration of masculinity (Alter, 1994, 2000).

6 Nandy (1983, 10) indicates that the feminisation of Bahun men has not historically always worked along these lines, at times quite the opposite being the case: "The Bahun in his cerebral, self-denying asceticism was the traditional masculine counterpoint to the more violent, 'virile' active *Ksatriya* (writer or scribe caste), the later representing, the feminine principal in the cosmos."

how Kamaiya (subaltern) masculinities respond to, negotiate and at times appropriate certain Brahmanic masculinities.

Having outlined how Brahmanic masculinities are hegemonic and discussed how they are viewed in other studies, I now consider how the notion of masculinity developed so far relates to men's bodies.

### **Embodied Masculinity**

Having theoretically situated this thesis in terms of masculinity, I now consider what men's bodies have to do with gendered identities (I develop this further in Chapter Five). All the major masculinity theorists have engaged with this question, with Connell stating:

...gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do  
... it is not social practice reduced to the body. (2005, 71)

The conventional sex/gender dichotomy found in much of the literature on gender has several problems. Most fundamentally, such analysis often precludes any focus on the body and its significance in understanding gendered identities. This discussion is relatively straightforward in a framework of understanding in which bodies are themselves socially constructed and not 'fixed':

...bodies have no sex outside of discourse, in which they are designated.  
(Moore, 1994, 177)

The body, then, becomes a site of potential resistance to specific discourses. This conceptualisation permits an understanding in which the body is shaped and experienced by gender, rather than the other way around (Moore: 2007: 8). Connell has written extensively on the male body, and she and Messerschmidt borrow from this framework in their analysis:

...we need to understand that bodies are both objects of social practice and agents in social practice. (Connell and Messerschmidt: 2005: 851)

The centrality of the male body to male experience has found expression in a wide range of settings and perspectives. In an analysis that alludes to the contradiction and uncertainty of such experience, Gadd outlines the source of some of these tensions:

Men's bodies are sources of insecurity and feelings of inadequacy, symbolic purveyors of competence and incompetence, sites through which intimacy is experienced or thwarted. (Gadd: 2003: 350)

Men's bodies have an important impact on constructs of masculinity, and vice versa, but this can be in ways that complicate and problematize masculinities. Although there are important links between bodies and masculinity they are not seamless: quite the contrary, as Whitehead suggests below:

...many men fail to achieve a seamless, constant, symbiotic relationship between their bodies and dominant discourses of masculinity (Whitehead, 2002, 191)

Efforts to create the appearance of continuity between bodies and masculinity are closely associated with masculine subjectivities (Hall et al., 2007, 549), this is something that I consider at length in Chapter Five. Certain images and realities of bodies, and certain bodily practices, are associated with certain masculinities, but they do not completely determine each other. This helps to move an analysis of the social importance of bodies into a framework in which bodies and social practices influence each other in various ways, where bodies are shaped by as well as shaping social practices. Shilling consolidates the relationship being explored:

This is a dynamic relationship [between bodies and social practices] which involves the body both affecting and being affected by social relations. (Shilling, 2003, 100)

Shilling (2003: 95) highlights the negotiation of biology in relation to some of the gendered assumptions associated with women such as 'weak' and 'fragile', with men

the opposite, despite the many contradictions inherent in this. In some ways the body becomes something that must be controlled, and sets some of the limits of gender expectations: one must behave 'like a man', and have the body expected of a man. One can see this intertwining with the previous section on Brahmanic hegemonic masculinities, as part of being hegemonic there is certain bodily expectations that are specific to the hegemonic position. In the instance of Bahun men, these bodily expectations take a certain form, that for other men is often equated with physical weakness (as the quote from Ahearn indicates above).

Ultimately, bodies are an important consideration in the way I explore Kamaiya masculinities. By exploring the various ways that bodies and gendered identities influence each other, this section has shown that bodies are a vital part of masculine identities, although, in ways that have the potential to destabilise both.

The approach to masculinity outlined here through a consideration of discourse, hegemonic masculinity and bodies provides a theoretical perspective from which I consider the three main analytical chapters or foci of this thesis: bodies and consumption, work/migration and family. Masculinities are the main focus of this thesis, although I also use other theoretical tools to shape my analysis of Kamaiya men's lives. Before turning to modernity, I consider agency, another analytical tool that I use throughout this thesis.

## **Agency**

A notion of agency is critical for this thesis and, more broadly, for research on gender, because it gives an account of behaviour that is essential to understanding certain aspects of masculinity. The conceptualisation of agency deployed here initially borrows from Anthony Giddens' (1984) notion of structuration. Structuration attempts to avoid the problems associated with prioritising either structure or agency by situating the subject between the two. Long works through this dualism as follows:

The notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most

extreme forms of coercion ... Within limits social actors are 'knowable and 'capable' (2001, 16)

The subject mediates between structure and agency, neither fully self-determined nor fully determined by structure. Exploring the subject's agency requires an analysis that to some extent complements Hollway's notion of investment outlined earlier.

The notion that agency is gendered is an important insight that permeates this thesis. Men's agency has been conventionally overstated, complementing an underestimation of women's agency. Herdt (2003) indicates that agency and military prowess go hand in hand in specific practices associated with the transition to adult masculinities in Sambian society. Herdt views male agency as unstable, insecure and, critically, achieved through submission to older men. I explore generational differences in masculinity in more detail in Chapter Five. So far I have outlined the meaning of agency in this thesis through discussion of some of the ways in which it has been theoretically developed elsewhere. In the next section I focus on what this means for research in Nepal.

In her research on the Sherpa, Sherry Ortner (1989) attempts to mitigate the problems associated with much of the theorising of agency that sees subjects as free, socially determined, or somewhere in between. Ortner considers subjects to be 'loosely structured', implying the limited influence of structure (1989, 198). Agency is a way of thinking about subjects who are not independent or completely culturally determined: this might be called the 'culturally constrained capacity to act' (Ahearn, 2001, 54). Agency is context-specific and is not synonymous with free will; it is always constrained or limited by structure, so it can be seen as both acceptance of and opposition to certain forms of domination. Aparna Rao (1998) further deepens the usefulness of agency, moving beyond the perspective that it might simply be equated with resistance by exploring how agency might be implicated in the continuity of domination and the wider status quo.

Ahearn (2001, 55) outlines a potentially fruitful approach that considers how both resistance and accommodation are implicated simultaneously in many actions. This helps to move the analysis from a consideration of 'more' or 'less' agency to create a

space in which to enquire how Kamaiya men themselves think and talk about how agency might be changing in their lives.

With my knowledge of the various changes taking place in my fieldwork sites I explore how Kamaiya men experience and perform various changes in agency that are both implicated in these changes and are themselves part of the changes. This raises a number of questions: What are the implications of modernity, as it is unfolding locally, for agency? How do Kamaiya men think about agency when it corresponds with the accommodation of Bahun masculinities? How does agency work in this context, and how is this implicated in negotiation with hegemonic masculinity? This is particularly important, as I consistently consider the various ways in which Kamaiya men are responding to upper-caste, Brahmanic hegemonic masculinities. In a different context (exploring women's multiple relationships with the masculinist hierarchy), Ortner (1996, 16) usefully explores how agency is implicated in relationships with the performance of various hegemonies. She illustrates how women are agents in this context, but are agents who do not entirely identify with the hegemonic hierarchy or with the fact that they can act independently of the situation in which they are located. In a later paper, Ortner returns to agency:

Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings. (Ortner, 2005, 34)

This is not an entirely new position, but Ortner again highlights the importance of considering both agency and structure in a context in which this is not seen as a duality. This is important in my exploration of how the members of a differently subordinate group negotiate their gendered identities. I explore how Kamaiya men negotiate changing and complicated arenas of potential action and constraint.

In one final and necessary nuance of how I see agency in this thesis, I return briefly to Ahearn's (2001) view. She identifies a number of generational differences in agency, indicating that a certain interpretation of Development is useful in the Nepali context.

She reports that the older subjects in her research were more fatalistic about agency, while younger participants had quite a different perspective:

...who have grown up immersed in development discourse tend to adhere to a more individualistic theory of human action. (Ahearn, 2001, 248)

That development discourse as a reflection of modernity, which I explore in more detail below, might lead to a different form of agency and deepen generational differences is an important insight and one with which I critically engage in the following chapters. Furthermore, in relation to agency, I consider that this is not simply a question of structure/agency, freedom or constraint, but it is also a way of thinking about actions that can reflect both freedom and constraint at once.

Having outlined both masculinity and agency, I now turn to the final major theoretical tool required to shape my analysis of the chapters: modernity. As with masculinity and agency, my outline of modernity has important links with the two previous theories.

## **Modernity**

So far in this chapter I have outlined masculinity and agency; in this section I first define what I mean by modernity and discuss how other researchers in Nepal understand it. This section will illustrate how the approach that is taken to modernity in this thesis, illuminates aspects of Kamaiya masculinities that I subsequently explore. The importance of modernity (as I outline it here - focusing on the development process) for this thesis, relates to a specific understanding of the situation into which the Kamaiya have been freed. Throughout this thesis I consider a range of reciprocal relationships between modernity and masculinity that illustrate change and continuity in both. Subsequently I explore the ways in which modernity is a critical part of the changes in Kamaiya masculinities that are the focus of this thesis. In order to provide a starting place for considering various aspects of modernity, I return once more to Giddens to provide an outline of what I take modernity to be:

Modernity is a double-edged phenomenon. The development of modern social institutions has created vastly greater opportunities for human beings to enjoy

a secure and rewarding existence than in any type of pre-modern system. But modernity also has a sombre side that has become very important in the present century, such as the frequently degrading nature of modern industrial work.... (1991, 7)

In some senses the understanding of modernity above and the transition Giddens mentions from pre-modern systems would correspond with the notion that the period up to 2000 (while the Kamaiya system still formally existed) could be considered 'pre-modern'. Following 2000 some Kamaiya men have opportunities that were inconceivable prior to freedom. These changes form the focus of the bulk of Chapters 5-7, focusing on various opportunities and realities of new forms of consumption, work, mobility, education, relationships etc.... I illustrate in this section that these opportunities and the aspirations that guide them are heavily shaped by modernity as well as masculinity.

While significant changes are evident in the lives of many Kamaiya men following freedom, I argue in this thesis that freedom on July 17<sup>th</sup> 2000, does not in fact represent a clear juncture or 'break'<sup>7</sup> between pre-modernity and modernity. The transition to freedom and actual experiences of freedom for the Kamaiya are more complicated than this. This reflects a questioning of any assumed links between pre-modernity and bonded labour on one hand and modernity and free labour on the other. Therefore, bonded labour can be seen as a condition of modernity, as Kapadia outlines:

...the presence of attached [bonded] labour does not signify a lack of modernity in a specific agrarian context, it signals that a local modernity is unfolding, in all its complexity. (2002, 152)

This raises two questions that this section aims to address, what shapes the local modernity in the Terai in which this thesis is located and what does modernity mean for Kamaiya masculinities following freedom?

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7 The criticism of the idea of 'break' used here reflects Appadurai's (1996, 2-3) analysis of this.



Before considering the links between modernity and masculinity, I now outline what modernity means in the Terai and more broadly in Nepal. In this section I focus on the local contours of modernity that are influenced by mainstream Development process and discourse. This illustrates the influence of aspects of Development on certain the aspects of Kamaiya masculinities that are subsequently considered. I focus here on Pigg's research on various aspects of modernity, although many other researchers have investigated aspects of modernity in Nepal, such as Fisher (1990), Ortner (1999), Ahearn (2001, 2004), Liechy (2003, 2010) and Guneratne (1999b, 2002). I have chosen Pigg (1992, 1996, 2001) for a number of reasons, but principally because her work focuses on the development process in a framework of changing attitudes to shamanism (something I consider in Chapter Five in relation to the Guruwa who perform a type of shamanic role within Kamaiya communities). Pigg's research indicates that there are particular associations made in Nepal between development and modernity, which help to shape how modernity is understood in Nepal. For Pigg, modernity:

...is quite literally a worldview: a way of imagining both space and people through temporal idioms of progress and backwardness. (1996, 161)

For Pigg (1992, 1996), development in Nepal is synonymous with modernity and the development process carries modernity with it (cf. Carney and Rappleye, 2011). Pigg reflects this position in a nuanced way that opens up a space for consideration of how modernity is shaped locally:

... development establishes an ideological encounter in which universalist notions of progress and modernity meet locally grounded social visions. (Pigg, 1992, 492)

She continues:

Embedded in the Nepali usage of *bikas* (development) is what I call an ideology of modernization: the representation of society through an implicit scale of social progress. (Pigg, 1992, 499)

The relevance of Pigg's perspective on modernity is not that it is simply being absorbed into Nepali society, but that modernity is being transformed as it unfolds locally. I take this perspective through the chapters that follow, exploring not just the local, specific contours of modernity in my fieldwork sites but also Pigg's analysis of how these local modernities become critical for the way that Nepalis (and of course others) interact. Modernity/development is given meaning, regurgitated and reformed locally in specific settings to create 'alternative, interactive modernities' (Appadurai, 1996, 65). In the section below I explore what the perspective on modernity I have outlined so far contributes to the understanding of Kamaiya masculinities.

As I discuss throughout the chapters that follow, modernity comes together with masculinity in multiple and diverse ways. Performances and perceptions of what being a 'modern' man means in the context of locally specific manifestations of modernity are complicating and multiplying local masculinities. This is a consequence of how masculinity and modernity come together to create a broad range of opportunity and constraint that are associated with particular tensions and difficulties. For example, the changes I explore in Chapter Five relating to aspects of consumption by Kamaiya men directly respond to local ideas of what it means to be 'modern'. Chapters Six (focusing on work, education and mobility) and Seven (focusing on family life) are illuminated at various stages through a consideration of the ways that being seen as a modern man is influencing the changes explored in these chapters. Cumulatively these chapters illustrate that to be seen as a modern man (as this is understood and imagined locally by Kamaiya men) is viewed positively (although as I will show, achieving this is not without its costs and negative aspects). Schein helps to situate the 'modern' here:

The modern is usefully thought of not only as a context in which people make their lives, nor only as a discursive regime that shapes subjectivity, but also as

powerfully constituted and negotiated through performance. (Schein, 1999, 361)

So certain performances interweave masculinity with modernity, something that I consider throughout this thesis. I show that locally defined notions of modernity are becoming critical for configurations of masculine identity in Kamaiya communities. In relation to modernity amongst the middle class in Kathmandu, Liechty (2003, 2010) focuses on how certain forms of consumption, particularly by young middle-class men, construct certain masculine identities. His theoretical stance is especially relevant in this research, which explores similar processes, although from a different class, caste and ethnic perspective. This different perspective has something to do with location, as if Liechty views the middle-class research subjects he studies in Kathmandu as on the periphery of modernity (2003, 7), that would make the two fieldsites considered here as being in an even more pronounced peripheral position. This section on modernity indicates that this concept contributes significant nuance to ways in which I consider Kamaiya masculinities throughout the rest of this thesis. Having both outlined modernity and indicated the usefulness of this concept for the ways in which I discuss Kamaiya masculinities subsequently, I now consider breadwinner masculinities as a specific coming together of modernity and masculinity.

At various stages this thesis focuses on one manifestation of the coming together of adult<sup>8</sup> masculinity, modernity and agency – in the form of ‘breadwinner’ Kamaiya masculinities. The use of the term breadwinner reflects Osella and Osella’s insight of the importance of this modern, masculine ‘ideal’ in South Asia:

“...our ethnography indicates the degree to which a modern ‘breadwinner’ ideal has come to be the dominant mode of masculinity.” (2006, 5)

In this thesis I consider the usefulness of the concept breadwinner in relation to Kamaiya masculinities and explore certain facets of this in some detail (particularly in Chapter 7). The importance of the breadwinner concept in the Kamaiya context is that this is relevant in the lives of Kamaiya men following freedom as never before. Within

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<sup>8</sup> When I discuss adult throughout this thesis this is taken to mean those over 18 years of age.

the Kamaiya system the notion of breadwinning was not applicable, as Kamaiya men were not seen as providing for their families the way they are following freedom. This thesis illustrates how Kamaiya men are having to adapt to various expectations associated with breadwinner masculinities following freedom. Although as the Osella and Osella indicate above this is something many men in South Asia have been doing for many years and in many contexts. To explore the contours of this collation of masculine subject positions (as well as various efforts to occupy these positions), each of the theories outlined in this chapter all make significant contributions.

Throughout this section and the thesis more broadly, I focus on various aspects of personhood and consumption relating to modernity that influence Kamaiya masculinities. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates how being a 'modern' Kamaiya man relates to certain masculine identities with associated behaviours and aspirations. This thesis illustrates how focusing on masculinities provides a rich and meaningful way of considering various changes in agency and modernity as experienced by a specific group of Kamaiya men in far-west Nepal. I will show that the understanding of masculinity outlined here and applied to each of the subsequent parts of this thesis makes an important contribution to understanding modernity and the development process amongst the Kamaiya.

Having outlined the concepts that are used in this thesis I now turn in Chapter 3 below to the research setting and methods that were used during both periods of fieldwork.

### **Chapter 3 – Research Setting and Methodology**

In this chapter I outline the setting in which this research is located as well as the methods I used for this study. The location and methods I chose and my position in the field study sites clearly had a profound influence on the sort of material I was able to collect and my interpretation of it. Subsequently I also present ethical considerations that related to the fieldwork upon which this fieldwork is based. Before moving onto consider the methodological approach I took in this research, this chapter outlines the setting in which the research was located, begin with a consideration of Nepal.

## Nepal

The latest UNDP Human Development Report ranks Nepal as 157th out of 187 countries. It is the poorest country in South Asia and in the low category of human development (UNDP, 2011, 133), according to the World Food Programme (WFP), 41% of the population are undernourished and 24% live on less than \$1 a day (WFP, 2011). In 2009, 17.7% of the Nepali population of just over 26.6 million lived in urban areas, while in 2001 the equivalent figure was 14% (Asian Development Bank, 2011a, 1), indicating a gradual process of urbanisation. The adult (over 15) literacy rate is 57%; young (15-24 years) males' literacy are 87% and young females', 77% (UNICEF, 2011), indicating significant recent change. According to official figures, 1,917,903 people (1,663,237 men and 254,666 women) were absent abroad in (CBS, 2011, 1), with 86% of those who had officially migrated men (CBS, 2011, 1). The 2001 census recognises 102 castes and ethnic groups and over 92 living languages, indicating great linguistic and cultural diversity.

Violent conflict erupted in Nepal in 1996, and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in 2006. By June 2006, 13,347 people had died in during the 10-year PW: 8,377 killed by the state and 4,970 by the PLA, the armed wing of the United Communist Party Nepal (UCPN(M)). The majority of those who were killed, injured or disappeared during the insurgency were men, complementing global trends indicating that men constitute the majority of both the perpetrators and the victims of violence (Connell, 2007, 8). Throughout the conflict the Maoists had a strong influence in rural Nepal, controlling up to 40% of the country (Karki, 2003). Following peace in 2006, the UCPN(M) became the largest party in the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in 2008, with 38% of the votes. The peace is unstable in multiple ways.

Despite the PW and relatively low development indicators there is evidence that Nepal is making progress towards meeting some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Asian Development Bank, 2011b, Government of Nepal, 2010). The transitions taking place, however, are uneven throughout Nepal and between different caste and ethnic groups. These figures are significant for this thesis as this is one way of considering the context of modernity into which the Kamaiya are emerging, there is

a significant amount of development activity taking place across Nepal that is contributing to meeting the MDGs.

Having given a brief account of relevant development indicators for Nepal, I now turn to the district level to give the context at this administrative level. The research was located in two fieldwork sites in Kailali district in Nepal's southern plain or Terai. Just over 50% of Nepal's population live in the Terai (CBS, 2011, 1). According to Gaige (1975) the Terai represents a specific challenge regarding integration into the Nepali state, as there is an assumption that hill peoples dominate Kathmandu. I show later how the state's policies towards integration of the Terai have had a significant influence on the development of the Kamaiya system. The Terai is the most economically productive area of Nepal and has many close links with India (Gaige, 1975). The Terai is shown in yellow on the map below, while Kailali district is highlighted in blue:



Figure 1 – Location of Kailali and Ecological Zones of Nepal, source <http://reliefweb.int>

## Kailali District

This thesis is based on ethnographic research undertaken at two fieldwork sites in Kailali district in far-west Nepal. The district context is important for a number of reasons, not least that this administrative context had a significant meaning at both fieldwork sites. The indicators given below provide context for the subsequent

chapters. The lack of research based in Kailali reflects the wider lack of accounts of social history in Nepal (Onta, 1994), with the notable exceptions of (Ødegaard, 1997, Rankin, 1999). This hot, flat district is prone to widespread flooding during the monsoon months and has strong links with India. The location of Kailali is indicated in Figure 1 above in blue.

In this section I present various indicators to outline the context in which this research is situated. The official population of Kailali is 770,279, with an annual growth rate of 2.22% (the national average is 1.4%) (CBS, 2011, 2). Kailali has the fifth highest population of all 75 districts in Nepal and a relatively high population density. The official total population abroad from Kailali was 61,271 (48,569 or 79% men, 12,702 women) (CBS, 2011, 2), with the proportion of men abroad from Dhangadhi slightly lower than the national average. This should be compared with men making up 51% of the adult population in Kailali in 2011 (CBS, 2011, 2), so the population abroad figures indicate that there is a lot of migration out of Kailali and this migration is predominantly by men. However, given the porous nature of the border with India it is likely that the actual figures are far higher. These figures indicate that movement is strongly gendered, with masculinities becoming associated with movement in multiple ways, that I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6.

Government of Nepal figures indicate that Kailali ranks 21st out of the 75 districts in terms of composite development indicators, placing it above the national average (CBS, 2003a, 6). The literacy rate for population aged six and over is 60% for males and 36% for females, with a district average of 48% (CBS, 2001, Table 12). I explore this further gender imbalance in Chapter 5.

As in all districts in Nepal there is significant caste and ethnic diversity in Kailali although in Kailali of all the ethnic groups represented, the Tharu are the largest ethnic group; 43.70% Tharu, 17.42% Chhetri, 10.73% Bahun Hill, 6.21% Kami, 4% Magar, 3% Thakuri, 2.87% Unidentified Caste, 2.73% Unidentified Dalit, 12.967% Damai/Dholi,

1.26% Sarki, 0.65% Sonar and 0.60% Lohar (Intensive Study & Research Centre, 2010).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, 34.32% of the district's population has mountain/hill origins (CBS, 2001) indicating that significant in migrations from the hills to the district has taken place. The numbers of those from mountain/hill background is expected to grow with the continued internal movement of people from the hills to the Terai.

In the 2008 CA elections, the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (UCPN(M))<sup>10</sup> won all six seats in Kailali, while in the previous election of 1999 the Nepali Congress (NC) Party won all four seats. This represents a significant political shift in the district which is reflected more broadly in Nepal, although the recent rise of the Tharuhat<sup>11</sup> might change the political composition of the district even further. Kailali was relatively unaffected by the PW. INSEC (2007) indicate that 264 people were killed in Kailali District during the conflict, and high numbers of IPDs (30230) in this district have been reported (ibid). One person was registered as 'disappeared' by the Maoists and 17 by the State during the PW, relatively few compared to neighbouring Bardia's 16 and 183 respectively)(ibid). However, the PW seems to have gained influence following the signing of the CPA in 2006. Kailali is one of the districts with the highest numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) and there are three 7th Division People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonments in the district. The significance of one of these cantonments for the men at one of the two fieldwork sites is considered at various stages in this thesis.

I chose Kailali district as the site for my fieldwork for several reasons, an important one being the recommendations of Tharu friends, who helped me to access NGOs and political parties in the district. It was also an opportunity to contribute research on a

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9 Included on <http://www.nrrc.org.np/where-we-work/district-profile.php?d=Kailali> (accessed February 2012)

10 The political party commonly referred to as the Maoists, alongside the political branches of the party Maoist affiliated organisations include the Young Communist League (YCL) and Peoples Liberation Army (PLA).

11 This is Tharu specific political movement that has emerged in post-conflict Nepal (Maycock, 2011). This movement had significant influence in Kailali in 2009, although whether this will be converted to mainstream political success remains unclear.



district that is neglected in the literature, largely due to its remoteness from Kathmandu. Kailali has significant Tharu and Kamaiya populations; Pashupati Chaudhary, leader of the Freed Kamaiya Society (FKS) stated that there were over 100 Kamaiya *bastis* in Kailali in 2011.<sup>12</sup> Kailali constitutes a good setting in which to undertake research focusing on the implications of freedom from a bonded system of labour for masculinity. Having situated this research in terms of Kailali district, below I move onto consider the two fieldsites in Kailali in which I undertook research.

### The Fieldwork Sites

The fieldwork upon which this thesis is based took place at two different sites, affording opportunities for the contextualisation and comparison of different experiences and masculinities at each. One is on government-allocated rural land; the other on unregistered urban land. Having two different fieldwork sites allowed comparisons between settled and transient aspects of the Kamaiya's experiences following freedom and in rural and urban settings. While members of each *basti* knew of the existence of the other, there were no obvious links between the two sites other than those that I make in this thesis. At both locations all the Kamaiya are free, although this had varying implications.

As Sharma (2007b) indicates, the conventional model of ethnographic fieldwork involves staying in one area for an extended period of time; but like him, I also digressed from this approach, although slightly differently. I spent my time between the two fieldwork sites in Dhangahdi, the district HQ, and Kampur *basti*. I spent ten months in 2009 and one month in 2011, cycling between the two in about an hour about once a week. Cycling was particularly useful, as it was not included in the many *bandh* (strikes) that restricted all other forms of transport .

There are several benefits to having two fieldwork sites, not least that it opens up the potential for comparison between the two settings, in this case one urban and one rural. After initially spending a considerable time in Kampur *basti* it was clear that

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12 Interview in Kathmandu Post, <http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2011/07/17/nation/kamaiya-rehab-plan-in-limbo/224112.html> (accessed August 2011).

being unable to explore an urban setting with which the *basti* had many links would considerably limit the material I could collect. Pettigrew (2004) considers multi-sited ethnography particularly suitable in situations of conflict, and I argue that this remains the case in post-conflict Nepal.

Having two fieldwork sites also provided a flexibility that a single one would not have offered. As Robson (2002) and many other writers on qualitative methods have found, undertaking fieldwork requires pragmatism and flexibility. For example, initially I focused largely on narratives of violence within the PLA and then various methodological and ethical concerns moved my focus more explicitly onto the Kamaiya. Furthermore, in both fieldsites I became interested in more ambient forms of violence and broader aspects of social change, of which the PW was one significant part. Having broadly located this research I now outline the two fieldsites in which this research is located before moving onto focus on life histories, the first of the two main methods I used in my fieldwork.

### **Landed Kamaiya: Kampur *Basti***

Shortly after the Kamaiya were freed, 2000 locations across the country were chosen as for their resettlement. Kampur *Basti* is one such settlement, and like many others in rural areas the land appropriated for it was dense jungle of little economic worth and limited agricultural potential. The *Basti* comprises 35 houses slightly set back from the road, with dense forest on two sides. A rutted mud track that becomes a muddy river during the monsoon rains leads from the road through the *basti* and into the forest. When the Kamaiya families settled in Kampur, each was allocated a plot of 5 kattha of land.<sup>13</sup> More recently (from 2005-6) a number of Dalit and Haliya households (around 15) have been established at the edges of the *basti*.

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<sup>13</sup> A kattha is equal to 0.3 hectares. Estimates state that a family of six can live off ten kattha for six months of the year, or for a full year if it is irrigated.

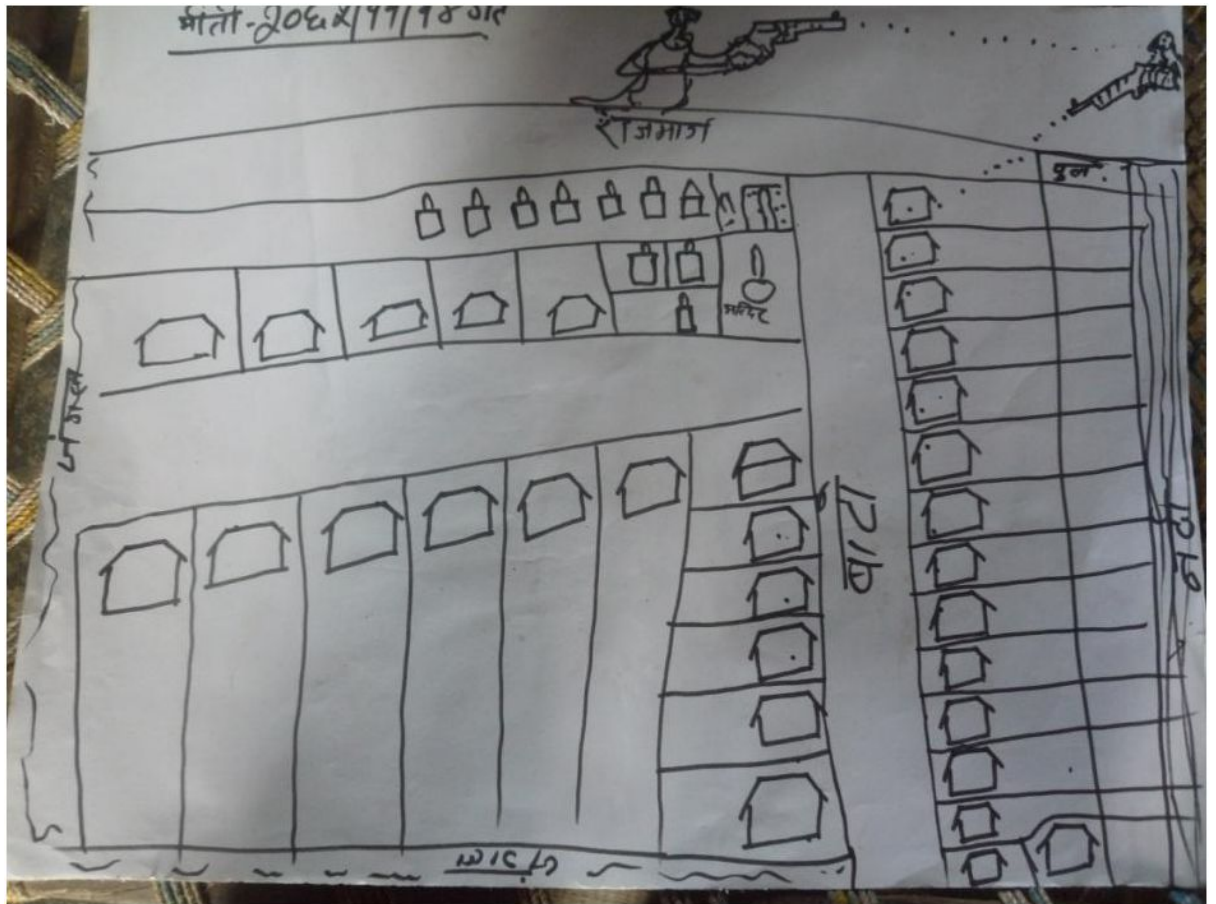


Plate 2 - A map of Kampur *Basti* drawn by a group of villagers

Kampur *basti* is to the south and a PLA to the north of the East-West Highway that leads to the Indian border 10-12km away. There is a more much larger and established village composed of an ethnically mixed group of families, also called Kampur, five minutes down this road to the east. Unlike Kampur *basti*, in this village the economy is focused on the business the East-West Highway brings. Other than the Skype Bar in Kampur village, there was limited interaction between PLA cadres and the inhabitants of the village while cadres could be seen in Kampur *basti* daily. There were a number of reasons for this, the most obvious being proximity, but there was PLA cadres I spoke to agreed that the people in the *basti* were more friendly towards them, and are almost entirely Tharus, who the Maoists saw as a group that supported their movement. Interactions between men from the *basti* and PLA cadres from the cantonment were influential in several ways, as I illustrate throughout this thesis.

Over time, the villages and *bastis* around the cantonments and the cantonments themselves have become increasingly involved with each other. However, interactions

between the two are somewhat one-sided: for example the PLA cadres can go anywhere in the *basti*, but the villagers cannot go anywhere they like in the cantonment. The residents of Kampur *basti* seemed to have mixed feelings about having the cantonment close by, but there was a general consensus that it was not a good thing, especially amongst the younger men in the *basti* (as I shall explore subsequently in chapters 5-7). Most were ambivalent about the possibility of it closing, as they did not see it as benefiting them. However, while I was there five female cadres were living in houses in the *basti*; this was the most obvious area of interaction between the cantonment and the *basti*.

The land given to the Kamaiya in the *basti* is not very fertile and is insufficient for subsistence, so alongside the food the villagers produce from this land, and rice and lentils purchased with the little income they are able to generate from labouring, the forest is an important resource. Each family has a simple, two-room concrete building with a tin roof on its land, built by an NGO. There were conflicting and somewhat confusing reports from the villagers about which NGO did this. The buildings are poorly constructed and the villagers are not happy with them, as they are hot in summer and cold in winter. Some use them for storage or rent them out to pregnant PLA cadres; I also rented one of these rooms. All the families have built an adjacent traditional mud hut where they cook, eat, drink and socialise, as illustrated in Plate Three below. The sides of these huts are covered with mud reliefs, often depicting the forest and hunting, illustrating the importance of the forest.



**Plate 3 – A Kamaiya home in Kampur *basti***

While I was staying in the *basti* most of the houses were connected to mains electricity for the first time. This was a momentous occasion as it brought a level of official authenticity and visibility. It opened up educational and economic opportunities for many villagers, who are now able to study and work much later into the night than previously. Of the thirty-five houses in the *basti*, only two were unable to get electricity (due to limited resources). As the *basti* was the first place these Kamaiya had moved to when freed, the villagers are proud to live and own land there, and having electricity contributes to this sense of pride. Below I give a brief account of the second fieldwork site, whose inhabitants do not own the land they live on.

### **Landless Kamaiya: Dhangadhi *Basti***

The second case study location is an illegally established *basti* in the middle of Dhangadhi, Kailali's district headquarters. Nepali ethnography does not address urban areas, with the notable exception of Liechty's research on the middle classes and urban masculinities in Kathmandu (2003, 2010), on which this thesis builds. There is a specific set of issues relating to masculinity in this setting, with a range of interactions between Kamaiya and Bahun men that influence the formation of Kamaiya masculinities.

Dhangadhi, the largest city in the far west of Nepal, lies on a plain that extends towards India to the south and Nepal's Kanchanpur and Bardia districts to the east and west. It is one of only two municipal areas in Kailali and offers a range of economic opportunities not available elsewhere in the district, such as rickshaw driving. Like many of the border towns and cities on the Nepal-India border, it is very busy during the day and is hot, dusty and polluted.

The location of the city is important for a number of reasons: first, it is about 3km (ten minutes by rickshaw) from one of only eight official border crossings to India and the only crossing for some 70km. It also constitutes the southern border of the Dhangadhi metropolitan area. The border crossing is busy throughout the day and there is a strong Indian influence in many aspects of life in the city.

The group of Kamaiya men in Dhangadhi that I worked with are all rickshaw drivers who live in a *basti* in the middle of Dhangadhi comprising 54 huts with roughly equal amounts of land that their families divided up when they moved there. Most of these Kamaiya families settled there illegally because the state gave them poor land or no land at all. There is occasional contact between various leaders from the Kamaiya *basti* with various government officials, but apparently little chance of their being able to stay permanently. Consequently they suffer constant fear of violence and being forced to move. Similarly to Kampur *basti*, subsequent to this *basti* having been established a number of Dalit and Haliya families moved to the edges of the *basti* (around 5 houses). The conditions in these houses were even worse than those in the Kamaiya *basti*. Although there appeared to be relatively cordial relations between these two groups of landless settlers, the Dalit and Haliya families did not play any significant part in the social life of the Kamaiya *basti*.

As Plate 5, below, illustrates, as in many other cities in Nepal, rickshaws are one of the main form of transport within Dhangadhi and provide important economic opportunities for various groups of young men. Rickshaws are an urban form of transport and are not used in rural areas. There are various subgroups of driver: this section only relates to Kamaiya rickshaw drivers.



**Plate 4 - Rickshaws in downtown Dhangadhi**

I explore the implications of owning land for Kamaiya masculinities later in the thesis. For these men, working as rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi facilitated a transition away from depending on land for their livelihoods. This and other aspects of living in the city influence masculinities in this setting in various ways, not least through interaction with Bahun passengers. Having provided some background to both of the fieldwork sites, I present below the specific methods I used to collect the research material that I explore in chapters 5-7.

## **Research Methods**

The 'methodological pluralism' that Morris and Copestake (1993, 46) advocate is central to the methodological approach of this research. The principal methods employed during the fieldwork were life histories and participant observation.<sup>14</sup> I outline each of these methods and the interactions between them below.

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<sup>14</sup> I also carried out a number of focus groups and key informant interviews to provide background information on various issues, although I do not discuss these methods in this chapter. I found the focus groups of limited usefulness, reflecting Hopkins' (2007) discussion of this method.

As Baviskar (1995) indicates, the methodological approach taken closely reflects the researcher's ideology. I adopted a multi-methods approach to focus on men's experience and testimony and gain an understanding of Kamaiya masculinities. By focusing on the Kamaiya men's accounts and stories of their lives I privilege the subaltern perspective they represent. The three methods I outline below each make a different but complementary contribution towards this goal and involve ethnographic methods and qualitative data.

### **Life Histories**

Life histories were a principal source of the material I collected during my fieldwork and led to the collation of a number of 'thick' personal narratives. I collected about 45 life histories and many more partial accounts of Kamaiya men's lives; I also gathered life histories from PLA cadres, Bahun and Dalit men, conflict victims and women and children. Blee and Taylor (2002, 92) find this approach useful in situations of marginality such as my research setting. Life histories lend themselves to research in which narrative is the 'object and method of analysis' (Ewick and Silbey, 1995, 198). Ewick and Silbey outline some of the variables that both subvert and produce hegemonic narratives, indicating that while narratives often reflect 'existing social inequalities, disparities of power and ideological effect', they can also provide the opportunity to 'reshape the social world' (1995: 222). The key point is that while some stories are told, others are not, and there are associated interactions between power and memory.<sup>15</sup>

Quite often in both settings I was watched and at times constantly followed by various children. It was difficult to undertake interviews in a space that could be considered 'private' in either research setting, which was problematic when conversation turned to sensitive and difficult subjects such as accounts of police violence during the PW (I discuss the implications of these experiences in terms of masculinity in more detail in Chapter 4). This may have had a profound influence on the sorts of life histories I was

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<sup>15</sup> The gendered production of memories has been explored in a number of places, not least by Declich (2001), who explores the gendered nature of these processes following the conflict in Somalia.



told. It was particularly problematic early on in both sites, although with time, interest in me, and what I was doing seemed to subside.

If the boundaries between interviews and group interviews are blurred, this not only changes the sorts of material I collected but also the performances of masculinity within the interview setting (Gill et al., 2005, 6). On a number of occasions while discussing their experiences of the PW, some men seemed keen to state they had no problems with violence or the Nepal Police during the war and were not afraid of the Police at the time. This was particularly evident when other men were around, listening to and sometimes contributing to the conversation, although when I was able to conduct a more intimate interview accounts of fear and sometimes terror emerged.

I recorded<sup>16</sup> the life histories of various research participants over several interviews in semi-structured interviews,<sup>17</sup> enabling their stories to emerge in a non-predetermined way. Throughout I considered my research subjects, as what Hollway and Jefferson call the 'defended subject', which entails focusing on 'understanding the effects of defences against anxiety on people's actions and stories about them' (2000, 4).<sup>18</sup> Hollway and Jefferson outline four interlinked strategies to elicit narratives from defended subjects:

- Use open-ended, not closed questions, the more open the better
- Elicit stories
- Avoid 'why' questions
- Follow up using respondents' ordering and phrasing.

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, 34-36)

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16 Sometimes I used a dictaphone, but sometimes this did not feel appropriate, so one of my research assistant took notes.

17 Bauer indicates that such interviews are semi-structured, as the researcher influences them in a number of important ways: 'by selecting themes and topics, by ordering the questions and by wording questions in his or her language' (1996: 2)

18 This should be contextualised in a framework in which anxiety is 'inherent to the human condition'. Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 19)

Their responses on a broad range of issues such as their experience of freedom from the Kamaiya system and the Maoist PW, and of other events and life experiences, were central to this approach and their life histories were an important means of exploring such issues. While it was a useful method, it has several important limitations, not least that 'motives' can often be added after an event has taken place (Mills, 1940). As Blee and Taylor (2002) indicate, it necessitates a multi-method approach. Consequently I combined this method with others, as I describe below.

Having outlined my main approach to interviews I now briefly consider some of this method's limitations and the way I was able to use them. In the early stages of my research I focused on following the method outlined above and getting as many interviews as possible. While this produced a significant amount of material, a significant amount of which was subsequently transcribed and coded (which I consider in more detail in the section on data analysis below), I might have been more efficient in my data gathering. The material was not as rich as I would have liked, perhaps because I did not probe enough in my interviews, and certainly because many of the interviews took place in Dangaura Tharu, a language that I do not know well. I explore methodological issues with language in more detail below.

Many interviewees found my use of the Dictaphone disruptive and offputting, so at the early stages of my fieldwork I began to conduct fewer interviews and focus on participant observation and note taking. In a presentation at the fourth ESRC Research Methods Festival in Oxford in July 2010, Hollway (2000) told the audience that if there were a hypothetical fire and she could save either her interview transcripts or her research notes, she would always choose her notes. I reflected on this at length at the time and do so now as I write this thesis, and with regard to my research, my own answer to this question has changed significantly. In the first instance I turn to my many notebooks filled with notes, drawings and thoughts whenever I want to reflect on a point or on the account of a certain research subject and their life story. I collected these notes as a participant observer, and now discuss them below.

## Participant Observation

In ethnographic studies, participant observation is often used to complement interviews (Bryman, 2001). The way in which I present the material in the chapters that follow represents what Clifford has called a 'partial truth' (1986, 7) inherent in all ethnographic work and in this specific methodology. Participant observation involves the researcher spending a period of time in a specific context with a specific group of people, collecting material while attempting to fully emulate those living in the community under focus (Ellen, 1993, 22). As mentioned at the start of this chapter, I digressed slightly from this approach by having two main fieldwork sites. I tried to live like the Kamaiya men at these two sites as much as possible. On occasion this involved doing the work that they were involved in, and although this did not include driving a rickshaw as the rickshaw drivers found the idea ridiculous, I took part in various agricultural and hunting activities. Furthermore, I took part in the social life which, as I discuss below, posed various difficulties for me as a researcher. Both participating in and standing outside life at the two sites taught me a great deal about Kamaiya men's lives. However, my positionality through the various identities I brought to the research – my gender, race, class etc. – influenced both how I collected data and its interpretation (Mullings, 1999, 337), and I explore the implications of this below.

It was often difficult to take notes openly, so I relied on what Ottemberg (1990, 144-146) calls 'scratch notes'. I would take rough scratch notes during the day and would write them up with my recollections of events and conversations in the evening. My writing was viewed with suspicion both in the *basti* and in Dhangadhi, so it seemed preferable to write as little as possible in the day and write at length each evening. The sensitivity of some of the things I was told – for example negative rumours in Kampur *basti* about PLA cadres – required writing such comments up away from the circumstances in which they were mentioned. As Sharma (2007b, 74) indicates, writing notes changes the researcher's position from that of participant to observer, which in certain circumstances (for example late at the Skype Bar at night) was neither possible nor desirable. In the section on ethics later in the chapter, I describe how I protected the identity of my research subjects in my notes.

Having outlined the three main methods I used during my fieldwork, below I discuss a range of methodological issues and positions that require clarification before exploring the ethical considerations necessary in my fieldwork.

### **Data Analysis and Organisation**

Having collected a significant amount of quite varied material during the two periods of fieldwork I outline in this section how I organised and analysed this. Essentially this was an iterative process with themes emerging from the material I collected. This meant that I had no pre-determined plan or structure in relation to the themes and areas I consider in this thesis were changed a number of times through the data analysis stage. Ultimately, I used an iterative process of data analysis in order to respond to the various opportunities that presented themselves for data collection in the field. Consequently the final themes emerged from the material I collected, reflecting the strengths and weakness of this material. This was a time consuming process with many different potential themes emerging from the material I had collected, finally deciding to focus on the three main areas that form the focus of this thesis was not a straightforward process.

I initially used Nvivo in order to code and organise the transcribed interviews that I had collected, this took a considerable amount of time and was of some subsequent use. Nvivo was certainly helpful in organising and helping to develop certain themes emerging from the transcribed interviews. However, given the significant amount of data I had collected that was not easy to incorporate into Nvivo (principally my fieldnotes), this resulted in combining the outputs from Nvivo with immersing myself in my fieldnotes and organising them through an indexing system. Subsequent to organising my material in these ways, the themes I have focused on in this thesis emerged iteratively over some months through these processes. Following Hollway and Jefferson (2000) the process of data analysis incorporated the inconsistencies in the accounts and behaviours of various research subjects as opposed to a focus on finding coherence often found in narrative analysis.

As Trede and Higgs note:

The task of qualitative researchers is to describe, report and represent the realities of their research participants. This is achieved by using rich descriptions, with quotes and observation data. (2009, 18)

In the presentation of the material in this thesis I made a conscious decision not to present the spoken testimonies of the men who have been included, but to focus on description and observational material. This was after having written versions of some of the chapters including spoken testimony in the form of quotes from certain research subjects.<sup>19</sup> After considerable reflection this approach didn't reflect the strengths of the material I collected and the way I wanted to present the narratives of men who are the focus on this thesis. This decision has advantages and disadvantages, although ultimately this is a reflection of the strengths of the material I collected i.e. that the fieldnotes I took were on reflection richer and more relevant than many of the more formal interviews I was able to record and subsequently transcribe (as I have outlined above). I didn't often have transcribed quotes to complement the points made in this thesis from certain research subjects despite discussing these points with them. As I mention above using a dictaphone wasn't desirable or appropriate in many of the settings in which I undertook research. The approach I have taken also has ethical advantages as not including direct quotes from certain research subjects as the theme emerged iteratively I did not know when I was in both fieldsites which quotes I would potentially include. Not being able to contact research subjects to verify the accuracy of any given quote would have proven problematic raising ethical concerns regarding any quotations I might have included.

### **Access/Gatekeepers**

When I first worked in Nepal in 1997 I made a number of Tharu friends, with whom I have remained close. They now work for various INGOs in Nepal, and one was very helpful in terms of access and advice on places to conduct my research.

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<sup>19</sup> Please see Sandelowski (1994) and Corden and Sainsbury (2005) for more on some of the issues associated with using quotes in qualitative research.

In Dhangadhi I initially gained access to the group of rickshaw drivers through the Rickshaw Drivers' Union. This was straightforward, and the setting in which these men lived was open and easy to access. However, access to a single rickshaw driver for an extended period outside on the streets, where they were most often found, was not easy. For example, it was difficult to make plans to meet Upendra, as he did not know when he would finish work. My interviews with the rickshaw drivers were often fleeting, and those I interviewed seemed distracted and were constantly looking out for their next fare;<sup>20</sup> they live marginal lives and are always keen to add to their small and inconsistent income. Holding interviews out in the open, on busy streets with many people, noise and distractions was also difficult. Consequently I spent what time I could with them in the garage from which they rented their rickshaws, and in their homes in the *basti* in Dhangadhi in which they lived.

Gaining access to Kampur *basti* was more complicated. The friend mentioned above introduced me to a Kamaiya leader who worked for an NGO, Kamaiya Pratha Unmulan Samaj (Kamaiya System Eradication Society (KPUS)), and had close links with Kampur *basti*. This facilitated my meeting villagers from Kampur in Dhangadhi who were participating in various protests organised by KPUS and other Kamaiya organisations.

### **Language**

I had been visiting Nepal on and off for over ten years prior to starting my fieldwork in December 2008, and my grasp of Nepali allowed relatively good conversation. I complemented this with two months of intensive language training in Kathmandu in early 2009, which enabled me to carry out a number of interviews on my own in Nepali. However, given the rich linguistic diversity in Nepal (according to the 2001 Census, there are 92 official languages in Nepal), this was not sufficient. I eventually recorded interviews in four languages (Nepali, Dangaura Tharu, Hindu, Dotiyali), which involved a range of issues relating to translation and interpretation.

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<sup>20</sup> I undertook multiple interviews with 14 rickshaw drivers but had many additional conversations with many more drivers than this.

Although understanding Nepali was useful, on reflection a deeper understanding of Dangaura Tharu would have been even more so, given that this research was situated in two Kamaiya communities. Most Kamaiya speak Nepali and Dangaura Tharu, and Dangaura Tharu is the mother tongue of all the Kamaiya I spent time with and the main language spoken at home.

I employed two research assistants, partly due to these language issues. I also worked with them to diminish the problems of cross-cultural research, as both were familiar with Kailali district and the Kamaiya. In terms of being involved in ethnographic research one was a relatively inexperienced 19-year-old, female Bahun student from Dhangadhi, and the other, a very experienced 29-year-old Tharu man, also from Dhangadhi. Both worked well in different situations and had different strengths, so I worked with them interchangeably depending on my focus.

While I considered my own positionality carefully (see below), it is also important to consider how my research assistants might have affected my conversations. Certainly working with a Bahun woman in Kampur *basti* was initially problematic: she would neither eat nor drink with the villagers nor stay in the *basti*. This worked in my favour, though, as her attitude towards the *basti* highlighted how happy I was in the *basti* and that I liked Kamaiya food and drink very much, helping to consolidate my position as someone who was not only interested in the villagers' lives but also liked being in the *basti*. Being introduced to the *basti* by my Tharu friends also contributed to my acceptance there.

In this thesis I largely use the Kamaiya's terms for relationships and situations. This provides an insight into my male Kamaiya participants' agency in negotiating and adapting the discourses that relate to them. For example, the rickshaw drivers called themselves rickshaw drivers, although more widely they are known as rickshaw pullers, denoting a slightly different configuration of agency. Although I do not solely focus on subaltern Kamaiya men, throughout this thesis I privilege how such men talk about themselves over other perspectives. Scott (1990: 5) calls this the 'hidden transcript' of subordinate social actors. Such subordinate discourses take place in the

context of more dominant 'public transcripts' (1990: 5), which in the example above correspond with these men being called rickshaw pullers.

### **Positionality**

Having outlined some of the implications for my positionality of working with research assistants, I now consider my own place in multiple discourses, many of which relate to masculinity, and its influence on the types of relationships I created and the material I was able to collect. I try to avoid the self-centred approach evident in much ethnographic research (a point made by Ahearn (2001, 27)), but will mention here that in both fieldwork sites I was generally referred to as *Saathi* (friend) or more often *Dhai* (older brother), even by people older than me.

Reflexivity was central to all stages of my research in Nepal. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) outline how reflexivity can make an important positive contribution to qualitative research, especially in relation to the misreading of narratives (Ibid. 67). As Reinharz (1997, 5) indicates, researchers have multiple identities apart from those associated with being a researcher; mine include being white, Welsh, heterosexual, male and, at the time, unmarried. I had not considered the implications of having a long-term girlfriend living with me in the field before going to the two fieldwork sites. That I was in a long-term relationship and unmarried caused some consternation, as it was rare at both sites. My girlfriend and I lived in a large Bahun house in Dhangadhi towards the north of the city, which may have influenced how the rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi, who generally had a negative view of Bahuns, perceived me. Furthermore, my girlfriend worked for the Nepali Red Cross while I was engaged with my fieldwork, consolidating the associations that people made between me and the development process and local manifestations of modernity. I was told on numerous occasions that the only other white person who had ever been to Kampur *basti* was a male GTZ worker who had stopped in his four-wheel-drive van, kept the van running while taking some photos and then left. It was often initially assumed that because I was white, I was a development worker or involved with the UN in post-conflict work. This led a number of people to assume that I could help them get compensation for various losses during the PW. Having to constantly deal with and disappoint these expectations was sometimes exhausting.



The multiple positions that I occupied as a researcher during my fieldwork period had a profound impact on both the information I collected and how I have interpreted and understood it. My position constituted both an advantage and a disadvantage at various times, although working with two research assistants provided the opportunity to approach situations from different perspectives. West (2003) found that being positioned as an 'outsider' brought certain benefits in his life-history research on men who had been victims of torture in Mozambique's war for independence. It allowed some of his research subjects to discuss issues that they found it difficult to speak about with members of their community. My positionality during my fieldwork was similar, and had similar benefits.

I tried to behave like the men of my age at both fieldwork sites as far as possible. However, trying to keep up with the men in both fieldwork sites in various ways was problematic and I was unable to do it in many respects, particularly in relation to drinking, which was an important daily occurrence at both sites (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, I did not go drinking every night, as the men from the village often got drunk and went back to their huts where they were aggressive and sometimes violent to their wives. I did not want to be a part of this, and felt very uncomfortable about being associated with it. The man in the house where I stayed did not treat his wife badly in my presence, but there were rumours about other men known to be violent towards their wives. This seemed to be most likely after a night at the Skype Bar and many village women did not approve of their husbands going there, especially as it meant they would be spending a large proportion of the household's low income. Not going to the Skype bar on a consistent basis allowed me to form relationships with other people in the *basti*, not least the women and older men, who disapproved of the bar and what went on there.

In Chapter 5 I discuss various forms of consumption at both sites, as well as my own, and how the way I presented myself in terms of clothing and possessions influenced my relationship with some of the Kamaiya men. I generally wore clothes similar to theirs and made a conscious effort not to display conspicuous signs of consumption. For example, very few people had a mobile phone in Kampur *basti*, although some

young men had expensive ones; I had one of the cheapest ones from the market. This had a number of advantages, and helped to challenge the assumption that I was rich because I am white. Having outlined some of the implications of my position for my research I now consider my political positionality, which closely complements this section.

## **Politics**

Political position is of great importance in the aftermath of the ten-year-long PW in Nepal. I think it is important to be more explicit about politics than is often the case in research, as my research occurred at a time when politics and political positioning seem to be important in every social situation in Nepal. Sharma (2007b) reports that at times during his research, his political positioning caused difficulties. In my case, I had greater sympathy for the Maoists and their ideology than for the then Nepal state.<sup>21</sup>

My knowledge of some left-wing literature and ideology (including Nepalese left-wing literature) and of the type of people who made Maoist leaders, having met some in London previously, made it relatively easy to get approval through the Maoist gatekeepers at both fieldwork sites. This is important: the Maoists, in various manifestations (YCL, PLA or Party), were the prevailing political force at both sites and in some ways represent an important reference point for Kamaiya masculinities (see Chapters 5-7). Other political parties, perhaps with the exception of the Tharuhat, were far less influential and relevant to my research. For example, all the Constituent Assembly (CA) members representing Kailali were Maoist. Despite the predominance of Maoists in Kailali, I had to take care in navigating these arenas of patronage and political affiliation when interacting with other parties. The YCL constantly tried to get me to join, but I resisted in order to be able to meet with people from other parties. Members of most of the other political parties, and upper-caste friends and associates such as the Bahun family with whom I lived when staying in Dhangadhi, found my interest in both the Maoists and the Kamaiya strange. While we were in Dhangadhi,

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21 This is largely as a consequence of my political persuasion but also because a range of organisations such as Amnesty International and INSEC have indicated that the state committed significantly more human rights abuses than the Maoists during the PW.

my girlfriend and I ate dhal-bhat<sup>22</sup> every night at one of the few Tharu-owned restaurants, which our Bahun hosts appeared to find strange and disagreeable.

Politics seems to be the elephant in the room in many conversations with a broad range researcher working in and on Nepal. Sharma gets closest to being explicit about this:

By default, the system that the Maoists were fighting against was largely favourable to me. I agree that it was impossible to be neutral, but equally I found that it was difficult to take sides. (Sharma, 2007b, 68)

I was living with the Kamaiya, who in some ways benefited from the Maoists' efforts to end caste and other forms of discrimination. Trying to keep out of such debates in a post-conflict context in which identities are taking multiple and new forms was both problematic and unrealistic. My political position and affiliations influenced a great deal of discourse and practice. To be interested in a subaltern, marginal group such as the Kamaiya was equated with being a Maoist (particularly by the upper castes), as only the Maoists consistently and explicitly focus on such groups. Irrespective of whether this association was useful or not to how I was perceived, I was unable to do a great deal about it. Ultimately my overall focus on the on poverty and the difficulties of the Kamaiya following freedom, did not leave me much space to construct an alternative political position. Sara Shneiderman (2004) explores very similar consequences of the focus of her own research during the PW.

Having located myself politically in relation to my fieldwork, I conclude this section on methodology with some of the problems of the methods and positions outlined so far in this chapter.

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<sup>22</sup> Dhal-bhat means rice and lentils this is the staple diet in Nepal.

## Problems/Limitations

Several problems emerged from the research methodology and location. I spent about 11 months in and around the two fieldwork sites, but more time would have been beneficial. Going back to the fieldwork sites for a second time was important, as it enabled me to deepen my understanding of certain factors whose importance had emerged with my analysis of the material from the first period of research.

Subsequently, I have been able to stay in touch with both fieldsites through various Tharu friends, this has proved invaluable during the writing up process enabling me to clarify certain accounts of events I have discussed in this thesis.

I have already touched on language and access issues. While Nepali was largely not a problem, Tharu certainly was, and on reflection I wish I had been able to understand and speak Dangaura Tharu better. While I had some meaningful relationships with many Kamaiya men and women at both fieldwork sites, if I had spoken Dangaura Tharu these relationships would have been closer and I would have gained more from my fieldwork.

Returning to rumours, Nordstrom and Robben (1995) call for analysis of rumours to be central to the analysis of conflict, as rumours can provide important insights into the experience and perception of events during times of conflict. In Kampur *basti* I heard many rumours about both the PLA and myself and my research assistants from various sources, but mainly from the woman in whose house I lived. As the *basti* was so close to the cantonment there were about five female PLA cadres living in the *basti* who had given or were about to give birth (pregnant women were not allowed to stay in the cantonments and so moved to villages such as Kampur *basti*). These five PLA cadres appeared to take an instant dislike to me and this made things difficult for me at times. For example, there were rumours that I was sleeping with my research assistant and spying on the PLA cantonment. While this was not generally a problem, such rumours and the women's dislike made it difficult to spend time in the houses in which they lived or with Kamaiya in the *basti* with strong affiliations with the PLA. Initially when it became clear that these women had a problem with my presence in the *basti* I was concerned, but over time I realised that it was an interesting response to my being

there, and given my good relationship with the cantonment's PLA commanders, ultimately it did not influence my fieldwork significantly.

Many researchers talk of the isolation of fieldwork as a problem. While it was isolating, the support of my then girlfriend was invaluable during my fieldwork, despite the fact that she was not often with me at the fieldwork sites. My own mental health was occasionally an issue, however. While planning my research I was very conscious of issues of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, as my research would include people who had been directly involved in violence during the PW as PLA cadres or conflict victims. However, I had not considered the impact of this on me sufficiently. More broadly, I think more emphasis and care should be given to the mental health implications of fieldwork for researchers, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Besides these problems and limitations of my fieldwork, the main problem I faced was encountering the difficulties in the lives of many Kamaiya, particularly in Kampur *basti*. These were people living marginal lives with very limited resources and little support from either the state or NGOs. There were many instances of people dying or getting ill from preventable problems. For example, malaria was a problem in the *basti*, but none of the villagers could afford a mosquito net. Perhaps most distressing was seeing the undoubted educational potential of many of the Kamaiya children in Kampur *basti* unfulfilled (I discuss education in Chapter 6). For many Kamaiya children it was unthinkable that they would go to school, for multiple reasons.

I have explored the three main methods used during my fieldwork and various methodological issues related to them in this chapter. I have considered my positionality and how this influenced the sorts of material I was able to collect, and discussed the problems and limitations associated with my methodological approach to the fieldwork. I now focus on the ethical considerations of this research.

## **Ethics**

Before starting my fieldwork, I made a submission to the UEA Ethics Committee that outlined various ethical concerns and the how I viewed and would deal with the risks

associated with my fieldwork. This process was useful, and I followed what I had originally set out to do in terms of ethics and risk minimisation. At a later stage I had to resubmit this document in order to accommodate the interviewing of a number of former PLA child combatants. I was aware of the ethical dimensions of my fieldwork, and conscious of ethical concerns as my research evolved in the field.

Particular considerations that arose during my fieldwork related to people involved with or affected by the PW in some way – which in fact applies to everyone on both fieldwork sites. Any of the research subjects might have PTSD as a consequence of their experiences of the PW or the Kamaiya system. Richters (2008) calls for sensitivity to PTSD symptoms and in research with people who have been involved in conflict, and Bhui and Warfa (2007) call for a focus on mental health problems during conflict itself. The latter's analysis largely focuses on the high level of substance misuse during the Somali conflict. Partially as a consequence of reflecting on this research, I was concerned about PTSD and how recalling very difficult and traumatic events might be problematic for my research participants. I spoke with a number of cross-cultural psychologists in Kathmandu who worked for the INGO Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) and who were experienced in this area. They recommended exercising great sensitivity to personal experiences of loss, post-traumatic effects and emotional issues released through the research. I was very conscious and sensitive about this, although my research assistants seemed less concerned. I would have been able to provide counselling through TPO to any of my research subjects if they had developed problems as a consequence of recalling something for me. Thankfully this was not necessary.

When I first entered both fieldwork sites, *basti* meetings were called where I was introduced and I explained what I was doing in the *basti* and how villagers might be involved in my research. Potential research subjects were asked if they would be a part of my project. Informed consent was elicited from each subject, normally in the form of a short discussion prior to starting an interview during which I outlined my motives and how I would use the material (that I was writing a book about the Kamaiya seemed to be most easily understood). I stressed that any information I was given

would be strictly confidential, and that I did not work for any NGO or government agency.

I have changed the names of all the participants in this thesis to protect their anonymity. I have also changed the names of the fieldwork sites, as I have included sensitive information that requires protecting the identity of all of the research subjects. However, I have kept the caste and class identities and positions the same. While taking notes I used a system that protected the identity of my research subjects in case my fieldnotes were stolen. When I returned to Dhangadhi I stored the recorded interviews securely on a password-protected hard drive. Furthermore, if I was told something particularly sensitive, such as the rumours about PLA cadres that circulated in Kampur *basti*, I wrote these up only when back in Dhangadhi and away from both sites.

To conclude this chapter I have outlined the ways I used life history interviews combined with participant observation in order to generate the material that I subsequently analyse. I have also given an account of the ways in which the data that I collected was organised and subsequently analysed. Furthermore, I have considered various methodological issues relating to the ways I conducted my fieldwork as well as considering the ethical considerations aspects of this research. In the next chapter I turn to give an account of the literature and outline a history of the Kamaiya system.

## **Chapter 4 – A history of the Kamaiya system and Kamaiya masculinities**

This chapter situates this thesis in relation to the literature on the Kamaiya system as well as the regional picture relating to bonded labour. I explore the nature of bonded labour in South Asia and India, before considering in more detail the Kamaiya system and the movement towards freedom and the end of the system. Throughout I outline the contribution that considering masculinities in these contexts can make to this literature. Before engaging with the literature on bonded labour in India and then moving onto consider the Kamaiya system in more detail, I outline the situation in South Asia.

## **South Asia**

Slavery takes many forms in the contemporary world (Bales, 2004, 2007). Estimates of the number of contemporary slaves worldwide range from 12 (ILO) to 27 million (2004, 9). Anti-Slavery International estimates that 20 million people are working as bonded labourers (Upadhyaya, 2004, 118). Despite the variability of these figures, there is little dispute that there is both diversity in the types of slavery throughout the world and that there are more slaves in South Asia than in any other region. In South Asia slavery in its many forms is a significant and persistent factor, with 15 to 20 million bonded labourers in the region (Bales, 2004). There have been, and still are, many forms of slavery both in and between the various countries across the region, among which bonded labour takes specific local forms according to locally-specific interconnections between ethnicity, class, caste and, critically, gender structures. Very little of the existing literature considers masculinity in the social relations integral to situations of both bondedness and post-bondedness, providing a clear basis for considering gender in this context.

Colonial administration across the region influenced bonded labour in various ways (Prakash, 1990). Although most of modern Nepal was not formally under colonial control as India was, the area that is now Kailali district was under British rule until it was returned to the Nepali State by the British East India Company in 1816. Alongside specific regional considerations there are limitations in the literature on bonded labour in South Asia that are broader than the issues relating to the absence of gender from much of this literature. For example, like much of the regional literature across a broad range of disciplines, the South Asian literature on bonded labour is dominated India-related research. The initial part of this chapter reflects on these limitations by focusing principally on bonded labour in India. I discuss Jan Breman's research on bonded labour below; before discussing his work, I outline some background to bonded labour in India.



## **Bonded Labour in India**<sup>23</sup>

There is a broad range of estimates of the number of bonded labourers in India, from 2.5 (Anti-Slavery International, 2005) to 40 million (Human Rights Watch, 1999). The majority of research on bonded labour in India relates to agrarian modes of production and therefore rural areas. Agricultural labourers in India and various systems of work and exploitation have been the focus of increasing amounts of scholarly analysis over recent years. One of the most prominent debates in the literature on bonded labour relates to whether it historically took certain forms which have subsided over time (Breman, 1974) or is a manifestation of the increasing influence of capitalism in rural India, in a context where colonial power relations remain important (Brass, 1990, Prakash, 1990).<sup>24</sup> One thing is clear: bonded labour remains an issue in contemporary India and is pervasive irrespective of theoretical perspectives on bondedness, which predominantly present class-based analyses of bonded labour.

While there are many writers on bonded labour in India (for example, see Brass, 1994, 1999, 1997, 1997, Lerche, 2009, Prakash, 1990, Rao, 1999, Ramachandran, 1990), I focus here on Jan Breman. The analysis below focuses on social relations in systems of bonded labour as considered by Breman. This is an area of particular importance for this chapter and, more broadly, for this thesis. This not only provides a context for the social relations associated with bonded and post-bonded labour but also brings the second part of this chapter, focusing on the Kamaiya system, into this wider literature.

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23 The literature on India is important to this thesis for a number of reasons. For example, the Tharu are also found in parts of India, principally Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. If bonded labour is so prevalent in India and there are Tharu in India, have the same forms of bonded labour emerged within the Tharu community in India and Nepal? Are there any differences that might impact on how masculinities are composed in these situations? There does not appear to be any literature that would enable exploration of these questions.

24 While the relationship between capitalism and bonded labour is discussed here principally in response to Breman, there are some interesting alternative perspectives: J. Mohan Rao suggests that mature capitalism and unfree labour are incompatible, as free labour replaces unfree labour in mature capitalism (1999); Jens Lerche focuses on how unfree labour is a manifestation of uneven capitalist development (2009); and Karen Kapadia (2002) indicates that bonded labour is compatible with the forms of capitalist production found in Indian agriculture, with bonded labour evident in many parts of India.

I now turn to Jan Breman and his perspective on bonded labour over the 40 or more years that he has been writing on such issues.

### **Jan Breman**

Berman (1974, 1985, 1990, 1993, 1996, 2009) is perhaps the foremost writer on bonded labour in India, and specifically South Gujarat. For over 40 years he has been making a significant contribution to this and the wider literature on agrarian change in India. His work on the *Halipratha* system of bonded labour (1974, 1985), which has some similarities with the Kamaiya system, is particularly relevant to this thesis. There were important caste and ethnic dimensions in the *Halipratha* system, with most of its bonded labourers coming from the *Dubla* tribal group and most of its landowners, Bahun.

According to Breman, the principal reason behind systems of bonded labour such as the *Halipratha* was landowners' need for cheap labour. As in the Kamaiya system, the *Hali* (bonded labourer) bonded his entire family in a situation of undefined working hours, having to work as and when the landowner demanded. In return, the landowner had to provide food, basic shelter etc. Breman explores how various processes of patronage and exploitation in these relationships made the *Halipratha* system one of unfree labour mediated by these two intertwining processes, making it a relationship based on mutual interests:

The initiative to begin the relationship was taken by both parties and it was in the interest of both to maintain it. (Breman, 1974, 45)

Breman states that this was not a forced but a voluntary system of labour. Due to the apparent insecurity and seasonal nature of labour demand there were certain attractions for the *Halis* to entering servitude. Breman sees this as a system of exploitation facilitated by patronage, which is contested by other writers on bonded labour such as Brass (1999). The focus on patronage raises questions that Breman does not answer. What did this patronage mean for the men involved, particularly for *Hali* men? If these processes of patronage and exploitation were mediated by men in this context, how was this formative of *Hali* (and landowner) masculinities? I discuss some

responses to these questions as I explore how Breman outlines the social relations of the *Halipratha* system, as they are important to this thesis.

Breman's perspective on the social relations of the *Halipratha* system provide a reference point against which I consider the social relations of the Kamaiya system later in this chapter. My focus in this section is Breman's (1985, 120) dynamics of the patron/client relationship and the implications of the *Hali's* marginality. For example, *Hali* often lived outside villages on marginal land, were considered 'socially redundant' and were expected to: 'demonstrate this inferiority by living an inconspicuous and withdrawn existence' (1985, 120). Despite many changes, including independence from the British, Breman reports that the upper castes consistently viewed this group in this way (1985, 121). The *Hali* remained landless and isolated and were only defined in relation to their agricultural output as bonded labourers. In most instances landlord and labourer were bound for life and successive generations (ibid. 129). While this was a situation of unfree labour, Breman stresses aspects of patronage, with the landlord guaranteeing a subsistence livelihood and protection while the labourer was loyal and submissive and asked for loans as and when required (ibid 128). Breman insightfully outlines the complexity of the relationship:

Reciprocity existed only as an ideal. The high-handedness permitted to the patron in his treatment of landless clients underlined the inequality of the parties. This institution was based on coercion and exploitation. (1985, 129)

So the *Hali* were marginal in many ways but received some support from their landlords. Breman does not investigate how this might have influenced *Hali* men's gender identity. What, then, does patronage mean to a male client? How does it influence masculinities in this context? These are questions that Breman does not ask, but the answers would add further insight into how the *Halipratha* system functioned and shaped the system's social relations. More broadly Breman seems to equate gender with talking about women, whose experience of the *Halipratha* system is of course of vital importance. However, talking of 'gender' in such terms is not about gender per se but about women's position in and experiences of the system.

Breman focuses on how the *Halipratha* patron-client system functioned as a mutually beneficial, voluntary engagement. He attempts to move the analysis away from bonded labour's simply relying on relationships of exploitation, to consider the formative aspects of patronage. In focusing so strongly on the mutual consent, he fails to explore how the *Hali* contested and challenged their position. This raises many questions about the nature of voluntary or bonded labour and the nature of freedom (which I discuss further, below). As Scott states, the overt performance of loyalty in such situations is compatible with various subtle and subversive forms of resistance (1985). In trying to balance how this system relied on both patronage and exploitation, Breman does not always go into enough depth regarding how the *Hali* resisted their position.

Over time, the *Halipratha* system gradually began to change as the patron-client relationship fragmented, coinciding with a transition away from the 'classical' bonded labour relations outlined above (Breman, 1974, 2007). Breman notes some significant transformations in the system which led to its gradual collapse for two primary reasons. Firstly, less labour-intensive forms of agricultural production became more common and the demand for labour subsided; and secondly, an increase in opportunities outside agriculture, and often outside villages, also contributed to the erosion of links between bonded labourer and landlord (Breman, 1974, 75-76). Breman discusses how the fragmented patron/client relations made way for more depersonalised, casual and temporary paid labour relations more in harmony with capitalist modes of production. These changes are also associated with the dissolution of the aspects of patronage discussed above and the emergence of the security of regular employment and guaranteed subsistence. From these insights and in later work, Breman develops the notion of *neo-bondage*, which he sees as compatible with capitalist modes of production (1993, 1996, 2010). He does not consider the meaning of this transition in terms of gendered identities, missing the opportunity to enrich his research on bondedness and post-bondedness. If *Hali* men (and women) were defined by their marginal and lowly positions in a system of bonded labour, what happened to their masculine (and other) identities when this system was in decline or ceased to exist? Such a question would open up the analysis to include the ways and extent to which the *Halipratha* system shaped *Hali* masculinities.

This section on Breman has discussed his central proposition of the patron/client relationship at the core of his analysis of the *Halipratha* bonded labour system, and the subsequent changes into forms of neo-bondage that have been associated with capitalism's increasing influence in rural India. This consideration of Breman's work on bonded labour provides an important context in which I situate many of the debates threaded through this thesis. However, Breman's work does not address the implications of the system for gender relations and masculinities that shape it, which are particularly relevant to this study, nor does he consider how masculinities are implicated in the relationships he discusses. This asks the question, what does a perspective that focuses on masculinities contribute to Breman's now mainstream analysis of bonded labour?

This thesis answers this question with an exploration of the Kamaiya system and its aftermath that explicitly focuses on masculinity. I argue that examining masculinity can enrich understanding of freedom following situations of bondedness and contribute to understanding of the situations and relationships involved. Explicitly considering masculinity creates a space in which certain questions can be asked. Examining what happens to masculinity following freedom from a system of bonded labour provides a new perspective, not only on how Breman sees bonded labour but also on how the Kamaiya system specifically has been seen to date.

Breman's work on bonded labour provides a context in which this thesis is located; I now turn to consider the Kamaiya system in more detail outlining a history of this system. Before considering this, I situate the Kamaiya as a sub-group within the wider Tharu ethnic group before exploring the existing literature on the Kamaiya system.

### **The Tharu**

Before discussing the Kamaiya, I give a brief account here of the broader ethnic group from which they emanate, the Tharu. The Tharu are a *Janajati* (indigenous) group of Nepal's Terai who live mainly in the west and far west of Nepal and parts of northern India, principally Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The Tharu live all across the Terai but make up a higher proportion of the population in the west Terai across five districts. They

are an extremely diverse group (Guneratne, 2002) and are considered indigenous to the Terai. According to the 2001 census they are the fourth largest caste/ethnic group in Nepal with 1,533,879 Tharu or 6.6% of the Nepali population (CBS, 2001, Table 1.7). In one district, Bardia, they constitute over 50% of the population, and in Kailali, 43.7% (CBS, 2003b, 127-128).

There is a good body of anthropological literature on the Tharu which provides an important context in which to situate this research (cf. Meyer et al., 1998, Guneratne, 2002, Guneratne, 1999b, Guneratne, 1999a, Hasan, 1993, Hu, 1957, Krauskopff, 2002, Krauskopff, 1995, Krauskopff and Meyer, 2000, Krauskopff, 1989, Leal, 1973, Maiti, 2004, Maslak, 2003, McDonough, 2000, McDonough, 1984, Meyer, 2003, Müller-Böker, 1999, Ødegaard, 1997, Rajaure, 1982, Shrestha et al., 2000, Skar, 1999, Srivastava, 1958, Verma, 2010). However, little of this work is explicitly concerned with constructions of Tharu masculinities, and therefore this thesis both complements the existing literature and adds a new perspective.

There are many sub-castes and subdivisions within the wider Tharu group, with diverse languages and cultural practices. Despite this diversity there is an effort by the Tharu elite to create a pan-Tharu identity which has met with limited success (cf. Guneratne, 2002, Krauskopff, 2002, Maycock, 2011). In this context of diversity, this research focuses on the Dangaura Tharu sub-group.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, it is located in two Kamaiya communities of a further sub-group of the Tharu which includes the Dangaura sub-group, to which all the Kamaiya discussed in this thesis belong. As with any system, there was a diversity of experiences and ways of being located in it (Seddon and Subedi, 2000, 7), and therefore each Tharu sub-group had slightly different variation of the Kamaiya system (Rankin, 1999, 28). I briefly discuss the Kamaiya below before moving onto Chapter Five, the first of the chapters in which I present my research material.

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25 The sub-grouping corresponds to specific languages and cultural practices, cf. Guneratne, 1999a, 1999b, 2002. Hu, 1957, McDonough, 1984, 2000, Meyer, Meyer, Rai, 1998, Rajaure, 1982.

## The Kamaiya

In 2004, Bales estimated that 2.5 million people were living in slavery in Nepal (ibid. 98), although he is not specific about the number of Kamaiya. Kamaiya is a form of bonded labour or slavery in Nepal from which the Kamaiya people take their name. Although there appear to be no recent or accurate data on the size of the population in Nepal, estimations of the number of Kamaiya include 83,375 (State of Nepal, 1999, cited in Karki 2001:76); 100,000 (Sharma, 1999); and 116,309 (Backward Society Education (BASE, 1995: 7), a leading Tharu NGO that worked to eradicate the Kamaiya system and now supports freed Kamaiyas).<sup>26</sup>

The Kamaiya are principally found in five districts in mid- and far-western Nepal: Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke, Bardiya, and Dang. Some datasets give Kailali as the district with the greatest number of Kamaiya, and others, Bardia. In a 1995 report BASE stated that there were 44,944 Kamaiya in Kailali (1995), although once more, there is a lack of reliable data.<sup>27</sup>

The Kamaiya are conventionally known as formerly bonded agricultural labourers from the Tharu ethnic community.<sup>28</sup> This is only partly accurate: there are many connotations of the term Kamaiya and these have changed historically as a consequence of changing realities and research practices. Historically the term has positive connotations of a hardworking people (Chhetri, 2005, 32), as well as negative connotations, which are currently more pervasive and relate to the system of slavery. Arjun Karki states that the Kamaiya are:

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26 See Cox, T. 1994. Backward Society Education (BASE). The Development of a Grassroots Movement. Unpublished. For an exploration of the earlier stages of BASE and Krauskopff, G. 2002. An 'Indigenous Minority' in a Border Area: Tharu Ethnic Associations, NGOs, and the Nepalese State. *In: Gellner, D. N. (ed.) Resistance and the state : Nepalese experiences*. Rev. ed. Oxford: Berghahn Books. for its later developments.

27 The sizes of the Tharu and Kamaiya communities were disputed in several interviews due to an assumed lack of understanding of these communities by state officials.

28 Seddon and Sebedi state that there is no legal definition of the term Kamaiya in Nepal (2000).

...rural labourers forced to work by an existing socio-economic and political relationship in demeaning conditions, and used as virtually unpaid labour for the cultivation of land and other domestic activities. (Karki, 2001, 70)

While Bales (2007, 97) sees the Kamaiya as 'medieval serfs', such a perspective focusing on exploitation is complemented by the narratives of a broad range of Kamaiya men and women that I met during my fieldwork. Tharu leaders with whom I spoke invoked the Kamaiya as an illustration of the exploitation of the Tharu, particularly at the hands of Bahun landlords. As indicated above, the Tharu have been the focus of a significant amount of anthropological research, although I have yet to find any specific work on the Kailali Kamaiya. There appears to be relatively little anthropological research focusing on the Kamaiya (with the notable exceptions of (Giri, 2004, 2009, 2010b, Guneratne, 2002, Rankin, 1999)), with most literature being a number of NGO reports that I discuss in the next part of this chapter focusing on the Kamaiya system.

## **The Kamaiya System**

In this section I explore the relevant literature on the Kamaiya system and describe the system prior to 2000 and freedom to provide a context in which the Kamaiya's transition to freedom can be situated. After outlining the nature of the system I discuss the movement towards and transition to freedom, bringing this chapter to an end and leading to the first chapter exploring the consequences of freedom as they relate to bodies.

While there are many systems of bonded labour in Nepal,<sup>29</sup> a number of factors made the Kamaiya system different from many of the other forms:

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29 Other forms of bonded labour and slavery in Nepal include *Badi*, *Deuki*, *Haliya Kamhari*, *Kumari*, *Jhuma*, and *Chhaupadi*.



The landlord retains the right to sell his Kamaiya to another landlord. This makes the Kamaiya relationship in effect, a form of slavery. (Seddon and Subedi, 2000, 10)<sup>30</sup>

This was not always the case in other forms of bonded labour, where labourers had more agency to change where they worked and for whom. Given the oral history of the Tharu,<sup>31</sup> the historical perspective on the Kamaiya system is fluid. During my fieldwork some Kamaiya, usually the older ones, had difficulty recalling aspects of the system for me. Some would simply not discuss it, while others, usually younger men, were more comfortable doing so. Generational differences seemed influential in these discussions. The Kamaiya system was a system of bonded labour, in agricultural areas mediated by debt. During my fieldwork periods in 2009 and 2010 the Kamaiya were widely considered formerly bonded agricultural labourers from the Tharu ethnic community.

In my discussions with Kamaiya people about the Kamaiya system it was difficult to get a clear historical perspective. In the literature a number of distinctions are made in relation to the historical development of the system. In part this relates to the system as it was 'traditionally' manifested; i.e. how it developed in a diverse Tharu community and latterly evolved into a system of slavery due to various influences. I explore this and other perspectives on the Kamaiya system below.

### **The Kamaiya system prior to the 1950s**

Karki (2001, 65) indicates that the Kamaiya system emerged from a related system of bonded labour during the Lichhabi dynasty (100-880 AD), and evolved and was influenced by the dynasties and eras of Nepal's history. A key date in the history of the Terai and the Tharu community is the 1950s, the decade in which malaria was largely eradicated, before which the forest was relatively untouched and the Tharu were the sole inhabitants of the Terai (Cheria, 2005, 16). During this period, it appears that

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30 For more on the differences between Kamaiya and other systems of permanent wage labour please see GEFONT (2001).

31 For more on Tharu oral tradition please see Muller-Böker (1999a).

the Kamaiya system operated primarily between Tharus on small farms, with relatively few non-Tharu landlords. Today there is still a significant number of Tharu landowners throughout the area in which the Kamaiya system existed, many of whom had Kamaiya working (bonded or not) on their land. Traditionally such relationships between rich and poor Tharu were considered a form of *patron-client* relationship without high levels of abuse assumed of a system of bonded labour (Upadhyaya, 2004, 125). Rankin (1999) indicates that in the more 'traditional' Kamaiya system (the assumption being that this was when it operated in the Tharu community only) there was significant flexibility in the roles and positions in the system. Debt (*Sauki*) was central and functioned as a means of maintaining the system, being passed on generationally and essentially attaching a cash value to each Kamaiya (Robertson and Mishra, 1997, 18). There was flexibility in relation to the debt, however, as in some instances it was possible for Kamaiya to pay it off and to become subsistence farmers (Rankin, 1999, 32). Arjun Guneratne complements this position:

...it is important to note that both the (Tharu) Kamaiya and his (Tharu) patron are members of one ritual and social world, and the line between them is finely drawn. (Guneratne, 2002, 96)

This perspective assumes that it was (and is) relatively better for Kamaiya to work for a Tharu landlord than for a *Pahari*,<sup>32</sup> despite being bonded in both cases, as they worked longer hours for Pahari than for Tharu landlords (Rankin 1999, Guneratne 2002). The implication is that ethnic identity is more important than class identity in shaping the experience of exploitation in the Kamaiya system. This was not entirely reflected in the narratives of the Kamaiya with whom I spent time, although there are formative generational nuances in these narratives.

### **The Pahari 'influx'**

Rankin suggests that the Nepali State's taxation and resettlement policies that created a new Pahari landlord class which was responsible for the transformation of the Kamaiya system into one of oppression (1999, 28). This is complemented by a BASE report, which states that the influx of Paharis following the eradication of malaria

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<sup>32</sup> *Pahari* means a Bahun or Chettri (i.e. upper caste) migrant from the hills.

marginalised the Tharus already living in the Terai (1995, 4). As the Tharus had no records of the land they were living on, the Paharis were able to register land in their name with a state that was responsive and understood their needs. There was little or no Tharu representation in central government at this time, limiting their ability to resist this change.<sup>33</sup> McDonough outlines the extent of these changes below:

Whereas in 1912 revenue settlement most of the landlords were Tharus, by the late 1960s... the great majority of landlords were Pahari. In Dang by this date... around 80% of the land cultivated by Tharu tenants belonged to Paharis. (1997, 281)<sup>34</sup>

The mass movement of Paharis brought changes in the Terai that affected the Kamaiya system. Following the eradication of malaria, the cultivated area of the Terai increased significantly as did the average size of farms, putting greater pressure on Kamaiya to do an increasing amount of agricultural work. Due to these changes and the influx of Paharis, who had limited cultural associations with the Kamaiya, the system became more exploitative in several ways (*cf.* Karki 2001, 72, Rankin 1999, 43). Kamaiya working on land owned by Paharis and on larger farms (as farms were extended at this time so there was greater need for agricultural labour) were treated worse still (Upadhyaya (2004). These accounts do not explore whether the size of Tharu landowners' farms also increased at this time, leading to similar exploitation.

These changes affected Kamaiya masculinities in the Kamaiya system. When one considers the formative ways in which masculinities are relational (*cf.* Connell, 2009, 54), this had implications for the masculine identities of those who were bonded in a situation where exploitation and associated masculinities were shifting. If there were increasing numbers of Pahari landlords, what difference (if any) did it make for Kamaiya men to be working for Tharu or Pahari landlord? What consequences did this

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33 This remains a problem today, with only 22 Tharus, i.e. 3.6% of the Constitutional Assembly (CA) members who won seats in the last election in 2008 are Tharu.

34 Although this research is located in Dang district and not Kailali, there would be many similarities in these figures in Kailali, although I can't find such figures in the literature.

have for Kamaiya masculinities? I return to the nature of Kamaiya masculinities in the Kamaiya system in more detail below.

### **Critique**

The above historical account of the Kamaiya system largely reflects the prevailing academic discourse relating to it. I question this discourse from a number of perspectives in this section. Firstly, despite it being a fragmented and at times isolated community, there are various accounts of resistance to the system, for example in the movement led by Radhakrishna Tharu in 1943-1944 in Bardia district and the *Kanara Andolan* movement that started in 1967 (Cheria, 2005, 20-22), both of which focused on the issues of landless Kamaiya. Such resistance indicates that the Kamaiya system was far from harmonious while this system was largely within the Tharu community.

These problems between the two groups (or classes) of Tharu indicate that prior to 1962 the system cannot be simply understood as 'non-abusive'. For example, these problems are currently reflected in the difficulties for some Kamaiya engaging in the Tharu elite's efforts to create a pan-Tharu identity, and political manifestations of the Tharu identity such as the Tharuhat (cf. Guneratne, 2002, Maycock 2011). There is resistance to such efforts from the majority of Kamaiya that I met during my fieldwork, due in part to the exploitation they experienced under Tharu landowners previously. Why would Kamaiya support political parties such as the Tharuhat, which are largely run by the sons of the landlords to whom they were previously bonded? Unlike some of the leftist parties such as the UCPN(M), political entities such as the Tharuhat rarely engage with land issues.

Despite noting the difference in the treatment of Kamaiya by Tharu and Pahari landlords, Rankin also remarks in a footnote:

...with respect to Kamaiyas, the class convergence of Pahari and Tharu *jamindars* [landlords] is more significant than the shared ethnic identity of Tharu Kamaiyas and Tharu *jamindars*. (Rankin, 1999, 44 (note.22))

This reflects the mainstream view that the Kamaiya system corresponds to anti-Pahari sentiment that one often encounters in various Tharu communities. While it is true of

the Kamaiya with whom I discussed their experiences of the Kamaiya system, it was not so simple as this: for example, I was told that there were both good and bad Tharu and Pahari landlords. These conversations implied that no easy generalisations can be made here. One's position in the system as Kamaiya (and landless) was more formative than ethnic associations one might have had with a Tharu landlord. This raises the question of whether class identities have more influence on Kamaiya masculinities than ethnic identities. Do Kamaiya masculinities have more in common with other landless groups' masculinities (such as the Haliya) or with the Tharu elite? These questions necessitate close consideration of the links between ethnicity and class in relation to the Kamaiya system and its contemporary legacy. Examining masculinity is particularly useful here, and throughout this thesis I consider how Bahun and Kamaiya masculinities interact with and influence one another.

While it is clear that the Kamaiya system changed and evolved, exploitation has been consistent. Having considered the historical account of the Kamaiya system and the evolution of the exploitation integral to it, I now consider how the system functioned in relation to gender. Before moving on to explore Kamaiya masculinities in the Kamaiya system, I briefly outline the gender division of labour as outlined in the literature.

### **The Kamaiya System: Gender Division of Labour**

Throughout this chapter I have used the word *Kamaiya* to refer to both a system of bonded labour and the bonded labourers in it, reflecting both the academic and popular discourses about the system and the people in it. The word more accurately describes adult male bonded labourers, with different roles at different stages in Kamaiya men's lives given different names, as is also the case for Kamaiya women. These names and ages are outlined in Table One below:

Titles for men - Age	Title
9 to 12	Chhegraiyare
13, 14	Gaiwar or Bhaiswar
15 to 20	Bardiyare
21 to 50	Kamaiya
51 onwards	Gaiwar or Bhaiswar
Titles for women - age	Title
7 to 12	Chhegriya or Ladkakhelaiya
13 to 16	Kamlahari
17 to 40	Bukrahi
41 onwards	Orgaini, Chhegriya or Ladkakhelaiya

Table 1 – Names and age of Kamaiya men and women, source Poudel and Niraula (1998, Table 3.1)

Kamaiya men are the unmarked gender in discussions of the Kamaiya system, as it is the normative way of discussing all Kamaiya, men and women, young and old in Nepali and the Dangaura Tharu languages. The data are variable and problematic here, but according to Sharma and Thakurathi:

...there were 26,000 adult male, 1500 women and 5000 children working under the [Kamaiya] system. (1998, i)

Engaging with these figures, in some ways the normative way in which the term Kamaiya is used reflects the reality that the group is male-dominated, or seen as male by those collecting data about it. The different names and roles associated with men, women, girls and boys' specific ages indicate that prior to 2000, when the Kamaiya were freed, the gender division of labour in the Kamaiya system depended greatly on both gender and age (Poudel and Niraula, 1998, 21, Table 4.1).

Within the Kamaiya system it was understood that a Kamaiya man and an associated female *bukrani*,<sup>35</sup> as a pair, were both considered as Kamaiya. The whole Kamaiya family was tied to a specific landlord through one relationship with the landlord, usually mediated through the husband or brother. Women and children did not take part in negotiations relating to debt and the contract with the landlord, although often there was no negotiation at all or what there was, was meaningless. The gendered implications of men being 'responsible' in this way for their families' bondedness are not addressed in the literature.

In the few instances that the gendered division of labour in the Kamaiya system is mentioned in the literature, men and boys' gendered identities in the system are not considered. Gender tends to be equated with women, as illustrated in the quote below:

There is a marked division of labour within the Kamaiya system, determined by a combination of traditional social relationships, production demands and the reproduction systems in western Nepal. Women are given different positions according to their work responsibilities. (OMCT, 2007, 26)

Other authors discussing the gendered division of labour in the Kamaiya system also take this position (cf. Poudel and Niraula, 1998). Both the pieces of research mentioned here suggest rigidity or inflexibility in gender roles in the Kamaiya system. There is an assumption that gender divisions of labour were largely determined by being in the Kamaiya system and therefore by landlords.

This was not strongly reflected in the conversations that I had about such roles and experiences during my fieldwork. In particular, elderly Kamaiya men and women's remarks about how gender roles were maintained did not fit what one might expect from the position outlined above. While there were clearly gender roles specific to certain stages in a Kamaiya's life, there was more flexibility than some of the literature

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35 This could be a wife, daughter-in-law, mother or any female family member (Robertson and Mishra, 1997). The *bukrani* would also be heavily involved in agricultural work and was usually paid less than the men.

suggests. This relates to the problem of making a clear distinction between public and private and the roles and labour assumed to correspond to these 'discrete' spaces. Although there were very few landed Kamaiya at the time of their report, Poudel and Niraula (1998) report that among such, the men were involved with the 'outside' world and women, the 'inside' world. This is problematic on a number of levels and is not reflected in my fieldwork experience. Beyond this distinction, the narratives of the Kamaiya described more flexibility in the gender roles – Kamaiya men having significant roles in their children's lives, for example. This may reflect changes that have happened since the Kamaiya were freed or in how the Kamaiya system is now remembered. Gender roles becoming more fluid is an example of the implications of freedom for the Kamaiya, and as I describe in Chapter 7, focusing on family life, this has significant implications for Kamaiya masculinities.

How gender roles in the Kamaiya system were discussed seemed to be different generationally, partly as a consequence of the closer association of elderly Kamaiya with the system. The Kamaiya system had influenced the gendered identity and perceptions of gender in relation to labour and all other aspects of the lives of Kamaiya who had been in it, particularly for older Kamaiya. This does not mean that the older generation discussed such roles more rigidly than the younger generation. The generational nuances mainly related to the younger generation's opportunities following freedom compared to those of the older generations, which seemed to influence how these two groups discussed gender roles in the system. Younger men were more irritated and aggressive when recalling their accounts of the Kamaiya system than older men, and resented their previous Tharu and Pahari owners<sup>36</sup> more.

Significant numbers of children worked in the Kamaiya system, and their work contributed to repaying their parents' (or grandparents') debt. The work was strongly

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36 Despite the ending of the Kamaiya system, the term 'owner' was the most common way of saying *jamindar* or landlord throughout my fieldwork. I was uncomfortable using this term, despite both of my research assistants also using it frequently. In a number of interviews I asked the interviewee if they had really been *owned* in the way the one can own a possession, which often led to interesting but difficult conversations about the mistreatment that many Kamaiya experienced at the hands of their 'owners'. The use of 'owner' in this thesis reflects the use of this term by specific research subjects.



gendered. For example, boys tending to be animal herders while girls largely did domestic work in the landlords' households. Despite the Kamaiya system ending in 2000, the *Kamlari* system of domestic workers was still common in 2009.<sup>37</sup> Only the young Kamaiya women and girls were involved, and it appeared that no equivalent form of bonded labour persisted for Kamaiya boys.<sup>38</sup> There is no equivalent system for young men, who commonly stay in their parents' household or, when old enough, move to undertake specific forms of unskilled labour (such as rickshaw driving).

Having discussed the gender division of labour in the Kamaiya system and the tensions between how this has been represented in the literature and my own data from the field, I now focus more closely on masculinities in the Kamaiya system to provide a context for later parts of the thesis, where I explore more contemporary manifestations.

### **Kamaiya Masculinities in the Kamaiya System**

Having outlined my position on masculinity and the history of the Kamaiya system, in this section I bring these two sections together to explore Kamaiya masculinities within the Kamaiya system. Poudel and Niraula (1998) contribute one of the very few papers that consider gender in relation to the Kamaiya system, although they do not explicitly consider men's gendered experiences. This section provides a context in which to consider the following critical questions: What was it like being a Kamaiya man, mistreated by his owner and with limited capacity to protect his family? How did Kamaiya men respond to this subversion of certain expectations of them as men? What is the contemporary legacy of the masculinities of the Kamaiya system? What were the implications for Kamaiya masculinities of freedom from a system of slavery and exploitation?

As indicated previously, until now such questions have not been asked specifically in relation to the Kamaiya (and more broadly in relation to bonded labour). The transition

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37 For example, in the house I rented in Dhangadhi (owned by a Bahun) there was always a Kamlari girl; this was also the case in many of the Bahun houses in this area of Dhangadhi (Hasanpur).

38 For more on the Kamlari system and child labour practices, see Giri (2009, 2010a, 2010b).

from slavery to peasant and other<sup>39</sup> forms of masculinities has not been explored in relation to this or to most other groups freed from situations of slavery. To explain this transition, below I discuss some of the main aspects of Kamaiya masculinities in the Kamaiya system, principally with reference to how Kamaiya men discussed them with me.

One of the main dynamics that seem to have shaped Kamaiya masculinities prior to freedom in 2000 was the relationship between Kamaiya men and their Tharu or Pahari owners. This was specific to the time and situation and was recounted by many Kamaiya men to me in sometimes conflicting ways. Generally these relationships were defined by a structural inequality, exploitation and associated violence, although some benevolence was mentioned when a small number of Kamaiya men discussed owners who they saw as treating them relatively well through providing for them in certain ways (particularly through payments of rice). There is a reflection here of Jan Breman's view that the *Halipratha* system was based on both patronage and exploitation (Breman, 1974, 1993, 2003).

The way Kamaiya men were treated by their owners had a significant impact on how they viewed themselves as men during this period, not least as in such a situation it was difficult, if not impossible, to resist or to remove oneself. One's standing as a Kamaiya man was compromised in many ways. For example, in many instances it was not possible for these men to protect themselves, their families and what little property they had, or to provide their families with money or basic provisions such as food and clothing. This was all mediated through their relationship with their owner, resulting in subversion of the potential for these roles to exist as part of Kamaiya masculinities. Such processes were strongly gendered: I did not encounter a single Kamaiya man who discussed their owner's wife or female relatives within the Kamaiya system, the focus being on their male owner. The fact that the system was based on a relationship between two men from entirely different places in the local class hierarchy seems to have significantly influenced Kamaiya masculinities in the Kamaiya system. Kamaiya men of this time recounted their male owners' mistreatment of them

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<sup>39</sup> Aspects of such masculinities are outlined in the three main chapters that follow.

and their families, generally holding them responsible for the mistreatment of the Kamaiya prior to freedom.

The consequences of these relationships and experiences have mixed resonances for Kamaiya men, with a marked generational difference emerging in some instances. The older Kamaiya men's views and identities seemed to be more shaped by the Kamaiya system than those of the younger Kamaiya men I met. For example, I met a small number of elderly Kamaiya men who had voted for the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) or Nepali Congress (NC) political parties<sup>40</sup> in the CA election of 2008 because, they told me, this was how their owners had voted and had instructed them to vote, and they had maintained this voting pattern despite having been freed from and distancing themselves from their former owners' direct influence. There seemed to be various tensions between the generations relating to these differences, with the younger male generation far more confident and angry when talking about their owners and their lives during the Kamaiya system. Religion is important here, and in Chapter 5 I discuss how older Kamaiya men seem to have an increasing interest in certain aspects of Tharu religious practice. There appear to be significant generational differences in how the Kamaiya system influences the Kamaiya masculinities I encountered nine years after the men I discuss in this thesis being freed.

At various stages later in this thesis I explore certain aspects of success and competence that are formative of Kamaiya masculinities. If one considers 'competency' (cf. Connell 2002, 58) integral to masculine identities, success in relation to certain masculine subjectivities and practices is critical and can help to explain many masculine behaviours. This then raises the question of how Kamaiya men in the Kamaiya system viewed competency and what 'trading' (de Visser and Smith, 2006, de Visser, 2009) of competency took place in this situation. Older men seemed to take more pride in their work for their owners and in being hard working and reliable, reflecting some of the older and more positive associations with the word Kamaiya mentioned above. Again, younger Kamaiya men talked differently about this, wanting to focus more on their lives following freedom rather than discuss what had happened

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40 These are both right-wing parties; the RPP is particularly loyal to the former monarchy.

prior to them gaining freedom. Some of the men I discuss in this thesis in their twenties would have been children within the Kamaiya system, so had a certain perspective on the system framed by their experiences of childhood as bonded labourers. Some clearly resented their fathers for having brought them up in the Kamaiya system, which to an extent eroded their respect for the older generation. According to them, their children had far greater opportunities than they had had and were not exposed to that specific situation of exploitation. As I show in subsequent chapters, although the Kamaiya system has ended, the Kamaiya are still subject to multiple forms of exploitation and discrimination as peasants involved in various types of wage labour and subsistence agriculture.

The change from what was essentially a feudal system of labour and social relations to peasant social relations corresponds to an associated change in masculinities, although both were shaped by exploitation, class and ethnicity. The environment from which Kamaiya masculinities emerge – they are now only partially formed in relation to labour markets with a number of different forms of Kamaiya masculinity attainable following freedom – are critical to this transition.<sup>41</sup> I explore the move from slave to peasant/worker and other masculinities in Chapter 6. As with any change of this magnitude, certain aspects of Kamaiya masculinities that are more easily understood in relation to the context of bondage and certain facets of masculine identities that are more resistant to change than others are emerging. While the Kamaiya have been freed, it is important to consider some of the ways in which parts of the Kamaiya system retain significant influence in the lives of many of the Kamaiya men I met during my fieldwork.

### **The Movement towards Freedom**

At various stages in Nepal's history bonded labour has been made illegal.<sup>42</sup> Efforts to end the Kamaiya system changed after 1990<sup>43</sup> when they coalesced into a highly

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41 This resonates with Chris Dolan's argument that times of violence are associated with a subversion of the viability of non-violent, alternative masculinities (cf. Dolan, 2002). One would assume in times of peace and reduced violence the opposite would be true.

42 It should be noted that 2000 was not the first time slavery was banned in Nepal, although it was the first time the Kamaiya system was specifically banned. Bonded labour was banned in 1926 to little

visible movement leading up to July 2000, led particularly by the NGO BASE. According to Guneratne (2002, 104), the movement towards freedom crystallised in May 2000 with the protest of nineteen Kamaiya from Geti VDC in Kailali, who demanded both their freedom and payment for their work. Arjun Karki's (2001) PhD thesis has an illuminating chapter exploring how the movement gained momentum during this period, and some of its shortcomings. The INGOs and NGOs involved with the Kamaiya freedom movement, including BASE, Anti-Slavery International, MS-Nepal, INSEC and ActionAid-Nepal, highlighted Kamaiya issues in various national and international contexts.<sup>44</sup>

The Kamaiya system and the efforts to end it gradually increased in prominence when democracy was re-established in Nepal in 1990, resulting in a broad movement towards freedom that is the focus of the next section. The implications of this movement, and of the end of the Kamaiya system which it brought about, is the focus of much of the rest of the thesis. Having presented a historical account of the Kamaiya system, I now discuss freedom and some of its implications for Kamaiya masculinities below.

In relation to gender the freedom movement was male-dominated.<sup>45</sup> Many of the prominent Kamaiya men in the movement such as Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, the chairman of the Backward Society Education (BASE), were well-educated and articulate. One finds certain forms of masculinities in this context. At one level, the movement towards freedom was about creating a space for alternative, non-Bahun and non-landed, masculinities, although often of a certain educational background.

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effect. This has resulted in cynicism amongst Kamaiya leaders about the state's commitment to ending the Kamaiya system.

43 1990 is a significant year in Nepal's history as it was the year of the *Jana Andolan* (People's Movement) that brought a type of democracy to Nepal.

44 More recently there seems to be increasing levels of resentment in the two *bastis* considered in this thesis of NGO and development efforts in the name of the Kamaiya. It seems that many Kamaiya long ago gave up hope of meaningful support from NGOs or INGOs.

45 However, it should be noted that the Freed Kamaiya Women's Association has done some important work following freedom in 2000.

The movement towards freedom became gendered in specific ways, and was about creating a space for a certain form of aspirant Kamaiya masculinity then (and still) that has had mixed success. Although the Kamaiya have been freed, throughout this thesis I consider the extent to which their masculinities remain defined by their experience of the Kamaiya system. A brief account of what freedom has meant for Kamaiya masculinities as part of broader post-freedom experiences is presented below.

### **Kamaiya Freedom Day: July 17<sup>th</sup> 2000**

This thesis began with Kamaiya Freedom Day in 2009 to illustrate its importance for the Kamaiya and for the context for this thesis. As a result of the movement mentioned above the then Nepali Congress-led<sup>46</sup> government banned all forms of bonded labour with specific reference to the Kamaiya and the west and far-western Terai on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2000, partly due to its fear that many Kamaiya would join the Maoists if nothing was done to improve their situation. It is unclear how many Kamaiya were freed on this day, due to poor data on this community, the government identified 18,291 Kamaiya households in 2000 (Cheria, 2005, 66) that were freed that day, although this number could be higher. On this day *Saunki*, the debt that functioned as a means of sustaining the Kamaiya system, was cancelled. In taking this action the government implied that all bonded labour could be accounted for under the umbrella of the Kamaiya, ignoring other forms of bonded labour in Nepal (Upadhyaya, 2004, 119). So while the movement highlighting the situation of the Kamaiya was successful in some ways, not least in securing freedom for many Kamaiya, it may have obscured other systems and experiences of bonded labour in Nepal.

Freedom had different meanings for different stakeholders. For the state, in response to considerable pressure from certain NGOs and INGOs, freedom meant the end of the protests and disruption caused by the Kamaiya. The subtext of the Maoist PW is of critical importance, as the state at the time was fighting a Maoist Insurgency and the prospect of large numbers of disaffected Kamaiya joining the PLA was an important influence on their acting when they did. For the Kamaiya, the day is significant because

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46 A centre-right mainstream political party in Nepal.

freedom means not being restricted in so many ways and greater opportunity for younger generations, as I discuss later. While some Kamaiya remain unfree and remain in situations of bondedness this tends to be in more remote areas. For the majority of Kamaiya many problems remain even for those who have been freed such as lack of land, which I explore below.

The significance of this day is difficult to understate in Kamaiya communities. It is an important and Kamaiya-specific annual celebration of freedom and a focal point for celebrations of Kamaiya identity and the strength and unity of the community following freedom. This is illustrated in Plate one, with which I began this thesis, which I took on July 17th 2009 during my period of fieldwork. From this day in 2000 onwards, Kamaiya were considered *mukti* (free) – a somewhat simplistic view given the continuation of some aspects of the system, as I explain below. Some relationships of exploitation similar to those of the old Kamaiya system have emerged since the Kamaiya were freed.

While the freedom granted in 2000 was a limited state response, a system of state-sanctioned identification of the Kamaiya was established at this time. As the table below shows, the criteria used for state classification of the Kamaiya was land:

The household having no land at all and residing at the house provided by the corresponding landlord - Class 'A' Red Category Kamaiya.
The household occupying informal land with a house for living but having no registered land - Class 'B' Blue Category Kamaiya.
The household having less than 2 kuttha (677.26 sq. m) of registered land and having own house Class - 'C' Yellow Category Kamaiya.
The household having more than 2 kuttha (677.26 sq. m) of registered land and having own house - Class 'D' White Category Kamaiya.

Table 2 - State Classification of Kamaiya, (Ban, 2002)

This system allows 'fake' Kamaiya to attempt to acquire identification (mainly in the Red category) in hope of receiving land from the state. I was told of a number of people who had been exposed in this act, and the Kamaiya recounting these stories exhibited a sense of pride that other marginal groups wanted to be classified as

Kamaiya. There was also a sense that a space had been created in which the Kamaiya were negotiating with the state for their community, and this was to be protected from other groups – including bonded and landless groups – who might encroach on it. I explore the integrity of this political and actual space below in the context of Kamaiya experiences of freedom.

### **Post-‘Freedom’ Kamaiya experiences**

A broad range of Kamaiya experiences were recounted to me during my research, beginning from July 17<sup>th</sup> 2000 when forced evictions of Kamaiya by landlords were reported in the media (Bales, 2007, 105). A key factor in the experiences of post-freedom, now *mutki*, Kamaiya, is whether or not they have received land from the state. Land and Tharu identities are inextricably linked (Guneratne, 2002, Chapter 4), as I discuss in Chapter 6. Prior to their freedom, the vast majority of Kamaiya were landless.

According to Anti-Slavery International, in 2007 40 percent of freed Kamaiya had still not received their full entitlement from the state.<sup>47</sup> A significant number of certain identity types (mainly red) have received five *kuttha* (0.17 hectares), and many have yet to receive land. Land remains as an issue for both resettled Kamaiya who have received land and, more urgently, for the landless such as those in the Dhangadhi *basti* discussed in this thesis. Kamaiya families given an allocation of 5 *kuttah* of land told me this was far from sufficient for their subsistence; the FKS demands at least 10 *kuttah* per ex-Kamaiya family. Without meaningful land reform in Nepal, one could argue that the Kamaiya, and many other landless groups, like them will not be able to transcend their current positions, which are largely defined by their previous status as bonded labourers.

While the Kamaiya were freed in 2000 there was no meaningful state or NGO/INGO rehabilitation programme. Lack of support and planning consistently emerged from my interviews with Kamaiya and NGO workers who work with them. Some were simply

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47 Summer 2007 Feature -- Nepal bonded labour

[http://old.antislavery.org/archive/reporter/reporter\\_summer\\_2007\\_articles.htm](http://old.antislavery.org/archive/reporter/reporter_summer_2007_articles.htm) (accessed 24th August 2011).



forced off the land where they had been bonded labourers. In 2007, about 40,000 – two thirds of freed Kamaiya – had received no support from the state and one third of the total were still living in refugee camps (Bales, 2007, 106). Bales draws a clear analogy between the emancipation of American slaves in 1865 and the freeing of the Kamaiya, in that both were botched by lack of state planning (ibid. 107). While they are very different situations, the Nepali state seemed to free the Kamaiya begrudgingly and accordingly had not planned for what might happen afterwards.

According to Pashupati Chaudhary, chairman of the FKS, in 2011, in Kailali 2832 Kamaiya were still waiting for land and rehabilitation (including all the residents of the second fieldsite in Dhangadhi).<sup>48</sup> Many Kamaiya families who have not been allocated land, such as those in Dhangadhi *basti*, are illegally occupying state land, the area of which is estimated to amount to about 1,354 hectares in Kailali alone (according to the FKS). This ‘illegal’ occupation of land is often in marginal and difficult locations with the constant threat of being forcibly moved on.<sup>49</sup> There seem to be several interlinked reasons for this intransigence by the state in relation to supporting freed Kamaiya. Pashupati sees it as discrimination against the Kamaiya and local resistance to the establishment of settlements.<sup>50</sup> Their rehabilitation is problematic partly due to the lack of suitable sites on which the Kamaiya can be settled. In an interview with the government official responsible for the rehabilitation of landless Kamaiya in Kailali, I was told that communities often strongly resist having an official Kamaiya *basti* established near their houses and land, as this might reduce the value of these assets.

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48 *Kathmandu Post*, July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011: <http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2011/07/17/nation/kamaiya-rehab-plan-in-limbo/224112.html>, (accessed August 2011).

49 Interview with Pashupati Chaudhary, leader of the Freed Kamaiya Society (FKS) in Kathmandu Post, <http://www.ekantipur.com/the-kathmandu-post/2011/07/17/nation/kamaiya-rehab-plan-in-limbo/224112.html> (accessed August 2011).

50 There are further views on this lack of engagement with the situation of the Kamaiya. For example, the Minister for Land Reforms and Management, Ram Charan Chaudhary, indicated in August 2011 that political instability and lack of consensus are blocking progress in rehabilitation.

<http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=%27Freed+Kamayas+not+rehabilitated+due+to+political+instability%27&NewsID=292468> (accessed August 2011).

While most Kamaiya left their owners' land in 2000, aspects of the Kamaiya system remain relevant in the lives of many, as I discuss below.

### **Continuity of the Kamaiya system**

With the signing of the CPA in 2006 and the establishment of the CA in 2008, a parliamentary sub-committee was formed to explore the Kamaiya situation and found that due to a lack of livelihood alternatives many Kamaiya remain bonded or are in marginal and temporary work. The sub-committee identified a number of issues, not least local community resistance to the establishment of a Kamaiya *basti* close to their village. In 2011, Pashupati reported that over 1,800 freed Kamaiyas were yet to be provided with identity cards in Kailali alone, which means that they cannot even begin to apply to the state for land.

Various cases of continuation of the Kamaiya system have emerged since 2000. For example, in July 2011 a story, later shown to be untrue, was published across various media outlets relating to a Tharu CA member from Dhangadhi, Malamati Rana Tharu, who had Kamaiya working on her land. The fact that the story was so prominent illustrates how despite being freed, the Kamaiya remain heavily associated with exploitation and poverty. A significant proportion of the agricultural workforce in a number of districts are still working on their previous owners' land, where the Kamaiya system has evolved and in some instances been replaced by a form of share-cropping (Upadhyaya, 2004, 126).

However, some sources associate the Kamaiya liberation movement with considerable successes:

Literacy rates have doubled. Interest rates have plummeted. Over two thirds work on their own land. Almost all ex-Kamaiya have got their identification cards. Over 95% have land registration certificates. 70% have five *kuttha* of land. Over 80% of the red card holders have received housing support. All have drinking water. (Vice-chairwoman Moti Devi, Central Committee, FKS quoted in Cheria (2005, 199)

These changes were not apparent at my fieldwork sites in Kailali, so may be exaggerated by someone heavily involved in the liberation movement. Despite some of the achievements of the freedom movement, Karki (2001, 125) finds that it has failed to address the structural issues of exploitation related to the Kamaiya system, enabling it to evolve and continue in alternative forms. The lack of state, INGO and NGO input into rehabilitation sustains this. This relates more broadly to consistent lack of engagement with issues of land and class in rural Nepal, other than by the Maoists. Interestingly, Cheria considers the success of the Kamaiya Liberation Movement to be associated with ex-Kamaiya becoming Tharu once more (Cheria, 2005, Chapter 8). This is an interesting proposition in relation to identity and class hierarchies in the Tharu community, but does not accord with my findings in the field, where the divisions between various Tharu sub-groups remained considerable.

Having discussed the relevant literature on the Kamaiya system, the movement towards freedom and outlined post-freedom experiences, I now move onto consider the Maoist PW and the implications of this for the Kamaiya community.

### **The Maoist PW (1996-2006)**

The Maoist PW was a major event in recent Nepali history that has had a range of impacts on groups such as the Kamaiya, the more obvious of which was the many cases of landlords being forced off their land and their land redistributed by the Maoists to groups such as the Kamaiya. This has resulted in many landlords moving to urban areas such as Dhangadhi, which are relatively safe for them. In some instances they have not been able to return to their land since 2006 and the signing of the CPA.

Many examples of such redistribution of land resulted in general Kamaiya support for the Maoists at my fieldwork sites, although the PW was a difficult time for both, particularly in Kampur *basti*, where there had been a battle and frequent visits from both the PLA and various state forces had strained already-stretched resources. State forces often enhanced support for the Maoists with violence. Given the low caste and class status of the Kamaiya and the Tharu, various state officials seemed to assume that they and supported the Maoists (which was, as I have shown, only partially true). I

was told frequent stories of police brutality such as random beatings and Kamaiya being taken off public buses during the PW.

However despite widespread support for the Maoists it was rare for Kamaiya to join the PLA, as illustrated in the figures below showing the caste/ethnic breakdown of the 19,602 registered PLA (at least according to United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) data):

Bahun	Chettris	Magars	Hill Dalit	Tamang	Madhesi	Tharu
16.11 %	15.78 %	12.5 %	10.02 %	6.9 %	6.63 %	5.59 %

Table 3 - Ethnic composition of the PLA, source (Magar, 2010)

The high proportion of Bahun and Chettris indicates that education may have an important influence on factors leading to people joining the PLA. Following the mainstream caste- and ethnicity-based arguments used to explain the PW, one would expect far higher representation of the lower castes and ethnic groups. The Tharu constitute one of the smallest ethnic groups in the PLA, at a lower level of the size of the Tharu population in Nepal as recorded in the last census (6.6%). This subverts the notion that those towards the bottom of the caste and class structure such as the Tharu and Kamaiya would be receptive to mainstream Maoist discourses about the abolishment of caste and other forms of oppression. In this section I have discussed the Tharu as I was not able to find any specific figures on the numbers of Kamaiya PLA cadre. In discussions about this with Kamaiya from Kampur *basti* I was told that there were no Kamaiya PLA cadre in Kampur PLA cantonment, but there were in some of the other cantonments of the PLA 7<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>51</sup> I was unable to confirm this with various PLA commanders, who did not want to discuss the ethnic composition of the PLA in any great depth.

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51 Following the signing of the CPA in 2006 the PLA 7<sup>th</sup> division has been located in one main cantonment and three satellite cantonments. The Kampur cantonment I discuss in this thesis was one of these satellite cantonments.

Besides the low representation of Tharu in the PLA, one would expect to find more Tharu in the Kampur PLA cantonment than I did. There were rumours circulating in some Tharu villages, especially among Tharu supporting the Tharuhat, that there had been more Tharus in Kampur cantonment and the other three cantonments associated with the Seventh Division when they were set up in 2006, but many had subsequently left to join the Tharuhat.

Overall the implications of the PW for the Kamaiya system appear to be mixed. However, the PW had an important influence on the timing of the formal end of the Kamaiya system by the state, as was discussed above. Having considered the Maoist PW generally, below I focus more closely on the implications of the war for Kamaiya masculinities

### **The Maoist PW and Kamaiya masculinities**

The PW caused another significant change in how Kamaiya masculinities were composed in relation to other masculinities. In this instance, this was in relation to masculinities that often took violent forms. This was particularly apparent in Kampur *basti*, where there had been a battle lasting for an afternoon between the PLA and Nepal Army, with a number of PLA cadres and Nepal Army soldiers killed. This was a very difficult time in the *basti*. Bullets and bombs damaged a number of the houses in the north of Kampur *basti* and although none of the villagers were hurt, many having run into the forest when the fighting started, a number of livestock had been killed. This was the only battle to occur in or close to the *basti* during the PW and had a range of meanings for the villagers I discussed it with in 2009. It was important to some although not all: the young men talked about it most often, exaggerating its significance for both the PLA and Nepal Army, not least in relation to the number of people killed.<sup>52</sup>

Most villagers felt that Kampur had not been badly affected by the PW, although this changed as I spent more time there, was trusted more and people spoke more about

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<sup>52</sup> Having interviewed a number of PLA cadre who had been present during the battle in Kampur, this battle was not considered something of great significance by them.

their experiences during this time. I would argue that Kampur was reasonably badly affected during the PW. I visited several villages that had had a far more difficult time, while conversely there were (principally urban) places and some Village Development Committee (VDCs)<sup>53</sup> which suffered little. Besides the battle mentioned above, on a number of occasions men from the Nepal Army or police came into the *basti* looking for Maoists and/or weapons, neither of which they found.<sup>54</sup> The police came more often, sometimes in the middle of the night, and always carried out their searches aggressively and sometimes violently. These searches largely shaped the villagers' perception of the state, even today, as they had limited access to other elements that might have had a positive influence on their lives such as education or health services. I was told by a number of villagers that a heavily pregnant woman had been pushed to the ground on one of these occasions, and some male villagers told me stories of their wives and daughters being treated and spoken to in ways they found offensive and difficult.

Exploring masculinity in this context helps to illuminate these processes. There was a range of inappropriate behaviour, although I did not hear any reports of rape on these occasions.<sup>55</sup> Some male villagers told me that discussing the treatment of some of the *basti*'s women was inappropriate with their wives or daughters present, which I respected, although I later explored the implications of this for the men affected. It was clear, when they recounted their experiences of the PW, that they found this particularly problematic, not least because they were often present and forced to watch, unable to stop the police treating the women they loved so badly. When one middle-aged man was discussing this with me he became emotional, which was one of

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53 The smallest administrative unit of the state in Nepal.

54 These experiences of these searches were common for many Kamaiya and Tharu. As the Tharu are largely poor, state forces often assumed that they supported the PLA. This was also the experience of many ethnic groups and low castes in Nepal, who were the focus of much unpleasant and sometimes violent attention from the Nepal Army and Police. This approach sometimes became a self-fulfilling prophecy with these experiences the reason why some people joined the PLA.

55 Something that has been reported in many other instances during the Peoples War:

<http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=opinionforums&id=25&lang=en> (accessed August 2011)

the very few occasions when I saw a man cry in the *basti*. It was not considered appropriate behaviour for men, especially in social settings.

Even men whose wives or daughters had not been directly affected by this police behaviour displayed the same feelings: it had impacted on the entire *basti*. There are several reasons why women were treated like this; men suffered a different type of abuse, mainly being pushed around and on some occasions, badly beaten. This relates to masculinity: by mistreating women – and on some occasions forcing the men to watch – the police intentionally humiliated the men. For the men I spoke to about this it resulted in a substantial subversion of a critical aspect of their masculinity: their ability to protect their female relatives. The more senior men in the *basti* had slightly different notions of protecting their sons or other male relatives compared to their female relatives, as men were considered more capable of looking after themselves and coping with physical threats or violence and so did not need protecting to the same extent, if at all. Women were considered vulnerable and needed more protection. Such police violence is not uncommon in peacetime in Nepal, but during the PW the extent and intensity of the abuse was far greater. There is a parallel here with the way in which this aspect of Kamaiya masculinities was subverted in the Kamaiya system, as in both the Kamaiya system and the PW the men were unable to meet the expectations of them as men that they would protect their female relatives. This has changed following freedom and the end of the PW, with Kamaiya men now more able to protect both their female relatives and the increasing amounts of property they are accumulating.

During the PW it was difficult for villagers to know to what official body's attention they should bring these issues, as the state itself was committing the abuse. It was not reported to any official body or human rights organisation. The police violence in Kampur had an important impact on the *basti*, but one very different from that of the behaviour of the PLA when they were in the *basti*. On a number of occasions PLA cadres stayed in the *basti* during the PW. The villagers had no warning of when they would come and stay for a night, demanding food before moving on to another village. The villagers had no choice but to accommodate their sometimes unrealistic demands although I heard of no PLA violence towards them. When they came they would

unsuccessfully try to recruit the younger villagers from the *basti*, but no one in the village joined<sup>56</sup> and I was told that at no stage had anyone planned to, despite the problems with the state outlined above.

The war was particularly difficult for the young men in the *basti*. Older men did not experience the same pressures as they were not the focus of the PLA's recruitment efforts or the attention of the police and Nepal Army. Several villagers told me that some young men had had to migrate to avoid recruitment into the PLA, as I discuss in Chapter 6 (Sondra Hausner (2007) has also discussed increasing levels of labour migration as an alternative to Maoist recruitment, particularly for young men). The young men told me that they had not wanted the PLA there at all, and that while they were not as bad as the police, they behaved arrogantly. When I asked them to explain, it emerged that they were unhappy that another group of men (and some women) could come into their *basti* whenever they wanted to and order them around. This resentment re-emerged when the cantonment was established next to the *basti* in 2007, as I discuss at several points in Chapters 5-7. Having considered some of the implications of the PW for Kamaiya masculinities I now conclude this chapter before moving on to consider the implications of post-freedom and post-conflict Kamaiya masculinities in relation to bodies.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude this section, in some ways Kamaiya masculinities were and are configured somewhere between the Kamaiya system and more peasant-orientated forms of work and identity. I discuss their emergence in Chapter 6, which focuses on work and mobility. Freedom has multiple implications for Kamaiya masculinities; Kamaiya expectations of freedom were very high and in many cases have not been met.

Having considered the literature on the Kamaiya system and the movement towards freedom in this chapter, I now move onto the main focus of this thesis - post-freedom

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<sup>56</sup> It is not particularly relevant to discuss the Kamaiya joining the Nepal Army or Police. These opportunities were largely not available for ethnic groups such as the Tharu, therefore, these two state institutions in no way reflect the diversity one finds in Nepal.



and post-conflict Kamaiya masculinities. Having discussed some of the implications of freedom and the Maoist PW, I now explore how such masculinities manifest in three main areas, bodies, work and family life, and discuss the fragmentation of such masculinities by various aspects of modernity.

This chapter has illustrated that considering masculinity within the context of bonded labour illuminates certain aspects of relationships that are central to these situations. Considering masculinity creates a space in which certain questions have been asked of this literature, questions that I now go onto respond to in the next chapter where I discuss the ways in which bodies and Kamaiya masculinities influence the other following freedom.

## **Chapter 5 – Bodies, consumption and Kamaiya masculinities**

This chapter explores the implications of Kamaiya men's bodies for Kamaiya masculinities. Through exploring changes in how both bodies and masculinities are configured, an exploration of how change is attributable to each of these considerations is outlined. Centrally the chapter argues that the uses and abuses of the bodies of Kamaiya men are profoundly both productive and destructive of their masculinities throughout their life course. At times such uses and abuses contribute to the successful realisation of certain masculinities, while at other times they can subvert and undermine efforts to achieve and sustain certain masculine performances and positions. Ultimately, the ways in which Kamaiya men make use of their bodies contribute to the production of particular masculinities in processes that I explore in the various components of this chapter.

Certain theoretical tools are required to guide the analysis of the material relating to Kamaiya men considered below. There is a consistent focus in this chapter on foregrounding the 'everyday' (Certeau, 1984), on how their bodies are used, abused and experienced by men in a range of ordinary situations. Watson indicates that research on the body has often focused on theorising the body while neglecting practical experience of the body (2000). It is this bodily, material reality that informs a significant proportion of lived experience (Leder, 1990, Moi, 1999, Merleau-Ponty, 1961, Sparkes and Smith, 2002). Reflecting this, this chapter considers the everyday

use and abuse of the body in order to understand certain configurations of masculinity. Following Merlau-Ponty, it brings the body clearly into focus as:

...the body of the wrestler may be seen, not simply as a signifier of meaning, but as a subject actor in a larger drama of culture and power. (Alter, 1992)

Alongside these notions of the significance of the body, additional, conceptual tools are required to illuminate the material below. I first consider male bodies before moving on to discuss how the body affects masculinities.

Like many other aspects of maleness and masculinity (Kimmel, 1997), male bodies are often considered an unmarked or 'unquestioned norm' (Grosz, 1994, 188). A crucial component of this is a form of disembodiment in response to how male corporeality is 'traditionally' unmarked (Stephens and Lorentzen, 2007). I directly challenge such assumptions in this chapter, which brings Kamaiya men's bodies into focus. This is through exploring certain aspects of masculine bodies (including the implications of drinking for bodies), experience (for example, being a rickshaw driver) and change (principally the change from the Kamaiya system to freedom).

The chapter discusses part of a wider shift away from 'universalised' and 'idealised' notions of the male body to explore a 'specific instance of the cultural construction of male corporeality' (Stephens and Lorentzen, 2007, 5). Such a focus challenges the notion that Kamaiya men's bodies are unquestioned. Kamaiya men's bodies emerge in this chapter as challenged, and in some ways marked, from a number of perspectives, not least in relation to other men's bodies, through their changing work and consumption patterns and shifting images of what is considered a desirable body.

Judith Butler states that all bodies are dependent and vulnerable (2004), a starting place that is useful when considering Kamaiya men's bodies here. It raises some interesting questions: how do Kamaiya men negotiate these bodily vulnerabilities? Why are some men apparently better at this than others? Gadd explores ways in which men's bodies can be sites of contradiction and uncertainty:

Men's bodies are sources of insecurity and feelings of inadequacy, symbolic purveyors of competence and incompetence, sites through which intimacy is experienced or thwarted. (Gadd: 2003: 350)

However, Gadd does not consider why this is or what might be specific to men in this instance. This chapter shows that the key considerations in relation to men's bodies are the range of gender-specific performances that (male) bodies are expected to perform in trying to achieve and maintain certain masculine subject positions. As such in this chapter I consider certain activities (such as rickshaw driving) that affects both bodies and masculinities.

Before moving on to consider various examples through which the relationship between men's bodies and masculinity is explored, further conceptual tools are required to analyse the material below. Having considered the body, and subsequently male bodies, I now turn to the relationship between male bodies and masculinities. Raewyn Connell's research has consistently been concerned with this question, the centrality of which is highlighted below:

...the first task of social analysis is to arrive at an understanding of men's bodies and their relation to masculinity. (Connell, 2005, 45)

Connell helps to fine-tune the ways in which I consider bodies and masculinity in this chapter by highlighting the significance of the links between gender and bodies:

...to understand how men's bodies are actually involved in masculinities we must abandon the conventional dichotomy between changing culture and unchanging bodies. (Connell, 2000, 57)

This moves the analysis of the social importance of bodies towards a perspective from which bodies and social practices influence each other in various ways: bodies shape and are shaped by social practice. One can now talk of embodied masculinities as a way of explaining these relationships. This is of critical importance in this chapter, which discusses various instances in which it is clear that Kamaiya masculinities as well

as Kamaiya men's bodies are and have changed. This is particularly the case for Kamaiya men, who were until recently bonded labourers living in a specific situation, with associated frameworks of practice and performance. As I discuss in the next section, the period of the Kamaiya system of bonded labour was associated with certain types of bodies and certain related masculinities.

In considering men's bodies, this chapter not only presents the lived material experiences of Kamaiya men and associated masculinities but also contributes to the understanding of changes observable in both.

An additional consideration when exploring men's bodies and masculinity relates to certain prevailing aspects of masculinity. Men's bodies and the behaviours that are prominent in shaping them often closely correspond with gender-specific notions of success and competence; for example through physical strength. Notions of competence and control over one's body emerge as important components of many masculinities, again indicating the reciprocally informing relationship between men's bodies and masculinity. As I illustrate throughout this chapter, competence and masculinity are closely linked to how male bodies are experienced and given meaning in social settings. This is especially the case for former bonded labourers, who are largely illiterate and so entirely dependent on their bodies for their livelihoods.

However, throughout this chapter there are several instances in which these processes seem to be in tension and are in some ways contradictory. For example, as indicated below, the rickshaw drivers' sense of masculinity and livelihood is entirely dependent on the strength of their bodies, overall fitness and resultant ability to make many rickshaw trips (and therefore money) as quickly as possible. There is a contradiction in these practices, as the very intense physical exertion that this occupation entails often leads to injuries and eventually to 'burn-out' and ultimately inability to do the job. In some ways this resonates with Wacquant's exploration of how boxing produces certain bodies which become 'inhabited':

The boxer wilfully perseveres into this potentially self-destructive trade because, in a very real sense, he is inhabited by the game that he inhabits. (Wacquant, 1995, 88)

Such tensions between men's bodies and their masculinities emerge consistently throughout this chapter. Whitehead develops this notion and considers how important aspects of men's subjectivity may emerge from such tensions and contradictions:

...many men fail to achieve a seamless, constant, symbiotic relationship between their bodies and dominant discourses of masculinity, yet they still attempt to do so and their masculine subjectivity is bound up in these attempts. (2002, 91)

These attempts at coherence (or the appearance of coherence) between bodies and masculinity take many forms. I explore these issues within a broader approach to understanding Kamaiya men and their bodies in the three main areas of this chapter, in which I outline the realities of Kamaiya men's bodies; discuss how consumption contributes to the shaping of and meaning associated with men's bodies; and finally consider the ways in which the normative images and realities of Kamaiya men's bodies are questioned through ageing.

The first section of this chapter starts with a historical focus on the form these tensions took while Kamaiya men were bonded labourers within the Kamaiya system. This contributes to broader exploration of the tensions and contradictions between the normative bodily images and Kamaiya masculinities during the period that these men were bonded labourers. Subsequently I explore the legacies of such processes before moving on to consider more contemporary forms of embodied Kamaiya masculinities through the example of rickshaw drivers.

The main argument of this chapter is that both Kamaiya men's bodies and the masculinities they inform are changing, shifting idealised visions of Kamaiya masculinity as well as the everyday lives of Kamaiya men. As I show, such changes are a consequence not only of changing social relations but also of the changing ways in

which bodies are given meaning socially. The accounts of embodied masculinity are situated in a context of significant social change and transition, which in turn corresponds to diverse new forms of practice. There are various events in these Kamaiya men's lives that mark important and distinct transitions, principal among which are the end of the Kamaiya system and the PW 1996-2006 and its aftermath, both of which feature prominently in this chapter. These events have had a profound influence not only on how masculinity is embodied but also on working practices and gender relations in the Kamaiya communities. A range of new behaviours and forms of embodied masculinity emerge from these wider processes of transition and change. I critically engage with the central question of how various cultural ideals relating to masculinity are embodied, and how both men's bodies and their masculinities are implicated in the changes to embodied masculinity. This chapter provides an insight into fluid and continually evolving manifestations of embodied masculinity.

Having provided a number of conceptual tools to guide the analysis that follows, I now consider some of the ways in which Kamaiya men's bodies are and have been used, and how these produce certain Kamaiya masculinities. I begin with an account of how the Kamaiya system of bonded labour created certain bodies and masculinities.

### **How are the various realities of Kamaiya men's bodies constituted?**

Having outlined the conceptual parameters of this chapter, I now turn to a number of specific Kamaiya men and their narratives to explore how these processes are unfolding in Kamaiya communities. I begin with an account of important historical points (i.e. in the Kamaiya system) relating to specific formulations of embodied masculinity. To fully understand contemporary facets of the embodied Kamaiya masculinity it is necessary to consider how being in the Kamaiya system represented a number of tensions that still resonate today.

This section of the chapter discusses how new forms of embodied masculinity have emerged as a consequence of the Kamaiya being freed. The move to freedom brought new challenges for Kamaiya men. As such, their bodies do not necessarily equate

simply to a means by which to meet the ideals of masculinity (as it did to a certain extent within the Kamaiya system). Although following freedom this remains the case to an extent, the picture now is more complicated. To be considered a successful man does not simply require being a good labourer as defined in purely economic terms. A new set of pressures and bodily images have emerged which Kamaiya men are negotiating. Whether these are easier to meet is a key question: below I discuss how the new challenges are different as a consequence of the transition from bonded-labourer status. Before exploring these changes, I consider how the Kamaiya system produced certain bodies and masculinities.

### **What were the implications of being in the Kamaiya system for embodied Kamaiya masculinities?**

As discussed, the Kamaiya system of bonded labour was a one of social relations with aspects of exploitation and patronage that still have some resonance for the Kamaiya. What were the consequences of the system for Kamaiya men's bodies and masculinities? Wacquant's article on boxing and the bodies it produces provides a useful way of thinking about this:

...specific social worlds invest, shape, and deploy human bodies. (1995, 65)

Certain social worlds such as the Kamaiya system produce and reproduce certain bodies. The Kamaiya system was a social world in which Kamaiya men and their bodies were positioned and treated in specific and often narrow ways. In this setting men were defined almost exclusively by the capacity of their bodies to do certain types of work on a very limited diet. To explore the implications of the Kamaiya system for Kamaiya bodies and masculinity I introduce Prakash, a Kamaiya man who outlined his personal account of the Kamaiya system in numerous conversations and discussions with me.

#### **Prakash**

As a Kamaiya man born prior to the abolition of the Kamaiya system, Prakash's early years were different to those following July 17th 2000, when he was aged about 14-16 and when the Kamaiya system legally ended. It is difficult to fully comprehend the

significance of this date for Mukti (freed) Kamaiya such as Prakash, for whom it represents the day on which he was freed from the bonded labour into which he had been born. Prakash did not seem to find talking about his life during the Kamaiya system comfortable, and when I tried to steer the conversation in this direction to find out more about it he usually recounted the same narratives, sometimes offering little or no detail of his personal experience.

However, on a number of occasions when we were alone we discussed this time in more detail. It was an extremely difficult time for Prakash during which he had little control over many aspects of his life, critically including certain aspects of control over his body. Control over the body was a central component of this system of bonded labour and was particularly problematic for Prakash. The Kamaiya system controlled and disciplined bodies in ways that were inherently exploitative. On several occasions, Prakash turned conversation about the Kamaiya system into an opportunity to criticise how his then 'owners' treated him and his father passionately and aggressively. He did not mention his female relatives in these discussions. He told me that beatings and violence from his owner and his owner's family were central to his experience and featured strongly in his memory. He also told me that due to the long hours he was expected to work and the limited food that he and his family received he was very often hungry. Therefore bodily vulnerabilities within the Kamaiya system were principally located around relationships with owners and vulnerabilities of consumption.

I turn now to the relationship between Kamaiya men and their owners in the Kamaiya system and the implications of this for embodied Kamaiya masculinity during this time. To guide this part of the chapter I first consider Wienke's position on bodily dissatisfaction:

...most men feel bodily dissatisfaction in comparison to the ideal type, because it is believed that those men closest to the ideal reap certain cultural and social benefits not available to those furthest away. (1998, 258-259)



While I do not explore 'ideal types' in any detail here, this is a useful way to think about how men's bodies are situated in the context of various types and images of bodies. It raises the question of what Kamaiya men such as Prakash saw as the ideal type of body under the Kamaiya system and whether this has changed following its abolition. Prakash told me that prior to 2000, when the Kamaiya system was still in existence, he had worked on an isolated farm. Isolation is often mentioned in accounts of the Kamaiya system, with many who worked on farms having little opportunity to travel. This means that the potential ideal types that Kamaiya men might refer and compare themselves to were limited to other Kamaiya in the vicinity their owners and owner's sons, as mentioned by Prakash and other Kamaiya men to whom I spoke about this, although they were keen to distance themselves from these people.

There are a number of generational distinctions in how the Kamaiya men recalled their experiences during the Kamaiya system which provide an insight into how Kamaiya men's bodies were given meaning in this system. Prakash continually tried to establish such generational distinctions in his recollections of the Kamaiya system. Here it is useful to consider Victor Seidler's insight:

As men explore the emotional histories carried in their bodies, so they can learn to develop more of a relationship with their bodies. (Seidler, 2007, 15)

For various reasons it seemed more possible for men of Prakash's age and generation to explore such emotional histories, in this instance in relation to the Kamaiya system. Besides their owners' sometimes violent treatment and the associated lack of food and other necessities, what other aspects of embodied masculinity relating to the Kamaiya system can help to explain the differences between generations of Kamaiya men? Shilling offers a way of exploring this if we accept his notion that the body is:

...seen as an entity which is in the process of becoming; a project that should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity. (Shilling, 2003, 5)

Do the generational differences I observed between Kamaiya men in their accounts of the Kamaiya system reflect the different extents to which these men were able to direct the project Shilling indicates here? This is not to discount the forms of resistance and evident agency that men of all ages exhibited while in the system, but rather reflects how the Kamaiya system was so constrictive of Kamaiya men's bodies, leaving little space for alternative bodily projects.

I now turn to bodily projects following the men's freedom from the Kamaiya system. I begin with a consideration of the everyday forms of embodied masculinity that I encountered in Dhangadhi through discussing the experiences of a number of Kamaiya rickshaw drivers. Now that the Kamaiya have achieved freedom, what are the implications for the vulnerabilities of male bodies and associated masculinities? Their physical vulnerability was previously connected to their relationships with their landlords and consumption (as outlined in Chapter 4). A number of new and different challenges have now emerged such as new forms of consumption and working patterns that place different stresses on the body.

In this section I explore some of the implications of the Kamaiya system in relation to Prakash's embodied masculinity and implications for intergenerational relations between men. Having considered some of the ways in which Prakash remembers his experiences of bondedness, this section has illuminated emotional memories of this time that he shared with me. This provides an important context for the rest of this chapter. Below I consider some of manifestations of embodied Kamaiya masculinity that have become possible since the abolishment of the Kamaiya system. Returning to Wacquant (1995), in some ways the end of the Kamaiya system represents a transition to a different social world which in turn produces different male bodies. To explore one example of the new embodied representations and experiences of masculinity I now consider the embodied experiences of a number of rickshaw drivers who lived in Dhangadhi.

## **Rickshaw Driving and Kamaiya Men's Bodies<sup>57</sup>**

Despite the fact that rickshaws are one of the principal forms of transportation in many cities of Nepal and India, this form of transport and the men who drive them are rarely addressed in the academic literature, with the notable exception of Jan Breman's observation that rickshaws are a relatively recent form of transport in Asia, with those engaged in this activity firmly located in the informal sector (1983, 165). Breman describes the typical rickshaw runner he encountered in Kolkata as follows:

...very young, thin and physically the worse for wear, scantily clad (in faded loincloth or torn shorts and a tattered vest) and with bare feet, bowed by the years of pulling and panting and sweating under his heavy load. (Breman, 1983, 166)

This provides a starting point from which to situate accounts of Kamaiya rickshaw drivers' embodied masculinity. Breman describes the lives of rickshaw runners and drivers and explores the difficulties they faced in order to survive and provide for their families in some detail. Breman's account is reflected in the experiences of rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi in several ways such as the high physical demand and financial insecurity of this type of work; and, as in Kolkata, rickshaw driving is a relatively new form of employment in Dhangadhi, especially for the Kamaiya. It represents a new set of possibilities for Kamaiya men, who until recently had been restricted to masculinities and bodily practices relating to the Kamaiya system of bonded labour.

In interviews with both the district Head and Head of the rickshaw branch of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) I was told that 5841 rickshaw drivers were registered with this union in Kailali, with 90% of these were from Dhangadhi. It was estimated that 10% of the rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi were either

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<sup>57</sup> In this section, and throughout this thesis, I use the term 'rickshaw driving' as opposed to 'rickshaw pulling'. This difference was pointed out to me on a number of occasions by rickshaw drivers, who preferred this term to describe themselves to the more commonly used, pejorative term rickshaw puller. The more common term rickshaw puller implies less agency than rickshaw driver, which was only used by the rickshaw drivers themselves.

not registered with GEFONT or were registered with another union (putting the total number of rickshaw drivers in the city at approximately 6,500). I was told that of the 5841 registered rickshaw drivers, 80% were Tharu (mainly Kamaiya) and 5% were Dalit (15 were of various caste and ethnic backgrounds although there none were Bahun). However, prior to 2000 (before the Kamaiya were freed), the number of registered Tharu rickshaw drivers was around 10% indicating that this has become a significant type of work for Kamaiya men following freedom.

Rickshaw driving is a male-dominated urban occupation, and this section presents the experiences of a number of Kamaiya men who have moved to Dhangadhi from the surrounding rural areas. The majority of the Kamaiya men I met had either moved to Dhangadhi with somebody they knew, or knew somebody already working in the city with whom they stayed. It is rare for rickshaw drivers to live with their families in Dhangadhi, which means that relationships that pre-dated the move to Dhangadhi take on a higher level of importance in Dhangadhi than back in their villages for these men. During my fieldwork period I spent most of my time with one group of rickshaw drivers in a rickshaw garage where rickshaws were repaired and rented from a rickshaw owner, and a number of these rickshaw drivers in the *basti* in Dhangadhi.

I now turn to these social settings and relationships to challenge Breman's emphasis on the relationship between rickshaw runners and their clients (1983). A consideration of embodied masculinity that emerges from the relationships and associated practices considered below illuminates important aspects of these men's lives for which Breman does not fully account. Various forms of competition and collaboration emerge from the relationships between Kamaiya rickshaw drivers that contribute to the meanings that these men attach to their bodies. Below I explore their relationship with other men, including their customers. The following section shows that such relationships are not only formative of these men's sense of masculinity but also shape bodies in these settings.

### **Rickshaws and Embodied Masculinity**

In this section I consider relationships between men and the forms of embodied masculinity that emerge as a consequence of these relationships. In several ways,

rickshaw driving both represents a new image and reality of embodied masculinity in Kamaiya communities. There are important differences between rickshaw driving and the bonded agricultural labour that these men were engaged in prior to becoming rickshaw drivers, principal among which is the ability to choose the type and location of the work they engage in; i.e. rickshaw driving is almost exclusively an urban occupation. Within a focus on men in developed contexts, Victor Seidler suggests:

The gym becomes the new cathedral of body cultures—a space where men can prove themselves able to endure pain. (Seidler, 2006, 5)

Here I consider a different kind of ‘cathedral’ located throughout Dhangadhi’s streets.<sup>58</sup> These streets are spaces in which men similarly attempt to prove themselves by ignoring the pain associated with rickshaw driving. The embodied masculinity considered here is informed by various types of competition between these young men, aspects of which lead to certain practices that have profound implications for their bodies. The competition examined here relates to rickshaw drivers’ frequent and spontaneous races along Dhangadhi’s dusty roads throughout the day. Such races happen only after a passenger is secured (so it helps if the passenger/s are light) and can involve any number of rickshaws at any given time. This brings into focus the relevance of Connell’s argument that performances of masculinity are often for, and in reference to, other men (2005).

It was particularly important for the Kamaiya rickshaw drivers that I spoke to that they were faster than the Indian drivers taking part in the race. Success in these many and frequent races resulted in a form of capital, with specific drivers known as the fastest and the strongest, which, besides making money, which even for the fastest driver was sometimes very difficult to do, is the type of status most revered amongst the drivers. Ultimately, the older and younger rickshaw drivers were not able to compete successfully in these races due to their relatively weaker bodies. This meant that they tended to have relatively low status in the group of men at the garage due to their

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<sup>58</sup> This reflects Radhika Chopra’s (2004) proposition that the street is a masculine arena (although not exclusive to men).

relative slowness along Dhangadhi's congested and dusty streets.<sup>59</sup> Here we see physical capital converted into economic capital through rickshaw driving, as in the boxing in Wacquant's research (1995).

The younger and older men exhibited the greatest tension between their bodies and the image of the successful rickshaw driver. The more successful Kamaiya seemed to have a much closer synergy between the bodies that they had and the expectations of Kamaiya masculinities as they relate to rickshaw drivers. In this way their bodies were important components of male success for this group of rickshaw drivers and the relative frailties of some men's bodies position them further away from the ideal type of body and associated physical capacity one finds amongst these men (Wienke, 1998).

The competition considered here led to a fluid stratification between these Kamaiya men, as even the fastest seemed to lose races frequently although overall they won more often than the others. The races were entirely dependent on physical prowess and the ability to continue peddling through the pain. They were important to these young men both practically, in relation to their livelihoods, and because they contributed to their effort to attain certain masculinities associated with status amongst this group. Paul Higate has identified, in certain groups of men in military settings,

...a particular bodily group identity — a repertoire of bodily actions that symbolised their difference from mainstream military value systems. (Higate, 1998, 90)

A bodily group identity is beginning to appear here: the races corresponded with being considered a successful rickshaw driver, which also meant that the winner was considered both the strongest and the fastest, earning higher levels of respect amongst peers. These ideas of competition directly relate to the Kamaiya rickshaw drivers' relationship with the strength and speed of their bodies and how long they

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<sup>59</sup> The low occupational status of rickshaw driving is complemented by these young men's low caste and class status.

could pedal when a race took place. The significance of these forms of competition and the status they potentially conveyed on the successful is heightened when one considers the relatively lowly position of rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi society. Kamaiya men cannot compete successfully with most other men they meet. The competition between drivers illustrates the importance of their bodies in producing certain masculinities. However, other aspects of their bodies also make an important contribution to their masculinities; principally their ability to ignore (or give the impression of ignoring) the pain associated with the physical demands of their work. Considering pain in this way offers an insight into aspects of Kamaiya masculinities relating to the control of male bodies, this is something that Victor Seidler has also discussed:

...men need to prove their masculinities by showing that they can endure pain.  
(Seidler, 2006, 7)

This is the case for Kamaiya rickshaw drivers and is an important aspect of how they not only prove but also maintain the appearance of their embodied masculinities. A number of rickshaw drivers discussed this with me, describing how being able to keep going all day though any pain was an important part of making a living as well as being successful. To get tired or show pain was to reveal weakness that would in turn lead to lower levels of success, both financially and in terms of their status amongst fellow rickshaw drivers. Pain is integral to labouring and rickshaw driving and is something to which rickshaw drivers have to become accustomed. This results in a type of bodily control that enables detachment from it, as in other forms of exertion in which the goal of the exertion becomes the entire focus of the activity, irrespective of any discomfort (Crossley, 2004), and is part of a spectrum of detachment ranging from (for example) the rejection of certain bodily pleasures to the importance of celibacy for men in various other contexts such as specific religious practices (Alter, 1994). Certain forms of detachment from the body thus become part of the effort to get closer to the embodied masculine ideals that are constantly referred to.

Having discussed how competition between rickshaw drivers is formative in certain practices and how at times discomfort and pain links between this and Kamaiya

masculinities, I now focus on the experience of Upendra, a Kamaiya rickshaw driver, and the ways in which he negotiated between the material reality of his body and the masculinities he was attempting to occupy.

## **Upendra**

Outside rickshaw-driving circles this job is widely considered one of the most undesirable. It does not require any specific skills but does demand high levels of physical fitness and endurance. Partly due to this, all other groups in Dhangadhi treat the occupation and those who do it with some disdain. There is a sense that rickshaw drivers can be treated with contempt in social situations, and I was told of many instances when these young men were victims of crime and mistreatment. This poses a particular problem for them as their sense of being a man is constantly being challenged and subverted by men and women, customers and others. For some, this led to internalisation of a sense of defeat or failure within a broader feeling of sadness expressed in multiple ways, for example in not looking up at all when someone hired their rickshaw. Others seemed less affected, often making jokes at the expense of their passengers.

Upendra is a Kamaiya man around 18 years old and had been living and working as a rickshaw driver in Dhangadhi for about three years when I met him. His occupation was critical to his being able to live and stay in Dhangadhi and important to his identity as a man. Despite a pride in Upendra's job as a rickshaw driver, (which was something that seemed to be quite rare amongst the other rickshaw drivers I met) there were a lot of problems with this job. For example there was significant uncertainty in what would be earned on a specific day. Furthermore, the rickshaw drivers I spoke to had little or no savings or any kind of obvious contingency should they become ill or have to return to their village.<sup>60</sup> Upendra told me that on an average day he would expect to earn around 80-120 rupees. Even to earn such a small amount would take significant amounts of work and effort. There were no guarantees that even if one put in a 14-

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<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, these young men didn't seem to send any money back to their families in their villages although if they were able to they would have certainly liked to do so.



hour day one would actually earn anything at the end of it. It was actually possible to lose money if not enough journeys were secured in a given day.

In many respects Upendra and his friends were unlike any of the other young men I met during my fieldwork. There was both frankness and clarity in how they discussed many aspects of their lives, and they presented a type of recklessness and almost disregard for the consequences of this for their bodies, irrespective of the fact that their bodies are critical to making their living. Consumption was certainly an important part of this (cf. Sharma, 2007b, Chapter VI), especially in relation to alcohol, as I discuss later in this chapter. The tension between their bodies and certain behaviours detrimental to them is interesting in the context of unskilled labourers such as Upendra. Mary Searle-Chatterjee discusses this in relation to road sweepers in Benares:

One might say there is less respect for the body [for those at the bottom of society] as well as less concern for its margins. (1981, 70)

This seems paradoxical, as one might expect those who depend on their bodies for their livelihoods (the sweepers, for Searle-Chatterjee, or Kamaiya rickshaw drivers in this instance) to protect them. As Connell indicates, 'the unskilled labourer has essentially one commodity to put on the market: his bodily capacity for labour' (2000, 64). The higher castes are generally more educated and therefore engage in 'white colour' work, for example in various NGO and government offices; the very few Kamaiya that I met in offices in Dhangadhi were working for specific Kamaiya or Tharu organisations. Upendra was certainly aware of the consequences of his body not allowing him to work; as someone with no savings he would be unable to eat. When I asked him about various behaviours that might increase the likelihood of getting ill, such as drinking and smoking, he was aware of the risk but also knew that the most important challenge he faced was his poor diet, which he was unable to do anything about (despite spending money on drink and cigarettes). How then are we to understand this apparent lack of respect for the very thing that is essential to the maintenance of these men's livelihoods? Closer examination of certain Kamaiya masculinities is illuminating in this regard. It is partly a reflection of the masculine

imperative to ignore pain and the damaging use of their bodies outlined above, but the next section also considers various forms of consumption and the links between these and the attainment of specific masculinities.

Are these contradictions a manifestation of competing forms of capital, where social, cultural and economic capital and associated behaviours may at times supersede physical capital? For Bourdieu (1978, 1984), physical capital (bodily form, capacity, strength and so on) is produced by diet, exercise etc. This is useful here in a number of ways, as Bourdieu's notion of physical capital is exchangeable with other forms of capital in types of exchange such as those that Alter (1992) discusses in relation to wrestling, and Wacquant (1995), to boxing. I argue that masculinities can contribute to a better understanding of the behaviours and depreciation of physical capital considered here. Certain masculinities make exchanges between various forms of capital both desirable and acceptable. As I have shown, a component of Kamaiya masculinities for rickshaw drivers such as Upendra relates to ignoring pain as part of a detachment from the body. This makes the exchange of physical capital for other forms of capital relatively straightforward. Therefore considering certain masculinities helps to explain why the physical capital of men such as Upendra depreciates due to the imperatives of economic capital (and the consumption of commodities such as food this facilitates) as well as social and other forms of capital. I revisit Bourdieu's explanation of capital at various points in this thesis, as it helps in the exploration of how certain performances and behaviours that might initially appear to be contradictory reflect the exchange of and interactions between various forms of capital.

In this initial part of the chapter I have discussed two examples of certain uses of Kamaiya men's bodies and how these inform and are formed by certain masculinities, and the tensions and difficulties that the body can pose in the effort to conform to such images; and I have also referred to how multiple and sometimes conflicting forms of capital contribute to the significance of certain embodied masculinities. Hall, Hockey and Robinson (2007) indicate that masculine subjectivities emerge through embodied efforts to meet certain masculine images. The examples of Prakash and Upendra reflect this, although I argue that it does not adequately account for these men's

subjectivities. Additional processes need to be considered alongside the forms of negotiation and resistance that refer to bodies explored above.

I now move on to consider the consequences of certain forms of consumption for men's bodies. Having discussed some of the tensions between how Kamaiya men's bodies and certain masculinities influence each other, I explore some of the ways in which patterns of consumption further shape and add layers of complexity to the embodiment of Kamaiya masculinity. Below I discuss two forms of consumption, drinking and the use of skin-whitening creams, each of which make different contributions to how Kamaiya masculinities are embodied.

### **How does consumption influence embodied Kamaiya masculinities?**

I have discussed some of the ways in which masculinity is embodied and some of the more recent observable changes in the Kamaiya communities where I carried out my research. There is another, more day-to-day level on which various forms of consumption cumulatively result in changes to how masculinity is embodied by post-bonded Kamaiya men. These result in certain behaviours and patterns of consumption such as drinking, which relate to specific masculinities. Osella and Osella see being an accomplished man able to both work and consume as critical to masculinity in South Asia:

...our ethnography indicates the degree to which a modern 'breadwinner' ideal has come to be the dominant mode of masculinity and reveals that under globalized consumption regimes, the anxieties inherent in this position are ever intensifying. (Osella and Osella, 2006, 5)

Considering the various aspects of consumption that I observed in the groups of Kamaiya men that I lived with complements the following chapter on work and can tell us important things about the dominant Kamaiya modes of masculinity. I begin this section on consumption by exploring how drinking is an important social activity for many of the Kamaiya men I met in both Dhangadhi and Kampur. Drinking is a means by

which to prove one's manhood and has both negative and positive consequences for Kamaiya men. Michael Kimmel indicates that risk-taking is an important component of masculinity (2004) and the use of the body (1987); Beiner situates such risk-taking in relation to drinking:

[Drinking is a] risktaking style which is accepted, if not expected, in men.  
(Beiner, 1987, 335)

Drinking of various kinds has been identified as a significant component of the performance of masculinity in various contexts, including on university campuses (Capraro, 2000), amongst blue-collar workers (Hemmingsson et al., 1998) and in the military (Bray et al., 1999). Investigating drinking and its implications for men can provide certain insights into both masculinity and men's bodies. In relation to Tharu identity, Guneratne (2002, 75-74) indicates that drinking alcohol was an important marker of counter caste hegemony as certain classifications of caste focused on the distinction between alcohol drinking (such as the Tharu) and non- alcohol drinking castes.

### **Drinking**

Like many young Kamaiya men I met in Nepal,<sup>61</sup> Kamaiya men in Dhangadhi enjoyed drinking, often combined with gambling. However the financial restrictions of the Kamaiya group, who had little or no disposable income, meant that they could only infrequently afford to buy alcohol so often made it at home. Kamaiya men and women, as well as some children, enjoy everyday drinking; and drinking is an important part of festivals and most social engagements. Drinking is a theme that features consistently in the Kamaiya men's accounts of their lives, and illustrates an situation in which certain forms of masculinity influence a form of consumption to create particular embodied masculinities, as explored elsewhere (cf. Peralta, 2007).

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61 Drinking was popular with most of the men and some of the women that I met during my fieldwork, although Bahun men often abstain from drinking (at least publicly).

Prakash told me that of all the drinks available in Kampur *basti Jha* was his favourite. It is popular with many Kamaiyas and is a potent, home-made milky-looking rice wine. Prakash had very rarely drunk beer as it was too expensive. The Kamaiya men in the *basti* had limited financial resources and were therefore restricted to drinking various homemade brews such as *Jha*. When there was a little spare money, they tended to spend it on alcohol or tobacco, both of which were popular amongst the men, and especially the younger men, as here and elsewhere in Nepal.<sup>62</sup>

When I asked Prakash's friends and family in Kampur *basti* how they would describe him, many used words such as 'successful' and 'busy'; in conversation people referred to his socialising and frequent drinking. He was one of a small group of young men in Kampur *basti* who often seemed to be having a good time. Many of the other young men in the *basti* looked up to and respected him. As I was told on a number of occasions, drinking was the mainstay of his social life; every social engagement involved drinking and sometimes this would mean that Prakash drank from early in the morning until late at night. When he had some money he would go to the Skype Bar (which I discuss below) with friends, but this was relatively infrequent as it was much cheaper to drink at home or at one of his friends' houses. He made a little supplementary income (apparently to pay for his drinking) through selling bottles of gin, which was popular when someone in the *basti* had something to celebrate such as a wedding or the birth of a child.

Drinking is not new for the Kamaiya. Kamaiya men told me that they drank before they were freed from the Kamaiya system, but now they can drink when and where they want. However, various changes are taking place in relation to both drinking patterns and the ways in which masculinity is performed through drinking. For Prakash, the significance of drinking relates to more than simply the experience and enjoyment of drinking alcohol. It also relates to the types of behaviours and conversations common during periods of drinking that are part of its attraction. The social life associated with drinking is strongly gendered and rich in many ways.

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62 These young men told me they did not use illegal drugs, although I was told by a number of unrelated people that the rickshaw drivers smoke marijuana. I was unable to verify this.

The principal reason for the change in Prakash and his friends' drinking habits was the opening of the Skype Bar, which seems to have disrupted the normative performance and patterns of drinking in which women often participate. While the majority of drinking in Kampur *Basti* still took place in various people's houses, this bar had opened close by and was the site of different performances and social relations. Drinking practices, and the spaces in which they take place, offer men a means of performativity that sustains their masculine identity (Campbell, 2000). The bar represents a new opportunity for such performance. The Skype Bar is a homosocial space. Below, I explore certain masculine performances (or homosocial enactment (Kimmel, 2012)) which largely relate to drinking and are specific to this space.

### **The Skype Bar<sup>63</sup>**

First, some context in which to situate the Skype Bar is required. In Kampur following the signing of the CPA in 2006, a PLA cantonment was established adjacent to the Kamaiya *Basti* on the other side of the east-west highway. Due to the location of the cantonment, the PW seems to have had a more profound influence on the *basti* since the conflict situation than during the PW itself. Consequently, various relationships between young men from the *basti* and those from the cantonment had emerged. These were most often expressed in the competitive expression of specific aspects of physical prowess and strength via certain manifestations of embodied masculinity. The Skype Bar was an interesting setting in which to observe forms of competition between men which have various consequences for their bodies. This brings the analysis back once more to Connell's insight that performances of masculinity are largely for other men (2005), which seems particularly relevant in a male-only setting.

Most of the Kamaiya men from the *basti* viewed the cantonment as largely negative; my impression was that they would have preferred it to be located elsewhere. However, a number of PLA cadres would visit their pregnant wives in the *basti* and so were often around, which led to a few friendships with villagers. These were not Kamaiya cadres but tended to be young Magar men from the hills of far-west Nepal

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63 The name of this bar has been changed.

such as Jumla and Kalikot to the north of Kailali, although a number of Tharu PLA cadres came into the *basti* at various times. I spoke to some of these PLA about the Skype Bar, which was notorious in both the cantonment and the *basti*, not least because there were no similar places around and it was frequented by the PLA, who have a mixed reputation in the surrounding villages. Some cadres I spoke to said they would never go to the Skype Bar. If they drank at all, they preferred to do so in local towns some distance from the cantonment when on leave. Due to the senior PLA cadres' public abstinence from alcohol, the PLA cadres who came to the bar seemed to do so relatively discreetly.

Despite most men in the *basti* viewing the cantonment with suspicion, some personally benefited economically from its establishment, largely through renting out a room in their NGO built house to a pregnant PLA cadre, although some households, such as that of Prakash and his wife, refused to do this under any circumstances. This was partly a response to various rumours about the PLA – for example, that PLA cadres had HIV and therefore some people did not want them close to their children. There were also rumours that the cadres stole eggs from the *basti*. However, the cantonment led to an increase in the number of people buying goods from the *basti* shops, so there were benefits to its establishment for villagers with certain commercial interests.

Despite these relationships, some Kamaiya men consistently discussed PLA cadres negatively. They said that when PLA cadres were in the *basti* they behaved with an arrogance some of younger Kamaiya men found particularly difficult. This was especially true for 'senior'<sup>64</sup> men such as Prakash, who felt that the PLA cadres did not sufficiently respect or acknowledge his standing in the *basti*. More specifically, Prakash found young male PLA cadres coming into the *basti* problematic and challenging, while female PLA did not seem to concern him as much. The presence of male PLA cadres subverted his position and standing as a young man to a certain extent. More broadly, this was reflected in areas of competition between the young men from the *basti* and

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64 This does not simply relate to age but more to standing as a man.

those from the cantonment, although the challenge seemed to emanate more from men in the *basti* than from the cantonment.

The Skype Bar was the place where the two groups of young men expressed certain aspects of their masculinities which I explore here. This was where they could prove their strength through their capacity for drinking and smoking. McDonald points out that alcohol can be used as a means of expressing dominance over other men (1994). As I discuss below, the Skype Bar was a space specifically for young men to consume and compete in. This included drinking, smoking and eating meat, and the men from the *basti* who went there often spoke of nights in the bar when they would drink far more than any of the PLA cadres there. They clearly enjoyed going to the Skype Bar, but could not afford to do so often. I would be interested to see what happens to the Skype Bar as and when the cantonment closes. It was established in response to the cantonment being established, so one would expect it to close with the cantonment. However, the Kamaiya men would be against such a closure as going to the Skype Bar furnishes them with status in the *basti*, despite the fact that when they actually get there it is difficult to keep up with the PLA, both financially and also perhaps in relation to the amount they are able to drink and smoke. But very few people in the *basti* were aware of this, and simply going to this bar made them different from the other young men from the *basti*, most of whom had never been there. This perhaps corresponds to the notion that the Skype Bar is not simply a masculine space but also involves specific forms of embodied masculinity that while most men in the *basti* could not perform all could relate to.

The Skype Bar consists of a roof and walls made of reeds from the local river, a mud floor and the ubiquitous plastic patio chairs of various colours that are found across Nepal. It was a rudimentary space with few comforts: if it rained, one got wet. There was limited electricity, which, when the lights were working, was illegally taken from a nearby electricity line which suffered frequent power cuts. On the walls were several advertisements for drinks and cigarette as well as many images of scantily clad female Bollywood stars taken from newspapers. The room consisted of a number of small booths partitioned by reed walls to one side, and a more open central area with some tables and chairs. The room was small and very atmospheric, and on a busy night could



contain 25-30 men as well as a barman and two adolescent boys who waited on the tables and cleaned.

Other than in the cantonment, drinking happened in all of the locations where I carried out my research. The Skype Bar is an important local meeting place close to both the Kampung *basti* and the cantonment, and is the only bar of its kind for some distance. Establishments such as this are not common in rural Nepal but are more usually found in towns and cities. The bar was around ten minutes' walk from the cantonment gate, towards the back of Kampung village near the rice paddies between the village and the forest. It was opened in 2006 by a local businessman following the establishment of the cantonment, and will most likely close when the cantonment does. The barman told me that he chose the name for its association with a modern computer programme. He was proud of his bar and was clearly making a lot of money from it.

The men who went to the bar tended to drink Diamond, a kind of gin. It was the cheapest drink in the bar and they consumed it, often with water to make it last longer, solely to get drunk. If someone had come into some money (in the case of the PLA, on being paid, and when the Kamaiya and other villagers had finished a large amount of paid labour or sold something), they would occasionally buy a beer, although this was considered something of a luxury as it was much more expensive than Diamond. When someone was briefly well-off they would mix beer and Diamond together to make a disgusting but very strong drink. The brand of beer available was called Tiger Beer, and at 7 per cent it was about twice the strength of the other brands available in local towns. Despite this, I heard a number of complaints that it was not strong enough. This relates to one aspect of embodied masculinity as performed in this bar: one must not only to be able to drink significant amounts of alcohol, but that alcohol must also be as strong as possible. Soft drinks were available, but these were only drunk with a spirit of some sort. Often there was no food available at the bar, and what food there was tended to be meat of some kind or various bar snacks such as peanuts and small packets of dhal. The most popular food, when it was available, was spicy fried goat or chicken, or occasionally venison from the forest, laced with chillies. Having considered some of the principal forms of consumption in the Skype Bar and

the various forms of competition these involved, I now look at the relationships that I observed between the men there.

Using various examples, I have shown how the relationships between men in all male contexts have a profound influence on masculinities (something reflected in research in other settings, cf. Almeida, 1996, Herzfeld, 1985, Osella and Osella, 2006). The Skype Bar was an extremely masculine space and I have not seen a similar place anywhere in Nepal or elsewhere. I never saw a woman in the bar (other than with few clothes on, in pictures pasted to the walls), and when I asked the barman if any women ever came in he simply laughed at me. In the evenings, the room was filled with smoke, sweat and men under 30, drinking heavily. It took some time to get used to the dynamics of the group and my place within it. Initially, as with many of the Nepalis I met, the young men almost unanimously thought I was in the UN or worked for an NGO, as these were the only other types of foreigners who passed through the area due to its remoteness. At first I was uncomfortable, although I was made to feel welcome by the young men from Kampur with whom I went. On my first visit many of the other men in the bar asked me what I was doing and why I was there, in a somewhat suspicious and unfriendly way. As West (2001) indicates, alcohol enables certain gendered expression as well as the potential to contribute to efforts to conform to specific gendered expectations and performances. Drinking helped me to conform to and better understand the gendered performances I encountered here.

Due to financial constraints, a few of the young men from the *basti* went to the bar just a couple of times every few weeks, and more often when they had money; I occasionally accompanied them when living in the *basti*. In the Skype Bar I was consistently challenged to drink more and to smoke by PLA cadres and local (mainly Kamaiya) men, who seemed happy that they could drink more than a *bideshi* (foreigner). I quickly realised that I was not going to be able to keep up, so I did not attempt to, although this resulted in much joking at my expense, mainly revolving around foreign men not being so strong or able to drink as much alcohol as Kamaiya and/or Nepali men. This was good-natured banter directly relating to my engaging, with varying levels of success, with the predominant forms of masculinity and associated forms of expectations of the body in the bar. Peralta (2007) provides the

useful insight here that the ability not only to drink but also to remain in control of one's body is crucial to proving one's strength and masculinity, and that a key aspect of the hegemonic ideal relating to male bodies is the ability to hold one's alcohol. This is part of a wider characteristic of masculinity that conflates 'being a man' to being in control (Garlick, 2010).

I engage with the notion of hegemony below. People went to the Skype Bar to get drunk, and this drinking was competitive, although, as Peralta indicates, it was equally important not to show any of the effects of the alcohol (and thus show weakness). Most of the men who went to the bar both drank and smoked a great deal, but similar amounts were probably drunk in other bars in local towns, which, however, were different in as much as they occasionally had a woman working there or, very occasionally, eating or drinking outside her home. And of course these were urban bars, whereas the Skype Bar was not.

The nights I spent in the Skype Bar were among the most intense, challenging and enjoyable times of my field work. They were useful to my research but very demanding linguistically, socially and, ultimately, physically. My research assistant at the time was a young woman who did not accompany me to the bar, as neither she and nor the men who went there would have been comfortable with her presence. This meant that I could establish male relationships with the men in the bar, although as I didn't go there all the time this allowed me to also develop relationships with those men who didn't go to the Skype bar.

Women were the focus of many of the conversations that took place in the Skype Bar; this was another area of competition between the men, whose discussions tended to focus on who had the highest number of *chwock* (sexually attractive) girlfriends. It was desirable for a man to have as many girlfriends as possible despite the financial implications of this, as it seems that the women often expected gifts and sometimes money when they met up with them. As stated previously, it is clear that there was much exaggeration during these conversations, although the bravado here was quite striking in relation to the masculinity that predominated in the Skype Bar. Unlike most of the other manifestations of masculinity that I observed there, which depended on

men for their validity, this aspect of masculine performance and discourse depended on women.

Drinking stories of various sorts have been identified as expressions of specific forms of masculinity that are misogynistic, young and often aggressive (Schacht, 1996). The conversations in the Skype Bar revolved around women, certain other men, drinking and stories about the PW and Nepali politics, generally in that order. Gough and Edwards have explored these types of male conversations in their research. They show that such bonding talk amongst men often focuses on discourses of subordinate 'others' (1998). While in their research the 'others' were women and gay men, in the Skype Bar 'others' tended to be women, Bahuns and upper-caste men generally. Homosexuality was not mentioned in conversations in the Skype Bar. This complicated Jeffords' (1989) work on masculinity, which indicates that relationships between men of different social standing are possible due to a common inferior other, i.e. women. However, other men as well as women were part of the 'othering' going on here, which produced a sense of camaraderie amongst the men. These men shared a common difference from women as well as from certain other groups of men (which Jeffords does not consider), as I discuss below.

The language commonly used in the bar included swearing of various kinds, often focusing on sexual organs. According to Searle-Chatterjee (1981), such language serves as a mechanism for differentiating low-caste groups from other more 'refined' or 'politer' groups.<sup>65</sup> Partly as a reflection of this, but also as part of the 'othering' identified above, it seemed almost less conceivable to the men in the bar that a Bahun man would ever join them than that a woman would. I now turn to how Bahun men and their bodies were seen, and examine whether thinking in terms of hegemony is helpful in exploring the links between male bodies and masculinities.

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65 There is a resonance here with Philippe Bourgois's (2003) research in Harlem, in which young men responded to their position of marginality through performances of 'promiscuity and conspicuous violence' (2003, 288).

Some Bahun men abstain from various activities in accordance with a specific interpretation of Hinduism (cf. Osella and Osella 2006). Osella and Osella, in research largely based in Kerala, indicate that the body is central to this position:

... [the] goal of final release from re-birth is thought to be achievable only by escape from the bonds of worldly attachment. (Osella and Osella, 2006, 47)

In some sense this is an emotional as well as a physical detachment, and consequently self-sufficiency is a vital part of these men's spiritual journey (ibid: 48). Bahuns and men (and especially Bahun men) apparently do not form physical or emotional attachment to others as much as women, children and lower castes (ibid, 48). This is also reflected in the ways that the Osellas view the ways these men consider wealth:

Bahun men disdain, at least publicly, accumulation of material wealth, focusing instead on possession of ritual knowledge and education. (Osella and Osella, 2000, 121)

These insights, while referring to a different context, indicate the importance of the body in both practice and identity, in this instance through the rejection of various bodily pleasures. This, when contrasted with the accounts of drinking detailed above, raises a number of questions, principally around what can be considered the hegemonic form of masculinity and the male body in these social settings.

Osella and Osella (2006, 6) explore this crucial question in relation to Malayali men. As outlined previously, their analysis initially combines Connell (2005) and Dumont's (1980) positions to reach a perspective indicating that Bahun men and Bahun masculinities (referring to purity cf. Dumont) can be considered the hegemonic form. However, their material does not entirely correspond with this conclusion. They find that Malayali men and their style of masculinity represent a counter-discourse to Brahmanic masculinity that relates not to weakness but to direct opposition (2006, 50). Central to this counter discourse is a different set of values that relate to different embodied masculinities of which drinking is a part. This raises the following question:

...does this mean that we have two versions of hegemonic masculinity? One appealing mostly to the hegemonic ideals of control and detachment [Bahun] and the other appealing to equally hegemonic ideals of non-vegetarianism, sociability and providing for the family [Malayali]? (Osella and Osella, 2006, 51)

As Osella and Osella indicate, the notion of hegemonic masculinity points towards a singular dominant model of masculinity. All other, subordinate masculinities are configured against this background, which explains why subordinate men are complicit in their position of subordination. However, the Osellas' material does not reflect this. They indicate that multiple forms of hegemonic masculinity were evident (which is not possible, according to the theory), consolidating the notion that hegemonic masculinity was not an appropriate way of thinking about masculinities in the case of Malayali men.

However, I argue that the account Kamaiya men's bodies and associated masculinities in this chapter represent in some instances (such as drinking) a challenge to Brahmanic masculinities, but one that doesn't represent a subversion of the hegemonic position of these masculinities. As I have shown in this chapter, this relates to Kamaiya men's bodies and their uses and abuses of them that in some instances reject, while at others embrace (and in some senses appropriate) certain aspects of Brahmanic masculinities. Therefore, one cannot view embodied Kamaiya masculinities simply in terms of a counter-discourse as the interactions between Kamaiya and Bahun masculinities are more complex than this.

This section has shown that bodies and embodied conceptions of masculinity must be central to any consideration of masculinity. I return to these questions in depth towards the end of the thesis. However, to extend the analysis of Kamaiya embodied masculinity further, I now turn to a different form of consumption: skin whitening and its implications for Kamaiya masculinities and bodies.

### ***Fair and Handsome – Kamaiya Men and Skin Whitening***

Bollywood cinema makes an important contribution to specific forms of embodied masculinity by providing certain images of the male body (Derne, 2000, Liechty, 2003,

Mazumdar, 2000, Osella and Osella, 2004). Reflecting this importance of cinema, I now turn to the influence of various Bollywood stars on Kamaiya embodied masculinity. Connell talks about similar processes in relation to Hollywood which also resonate in relation to Bollywood. With the international growth of Bollywood one would expect its importance to increase over the coming years:

So at the symbolic level there is not a simple homogenization of masculine embodiment. Rather there is a patchwork of increasing complexity, as more and more forms of masculinity are brought into contact, and some of them interact. (Connell, 2000, 65)

Kamaiya men are now exposed to a completely new range of masculinities that were simply not possible previously. They mainly relate to Bollywood, but one could also now also include PLA masculinities. In this section I reflect on the use of skin-whitening creams promoted by Bollywood stars and the images of masculinity that male Bollywood stars are thought to exemplify. The following section provides an insight into how both the everyday lives of Kamaiya men and idealised visions of Kamaiya masculinity are shifting in a broader context of regionalised images of men's bodies. Such changes were inconceivable prior to the freeing of the Kamaiya.

In this section I briefly outline how skin is important in embodied gendered identities before moving on to consider how various companies have sought to market a range of skin-whitening products to men. Finally, I consider the consumption of and response to such products on the part of a number of Kamaiya men. This will facilitate an exploration of the influence of such marketing efforts in changing patterns of the embodied Kamaiya masculinity, in the context of specific forms of racially defined notions of the male body.

I initially focus on India, not least because there are no manufacturers of such creams in Nepal and therefore all such products and the marketing associated with them emanate from there. Of all the locations in which Glenn considers skin-whitening

products, India emerges as the largest market (2008).<sup>66</sup> Anyone picking up an Indian magazine or newspaper or watching Indian television will be familiar with many of these products through the numerous advertisements promoting them. According to AC Neilson, a consumer research company, in 2010 the market for skin-whitening cream in India was estimated to be \$432million, with an annual growth rate of 18%.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, with the growth of the Indian middle classes and its significant disposable income, the popularity of skin-whitening products is expected to grow considerably over the coming years.

Some interesting research has been undertaken in India focusing on colourism, a type of social hierarchy based on gradations of skin tone within and between racial/ethnic groups (Glenn, 2008). Glenn sees the growth in the popularity of skin-whitening products as reflecting the increased significance of colourism in a range of settings. Furthermore, Glenn states that light skin operates as a kind of social capital, especially for women. She discusses the importance of female Bollywood stars in this, but not the emergence of the male market for these products and the use of male Bollywood stars to promote them. As a consequence of my focus on men and embodied masculinities, this section directly challenges the proposition that it is mainly women are concerned with such issues and that they are the principal consumers of skin-whitening products. This is reflective of a wider 'dubious equality' between the sexes that Monaghan (2005) explores in relation to body modification, which implies that men are becoming increasingly influenced by certain bodily images and associated pressures in the same way that women are.

Analysis of how masculinity and the consumption of skin-whitening creams by Kamaiya men makes it clear that men are very much concerned with skin colour. Whether they use these creams or not, they were a topic of conversation amongst Kamaiya men. The

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66 While the precise contemporary meanings of British colonialism on colourism in India are unclear, Arnold (2004) explores some of the colourist/racist attributes British colonisers during the colonial period. In relation to the colonial period in India, O'Hanlon (1997) explores aspects of continuity of masculinities pre and post this period.

67 Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8546183.stm> [accessed 3rd September 2011].



products raise some difficult questions about race and masculinity that I explore below. Connell helps to frame the discussion that follows:

The formation of masculinities and the meaning of men's bodies is persistently connected with the racialization of global society. 'Race' was—and to a large extent still is—understood as a hierarchy of bodies, and this has become inextricably mixed with the hierarchy of masculinities. (Connell, 2000, 61)

What does skin-whitening mean for such hierarchies and for the Kamaiya men negotiating them? Following Gill et al. (2005), it is considered a specific form of bodily modification and reflects Shilling's (2003) insight that the more we know about bodies, the more it is possible to change them.

Consideration of the ways in which masculinity is embodied for the Kamaiya men who use skin-whitening creams provides a counterpoint to the notion that skin colour is more a concern of women. The marketing executives of the corporations producing these creams have also identified this, as men are now being targeted as a significant potential market for their products. Skin-whitening products specifically for men emerged in India some 27 years after the launch of similar products for women. This section critically explores the implications of these changes for embodied masculinities. To contextualise such processes the following accounts are situated in a broader framework in which notions of masculinity are increasingly shaped by global processes:

Conceptions of Masculinity and masculine bodies are increasingly become more global, and this occurs as the media and multinational corporations penetrate the remotest regions of the planet. (Gerschick, 2005, 371)

Considering the popularity of products such as skin-whitening creams in Kamaiya communities will illuminate not only certain facets of embodied Kamaiya masculinities but also certain perspectives of global capitalism which contain evident racial undercurrents. While a range of skin-whitening products was available, the Kamaiya men discussed one specific product, Fair and Handsome, most frequently. The

promotion of this cream in newspapers, on billboards, on television and at the cinema was dominated by leading male Bollywood stars such as Shah Rukh Khan and John Abraham.



**Plate 5 - Shah Rukh Khan promoting Fair and Handsome<sup>68</sup>**

These actors are very well known in Nepal, and the advertisements and products were widespread even in most remote of locations such as Kampur.<sup>69</sup> Partly as a consequence of such advertising, representations of male bodies have become 'a pervasive feature of the visual landscape' (Gill et al., 2005, 6). Consequently, it is clear that the consumption of skin-whitening creams by a broad range of mainly young Nepali men, including Kamaiya men, is becoming increasingly common.

While these products are undoubtedly popular and commonly used, there is a certain amount of controversy associated with them. For example, in order to promote the launch of its skin-whitening products for men, Vaseline launched an app on Facebook which enables users to upload photographs of themselves and lighten their skin colour

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68 To view the Shah Rukh Khan Fair and Handsome advertisement that regularly featured on Nepali television during my fieldwork period, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqtWUezP8VA> (accessed July 2011)

69 There is a broad range of whitening products available including creams, aftershave, deodorants etc...

to see what their faces would look like if they used the cream. Such forms of promotion caused some debate in India, with some Bollywood stars such as Aishwarya Rai Bachchan openly opposed to them, due to the perception they did not promote natural beauty. The debate raises a number of questions about why some men use such creams and what this means for their embodied masculinities.

I discussed this debate, and skin-whitening more broadly, with a range of Kamaiya and other men and some women during my fieldwork, as it seemed to be a relatively new influence on embodied masculinity. Firstly, significant class distinctions emerge in relation to the consumption of these creams, as many men cannot afford them. Many Kamaiya men have little or no disposable income, and they tend to spend what little they have on alcohol and cigarettes and so are unable to buy these products, although sometimes they share them. The cost the cream varies considerably. Prakash and Basanta's shop in Kampur stocked only the smallest and cheapest tube of Fair and Handsome (30ml). Prakash told me that a number of both men from the *basti* and male PLA cadres regularly came to his shop to buy it, although when the PLA cadres did so they were never in uniform and bought it discreetly.

The use of these creams cannot simply be associated with emergent forms of embodied masculinity. Some men would not discuss it with me at all, exhibiting evident discomfort when I brought it up in conversation. With men who did not use the cream, I am not sure whether this was simply a reflection of their limited financial resources or a reflection of the growing pride and assertiveness in Kamaiya communities. One young man told me that to lightening one's skin made one look more like a Bahun, which he viewed as undesirable. He was very proud of being a Tharu with the skin colour he was born with. This has important implications for embodied masculinity and the way in which Kamaiya masculinities refer to other, more dominant masculinities for a number of reasons. Primarily the rejection of the vision of 'light-skinned' Bahun maleness is an interesting response to the Bahun's dominance in this area of Nepal.<sup>70</sup> I detected an ambient note of rejection of such forms of

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70 For more on the social superiority of Bahuns and the reliance of this superiority on subordinate groups, please see Fuller (2004).

embodied masculinity, partially as a response to the years of oppression in the Kamaiya system, often at the hands of Bahun landowners. In some ways these men's rejection of skin whitening is a rejection of a certain image of a certain body and the dominance of a certain (Brahmanic) image of maleness. I now consider an opposing view, i.e. that of the men who used such creams.

Kamaiya men's experience of skin-whitening creams is more complex than indicated above. Despite the resistance to and rejection of skin whitening explored above, I did talk to Kamaiya men who used such products. Could this be considered a response to a perceived inadequacy of their bodies? And does this indicate that, despite the growing assertion of Kamaiya male identity and pride associated with such masculinities, in some ways there is an undercurrent of inferiority? Such questions lead me to ask why these men viewed their bodies in a way that resulted in the use of such products in an effort to change them to overcome perceived bodily inadequacies. The section below investigates the source of this insecurity.

While a relatively small proportion of the men in the Kampur *basti* used skin-whitening cream, the Kamaiya men in Dhangadhi used it more readily. As both groups of men had little disposable income the potential to buy such products was limited. Grogan (1999) discusses various forms of dissatisfaction with their bodies in both men and women, with men focusing on the requirement for muscular bodies.<sup>71</sup> This section discusses how skin colour is also part of this requirement for some Kamaiya men. This bodily dissatisfaction is configured in culturally specific ways and with reference to images of the male body which, in this instance, relate to certain skin colours and that multinational corporations are exploiting. I now turn to one Kamaiya man who used such creams.

Dipendra, a Kamaiya rickshaw driver who lived in the *basti* in Dhangadhi with Upendra, had a small and evidently well-used tube of Fair and Handsome in the room he shared with five or six other rickshaw drivers. When I asked why such creams were seen as

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71 While Bollywood stars have well-muscled bodies these aspects of male body image did not seem to matter significantly in my field sites.

desirable, the adjective 'fresh' was used repeatedly. The feeling the men who used whitening creams got when they used them was consistently described as fresh. It made them feel good, confident and attractive. Although in some ways Dipendra was a little coy about his use of Fair and Handsome, he did not hide the cream in his room. When discussing this with me he told me that although all four rickshaw drivers with whom he shared a room told me that they did not use the cream, they sometimes took some of his. He was sure that they all used it and that if they had had more disposable income their consumption of it would increase.

Dipendra was under the impression that using these creams to lighten his skin would make him more popular with girls. I asked him directly whether his use of skin-whitening cream meant that he viewed those with lighter skin as more attractive and consequently more successful with women, and he responded by talking about his favourite Bollywood star, John Abrahams. The advertisements promoting the creams were all over Dhangadhi and the use of Bollywood stars to promote them seems to be an effective marketing approach. For Dipendra, the possibility of looking more like a Bollywood star (and for him, looking like John Abrahams in particular) promotes these products and is an important component of using them. He simply wanted to look more like his favourite star; popularity with women would naturally follow. When I asked him about the similarities between the skin tone of John Abrahams and that of the Bahun men in Dhangadhi and suggested that in fact his use of the cream might be an effort to look more like them he strongly disagreed. For him, it had everything to do with Bollywood and nothing to do with looking more like a Bahun. At this point I mentioned that Bollywood is dominated by higher caste (and Muslim) actors, so it was very likely that John Abrahams and most of the other Bollywood stars he liked are Bahun anyway.

However, I am not sure that Dipendra's narrative about his use of skin-whitening products is coherent. On reflection, the circumstances of these conversations have a lot to do with these specific responses. All conversations with the Kamaiya rickshaw drivers in the *basti* in Dhangadhi often started with one rickshaw driver. However, on almost every occasion other rickshaw drivers, neighbours and other people whom I did not know joined or listened to the conversation. In some ways this also fragments

notions of a dichotomy between public and private space, as there appeared not to be a great deal of private space for these men, which influenced how Dipendra was able to discuss personal issues such as his use of skin-whitening cream. Although he would not necessarily have given a different account of the reasoning behind his use of the product (or behind some of the other things we discussed) if we had been able to meet in isolation, he was only able to talk with me about such matters in certain ways. Given the anti-Bahun sentiment amongst many Kamaiya people, it was important for Kamaiya men to reaffirm the otherness of Bahun men whenever they could, as in the Skype Bar. This left very little room for talking positively, especially in group settings, about Bahun men or their bodies and skin-tone being desirable or attractive. Bahun women were not discussed at all. This is despite and in response to the dominance of Bahun men in Nepali society and the recent legacy of many Kamaiya, such as Dipendra, being in a situation of bondedness, often under Bahun landowners. Therefore Kamaiya men's use of skin-whitening products illuminates not just a facet of embodied masculinity for these men, but also how various masculinities with certain historical trajectories interact with each other.

To further situate Dipendra's position I now consider whether his use of skin-whitening cream can be seen as a corporeal reflection of Sankritisation. By illustrating the fluidity of the caste system and the expansion of Hinduism, Srinivas developed the notion of Sankritisation:

Every caste tended to imitate the customs and ritual of the topmost caste.  
(Srinivas, 2003 (1952), 30)

Guneratne borrows this well-known concept of Sankritisation to explore such processes in Tharu communities. However, he conflates Sankritisation with both Hinduisation and Nepalisation to explain the same sorts of changes from different perspectives (2002, 88). Srinivas outlines a concept of sankritisation in not a particularly gender-sensitive way, and Guneratne does not consider this at all. Above I have reported how Dipendra uses skin-whitening creams to try to meet the embodied ideals of Bollywood stars (who are Bahun) or Bahun men closer to him. This is despite him denying doing this. This appears to correspond to an embodied form of

Sankritisation. The inroads made across Nepal by global and regional images of beauty now make it possible to observe such embodied dimensions of Sankritisation that were previously unclear.

Skin whitening is an important feature of the lives of many men on my fieldwork sites, and not just those who use such creams. Is the use and prominence of skin-whitening products for men indicative of a different type of body consciousness amongst Kamaiya men? Seidler considers this in relation to men watching their weight and dieting (2006, 62), and I argue that the recent growth of a male market for skin-whitening products reflects a new and relatively recent form of body consciousness. Of all the groups I talked to, Bahun men seemed to use the cream more than any other. Here masculinity, race and a certain form of corporate activity combine to create a specific embodied manifestation of colourism.

In this section on skin whitening I have discussed how these creams and the advertising promoting them represent a specific challenge for Kamaiya men's sense of embodied masculinity, although this challenge has different implications for different Kamaiya men. More broadly, the use of such creams complements Monaghan's research into how men are becoming increasingly subject to the same sorts of bodily pressures and expectations as those affecting women (2005). This section helps to illuminate some of the images of men's bodies and how reality is often quite different. Morgan states that male bodies are often considered along the following lines:

...[male bodies] tend to be represented as hard and aggressive, an 'over-phallusised picture of man'. (Morgan, 2002, 407)

Considering male bodies in some ways as the opposite of 'hard', 'aggressive' etc., and as sites of tension and difficulty seems to be reflective of the realities, although not the images, associated with Kamaiya men's bodies. As the example of Dipendra illustrates, negotiating these difficulties produces an aspect of his masculinity. Skin whitening, which subverts normative representations of the male Kamaiya body, is one insight into this process. In one sense, the use and popularity of such creams constitute an effort by those who use them to resolve such tensions and to change their bodies to

bring them closer to images of the male body that they see as desirable. This is perhaps more useful than Morgan's (ibid) 'over-phallusised picture of man'.

In this section I have discussed various forms of consumption and their implications for embodied masculinities to show that through various practices, masculinities influence and are influenced by men's bodies and their changing everyday embodied lives. Some of these practices produce physical capital to which the everyday lives and practices of Kamaiya men are often detrimental. I now examine the deterioration of physical capital for Kamaiya men through an exploration of ageing and ill health, and the implications of both for embodied masculinities.

### **In what ways are the normative images and realities of Kamaiya men's bodies questioned?**

I have explored some of the ways in which Kamaiya masculinity is embodied and complicated through various forms of consumption and shifting images of the male body. I now consider some of the ways in which embodied Kamaiya masculinity is both questioned and in some ways subverted. To guide the analysis, this section of the chapter employs Bourdieu's (1978, 1984) notion of physical capital, as previously outlined. This is a useful way of thinking about bodies and helps to explore the decline of male bodies and the loss of physical capital through ageing. Lastly in this section I discuss a Tharu-specific, gendered form of healing (*Guruwa*) to explore some of the ways in which Kamaiya men's bodies can increase their capital.

As Hall et al. indicate, ageing and ill health have important implications for men and their bodies:

Ageing and ill health ... emerge as aspects of men's working lives which bring embodiment powerfully into focus. (Hall et al., 2007)

While we have seen that a constant process of negotiation in everyday situations and practices forms configurations of embodied masculinity, age and relative health status provide a different insight into the embodied lives of Kamaiya men. Leder (1990)



complements this position with his discussion how ageing and ill health highlight how the body is taken for granted, or dys-appears. Connell's male athlete, who is constantly aware of his body despite being at the peak of fitness and wellbeing, contrasts with this:

Steve's whole person has become caught up in practices that centre on his body and its performances. (Connell, 2000, 78).

Perhaps the implications of ill health and ageing are more complicated than Leder and Hall et al. would lead us to believe. For those who explicitly rely on their body to make a living, such as athletes, or in this instance, labourers of various kinds, bodies seem to be at the forefront of male subjectivity.

The accounts of Kamaiya men below indicate how ageing and ill health constitute a certain type of tension between men's bodies and their masculinities. In some ways, ageing temporarily disrupts the doxa or stability (or appearance of stability) between bodies and masculinities until a new doxa is achieved. For Bourdieu doxa is the:

...quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and subjective principals of organisation, the natural and social world appear self-evident. (1977, 164)

Ageing represents a constant reconfiguration of the 'correspondence', or appearance of harmony between men's bodies and their masculinities, which, as I discuss below, they respond in different ways to produce various masculinities that more closely relate to certain ages. I have shown above that while there is an ambient harmony between the male body and masculinities, there are constant tensions between Kamaiya men's bodies and Kamaiya masculinities. This section explores two processes that influence these tensions. Ill health and ageing highlight the inherent frailty and weakness of male bodies (Butler, 2004) which engagement with the prevailing forms of masculinity attempts to obscure. Before considering injury and embodied masculinity, I consider how ageing influences physical tension and produces the masculinities that are the central focus of this section.

## **How does Ageing Influence Embodied Kamaiya Masculinities?**

In this section I explore the implications of ageing for certain (mainly religious) processes that contribute to defining what 'older' means in the Kamaiya communities considered here. Initially I discuss Sarah Lamb's framework for ageing and bodies, which gives a specific account of how ageing is socially constructed and given meaning (Lamb, 2000). Lamb uses the focus on ageing to explore how bodies are culturally constructed in much the same way as gender is (Lamb, 2000). Following this, I look at what ageing means to both younger and older men in Kampur.

Sarah Lamb's (2010) research in North India explores various aspects of ageing in often illuminating ways. For Lamb, ageing and its implications appear in various physical manifestations such as 'greying hair, weakening, cooling'. For Lamb 'cool' (old age, death, widowhood) and 'hot' (marriage, sexuality, passion, anger) correspond with Bengalis' 'social-bodily conditions' (ibid, 14-15). 'Cooling', or 'drying', relates to a stage in the life cycle when the elderly become peripheral in the household and expect younger family members to look after them (Lamb, 2000). Although Lamb focuses on women, some important aspects of her work consider ageing in relation to men. Age is shown to have important meanings for different men:

While young men move freely around the village, spend hours at leisure reading newspapers, have spare cash to spend in the tea-shop, play soccer and go for picnics and care very much about their dress style, old men live much more curtailed lives. (2000, 192)

[Older men] are simple in dress, often shoeless, with little or no economic responsibility or power and increasingly confined to the household. (2000, 207)

Lamb argues that ageing (or cooling) makes men and women more alike, indicating that gender differences are unstable and changing throughout the life course. Following her framework on ageing, this section explores the implications of the 'cooling' process (or, to return to Bourdieu, decline in physical capital) in Kamaiya communities. I look at how older men respond to the ways in which ageing is socially

constructed by exploring certain changing religious practices. Throughout this section I respond to the question of whether 'cooling' and the decline of the importance of the gender difference with age constitutes a useful way of thinking about the material on ageing that I am presenting here. Does this kind of convergence take place in Kamaiya communities? In the Bengali community in which Lamb undertook her research, ageing was defined in relation to one's position in the life cycle and had little to do with years (ibid). This was strongly reflected at both my fieldwork sites, with very few respondents knowing or seeming to care how old they were. However, their position in relation to other Kamaiya was heavily influenced by their age.

This section focuses mainly on certain differences between older and younger groups of men in Kampur (there were no older Kamaiya rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi, as all the men there had to be fit enough to drive a rickshaw all day). While my material largely relates to men aged 14 to 35, there were many instances in which the older male body was important to masculinities. These often created nuances in the ways men related to each other. I now consider how ageing and ageing bodies are influential in the relationships between men in Kampur *basti*.

Prakash is a relatively young man of around 23 or 24. Both he and his family are unsure exactly when he was born, and this only seemed to matter when dealing with state officialdom or foreign researchers. While specific age did not seem to have much significance in the *basti*, relative age did, although there were certain limits and exceptions to the correlation between age and standing in the *basti*, or what can be called the gerio-centric social structure. Prakash is an example of one such exception, as despite his relative youth he was highly regarded and had a high level of social capital in the *basti*, due, to a great extent, to his physical capital.

When I first entered the *basti* I was surprised to see that Prakash was highly respected despite his youth, and that he had a high position of responsibility as the *basti's* committee leader when there were a significant number of other and older men who, I assumed, were more eligible for such positions. In part this was due to the way in which Prakash's masculinity was embodied. Of all the men in the *basti*, he seemed successful in negotiating the tensions between the reality of this body and the

prevailing images of masculinity in the *basti*. This means that the physicality of his body (that it was extremely fit, strong, hard etc...) corresponded quite closely with how men were expected to look in the *basti*. This impacted on how he was viewed and helped to propagate the notion that he was a successful man.

Despite these perceptions of success and aspects of leadership there were arenas of life in the *basti* in which Prakash was more considerate of social hierarchies based on his age. The main area in which he was deferential to older men in the village related to religious matters. Alter indicates the importance of considering the body in relation to religion:

Everyone who has studied Hindu life has to some extent noted the importance of the body in ritual, health, cosmology, and everyday life. (Alter, 1992, 24)

The following section on ageing explores it from this perspective. In our conversations about religion, Prakash seemed ambivalent about it, perhaps in reference to his relative lack of status in this area compared to the more political and economic forms of capital in the *basti* – aspects that relate to different age-differentiated forms of embodied masculinity. As Osella and Osella remind us:

...when thinking about 'men' and their positions of dominance, we are really thinking about younger men. (Osella and Osella, 2006, 18)

Male dominance is associated with the sorts of bodies and masculinities that young men perform, as I have discussed previously in this chapter. In religious practice in Kampur *basti*, however, one sees masculine order determined along the lines of age (and certain bodies). Older men are associated with the highest levels of religious knowledge and wisdom. In some ways this could be viewed as the older men's transition from an emphasis on physical to one on spiritual capital. Bourdieu identifies three manifestations of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalised (1986). If we accept that spiritual capital is a form of cultural capital, this provides a way to situate such exchanges as these take place between different manifestations of spiritual capital (Verter, 2003).

Religious ritual and specific forms of embodied masculinity intertwine at a number of levels in Kampur *basti*. Principally elderly men carried out the religious rituals, in which younger men and women do not have a role. The religious practices here reflect what Nettleton and Watson describe as a consequence of the process of ageing which contributes to the construction of new identities:

... ageing may involve an awareness of the physical body and associated attempts to construct narratives about one's new social world. The world has to be constantly 're-made' as one's body alters within it. (Nettleton and Watson, 1998, 13)

One response of the older Kamaiya men to their changing and ageing bodies seems to have led to changes to the religious practices that become part of their new social world as they become older. The distinctions in relation to regular worship and ritual at the Tharu house shrine (which seemed to happen on most days) are subtle but have a range of significance in relation to the influence of religion on both embodied masculinities and the influence of age within Kampur *basti*. The rituals associated with elderly men consolidate this group's position as the more frequently the head of the household, but this is configured along spiritual and not economic (and associated physical) parameters. I asked a number of the older men who had Tharu house gods why men were so predominant in these rituals, as in many other areas of life in the *basti* responsibilities seemed to be shared more, including in areas such as childcare and labour. I was told that men had always undertaken these roles, and that because elderly men no longer worked they had more time to consider and contemplate religious matters and were best placed to undertake the Tharu religious rituals (mainly discussed here in relation to Tharu house gods).

Lamb has explored the consequences of ageing in relation to reductions in certain aspects of power:

... peripherally granted senior men and especially women [receive some] increased freedoms. [However], becoming peripheral within a household was

accompanied by losses along many of the same dimensions – of space, transactions, and power. (Lamb, 2000, 58)

Older men in Kampur told me that younger people, who work, cannot consider religious issues properly as they are busy making money and providing for the family; i.e. they are occupied with accumulating social and economic capital. However, the older men's response to becoming more peripheral in their households and losing power along the lines Lamb indicates above appeared to be to see their role as providing for their families spiritually. Such changes directly relate to bodily function and the declining physical capital of older men.

Of the three religions found in Kampur *basti* – Hinduism, Buddhism and the Tharu religion<sup>72</sup> – the older group of men tended to gravitate towards the latter, although the boundaries between these religions are permeable, resulting in a complex combination of religious practices. Certainly the older men seemed to be most engaged with religion generally, and more specifically with the religious rituals associated with the Tharu gods of the house and the forest and other gods. They focused more on Tharu religion for a number of reasons, not least that Hindu positions of religious leadership and responsibility are taken by the higher (Bahun) castes and by definition are unattainable for Kamaiya men.<sup>73</sup> The Tharu religion offers an opportunity for them to develop meaningful masculine roles and (spiritual) capital in the *basti* despite their declining physical capital. In some ways, then, while specific to older men this represents a kind of inversion of sankritisation through a refocus on the Tharu religion.

The refocusing on Tharu religion by these men is in contrast to the ways in which Mary Ann Maslak (2003) considers such processes in her research on the Tharu. For Maslak, Tharus in fact strive to assimilate upper caste traditions in the hope of achieving higher social status (ibid, 149). However, the older Kamaiya men I am discussing here reject

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72 Buddhism seemed to play a relatively minor role within religious practice in the bastis.

73 This is further illustrated by the temple in the middle of Kampur basti being Bahun established, so no one from the basti had ever gone into it.

such links through their preference of Tharu religion. As I will outline below the situation is different for younger Kamaiya men who in contrast to the older men profess a preference for Hinduism.

Younger men's status in the *basti* is not determined by religion but more by their income and the bodies that produces this income: i.e., their physical capital. More broadly, the distinction between younger and older men also reflects the different engagement of men of different ages with the wider processes of modernity. As previously bonded labourers, such processes take on a particular significance. The younger men such as Prakash and Upendra have far greater employment and education opportunities than the older generations, as a consequence of living more of their lives having been freed. This appears to have changed some of their aspirations. Many of the younger men do not aspire to be associated with any form of religion, and if they do profess a belief, it tends to be in Hinduism. Their aspirations are focused on joining the mainstream job market and the economic benefits this can bring.

I now turn to one specific masculine role – that of the Guruwa<sup>74</sup> – to further consolidate the notion that ageing bodies produce new, gendered social worlds, of which the Guruwa represents a specific example.

### **Masculinity, Religion and Health: The Guruwa**

In this section I consider the Guruwa and the ways in which they consolidate the perspective outlined in the section above: i.e. that age produces certain forms of embodied masculinities (through religious practice, for example). The Guruwa have been part of Tharu society for as long as anyone could remember in either *basti*, with various edicts referring to the role as far back as 1807 (Krauskopff and Meyer, 2000, 160). Whether they should be considered as shamans, traditional healers or priests is not clear, as at different times they seem to undertake parts of what might be expected of each of these roles.

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74 The spelling of this term in English seems to vary significantly, with variants including Guruwa, Guruwar and Gurua.

The Guruwa are always male and always elderly because, as an elderly man in Kampur *basti* told me; ‘All the Guruwa are men, as men are good at this. Look at the pharmacist, too.’ I had not thought of this link across the various forms of medicine, but it illustrates an important gendered continuity. All the *bastis* and Tharu villages that I visited in Kailali had at least one Guruwa, and each of my case study *bastis* had one. In both instances, these were elderly men who were accorded a certain level of respect in their setting due to their knowledge of spiritual and health matters. The wider Tharu community often referred to the Guruwas’ knowledge of traditional Tharu customs, as being the most knowledgeable about such customs is part of their role. This was respected in the *basti*, particularly given the recent revival of pride in traditional Tharu customs resulting from the Tharuhat movement. Guruwa are rarely involved in politics as such matters are seen as incompatible with their focus on health and spiritual concerns.

Guruwa are mainly consulted about health matters, but occasionally they also advise about spiritual issues or concerns relating to Tharu culture. According to Guneratne:

The Guruwa is essentially a healer. When Tharus wish to draw an analogy between the Guruwa and a contemporary institution, they invariably compare him to a medical doctor. (Guneratne, 1999b, 12)

The Guruwa’s work as a healer is not confined to intercession with gods and spirits to discover the cause of illness; the Guruwa also seeks to cure disease through the medicinal use of roots and herbs and other skills. (Ibid, 13)

I spent some time with the Guruwa in Kampur *basti* and observed him practicing. His practice mainly consisted of minor rituals to alleviate minor aches and pains such as backache. The rituals were designed to make the *budh* (ghost or witch) leave the patient and thus alleviate the pain and refer to a specific cosmology (cf. Guneratne, 1999b, McDonough, 1984).



I now turn to how the Guruwa are situated amongst various health systems. Subedi found that Nepalis often use herbal remedies before turning to a traditional healer. Modern medicine and health care:

... are only sought as a last resort, usually for the serious and persistent problems. (Subedi, 2003, 155)

This indicates that traditional and modern forms of medicine are both used flexibly and interchangeably, indicating a medical plurality (Kleinman, 1980, Pigg, 1992, 1996). Although Subedi does not explore the reason, cost is an important influence here. Seeing a Guruwa does not always incur a cost, whereas using modern medicine does. However, I am not sure that Subedi's point regarding the primacy of faith healing across Nepal is reflected among the Kamaiya, as certain changes are happening here that I explore below in relation to the position of the Guruwa in Kamaiya communities.

Guneratne subverts Subedi's position by indicating that many of the Tharu with whom he undertook research often turned first to western medicine, which is taking on greater significance in Tharu communalities (Guneratne, 1999b, 12). According to Guneratne, the two forms of medicine complement each other:

Women are likely to have more faith in the Guruwa than are men, particularly younger men with some education. Both men and women however will have recourse to both doctor and Guruwa treat illness. (Guneratne, 1999b, 13)

Guneratne indicates that this gender difference is due to women being less exposed to outside influences as they are more rooted in the village, where the Guruwa plays an important role. Men travel more, and are more likely to be educated than women. However, this does not seem to be why the Guruwa is exclusively a male role. One learns to become a Guruwa by training with an existing Guruwa for a number of years. The training is offered without charge and the Guruwa cannot turn down anyone who asks it. I was told several times that women never approach the Guruwa for training, as a female Guruwa is inconceivable. I asked a number of young men whether they were interested in becoming a Guruwa, but none were. The importance of the Guruwa

is being eroded, perhaps particularly in relation to health and spirituality; however, they seem to be becoming more involved in consultations about Tharu culture. I view this as a decline in a certain form of embodied masculinity which I analyse below in relation to a particular Guruwa. This decline ultimately represents the decline of a certain vision of the Tharu body, as well as the associated ways of healing it:

Belief in the efficacy of the Guruwa is in decline among Tharu generally (but less so among women than among men). Nor are young men interested in taking up the calling. (Guneratne, 1999b, 14)

Alongside the shifts in religious practice outlined above there is also a decline in the importance of the Guruwa with regard to the rituals they are traditionally expected to perform on occasions such as marriages and deaths. Guneratne states that some Tharu ask Bahuns to undertake these duties rather than the Guruwa (1999a):

The balance of ritual power has shifted in the direction of the Bahun and the cultural tradition he represents, as Tharu society has become more Nepalised (and thus Hinduised). The Guruwa on the other hand, like the tiger, has become a threatened species in Chitwan.<sup>75</sup> (1999b, 20)

Bahun priests are now able to stay in the Terai all year, due to the eradication of malaria, and the associated clearing of forests has had a profound impact not just on Tharu (and Kamaiya) hunting and gathering practices but also on cosmological considerations:

The traditional cosmology of the Tharu is closely bound up with the existence of forest. Tharus believe for instance that the destruction of the forest has weakened their traditional gods, who drew their strength from the jungle. (Guneratne, 1999b, 19)

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<sup>75</sup> Chitwan is also a district in the Terai, although more central in Nepal than Kailali.

Despite these insights, Guneratne does not consider how gender or masculinities might make an important contribution to his analysis. Therefore, I now turn to what these changes mean more explicitly for Kamaiya embodied masculinities. Do the changes explored above refer to a wider process of sankritisation? What do they mean for the various religiously-informed manifestations of masculinity discussed above? Furthermore, what does this mean for the older men in Kampur *basti*, for whom the Guruwa and Tharu religion are important references? And how has the Guruwa in Kampur *basti*, who I was able to get to know reasonably well, adapted to the erosion of the importance of this role and position in Tharu society? Below I discuss the Kampur Guruwa to explore these questions.

### **The Kampur Guruwa**

I met the Guruwa in Kampur on a number of occasions. He may have been the oldest man in Kampur. As one of the more prominent people in the *basti*, it was important for me to meet and spend time with him to secure a sort of approval, as I realised quickly that this was a person who I needed to respect. In Kampur he seemed to be uniformly respected, and when he walked around the *basti*, people acknowledged him unlike anyone else and watched what he was doing with interest. They seemed to accept his behaviour, which was sometimes eccentric, as he was a man who knew things that the other villagers did not (a certain interpretation of Tharu culture and history). In a way the Guruwa's role constitutes a specific form of cultural literacy (Bourdieu, 1977) that is intertwined with the certain masculinities. He dressed much like anyone else of his age in the *basti* and lived with his family, although he seemed detached from them; he told me that he was very focused on Tharu spiritual matters and that his family were less important to him. Perhaps because of how young and old villagers viewed and talked about him with reverence, there did seem something special about this man.

The various performances that constitute the position of the Guruwa create a specific constellation of masculinity and spirituality. The Guruwa represent a specific form of masculinity and masculine power in the *bastis* and were particularly targeted by

Maoists during the PW.<sup>76</sup> The Kampur Guruwa told me that this was a particularly difficult time for him, as Maoist cadres had beaten him up more than once, and it had been difficult for him to practice his rituals openly during the PW. This illustrates the importance and prominence of the Guruwa at that time: they represented a certain type of spiritual challenge to PLA cadres. Maoists are strongly anti-religious, and spiritual leaders such as the Guruwa represented a 'valid' target during the PW.

The Kampur Guruwa drank and smoked much like the other men in the *basti*, although similarly to other men his age never in the Skype Bar. There were certain aspects of his behaviour that corresponded with more mainstream masculinities in the *basti*, although in relation to spiritual and health matters he was unique. When I asked him why he had decided to become a Guruwa, he told me that he had always been interested in spiritual matters, and particularly in his rich Tharu heritage. The timing of his becoming a Guruwa is interesting: he had decided to take the training when he was no longer able to work as much as he had previously. His body and physical capital seemed to have been profoundly affected by his many years of bonded labour in the Kamaiya system. One could see, in his frail body, the hardship of extremely long hours of demanding work and a poor diet. He told me that being a Guruwa enabled him to transcend the negative and lasting physical results of being a bonded labourer. His focus on spiritual matters helped him to replace the negative implications of his damaged body with the more positive and less physically demanding role of a Guruwa. This is an interesting variation on Leder's (1990) view that the body is taken for granted, or dys-appears, until aging and/or ill health bring it more strongly into focus. This Guruwa responded to the changed appearance of his body through ageing and ill health by focusing on spirituality in an effort to make his body dys-appear once more. I do not know whether he was successful in this, but he certainly wanted to give the impression that he was full of vigour and energy in public situations to an extent specific to him. According to him, this vigour and energy was a direct result of his becoming a Guruwa and embracing his Tharu heritage. This highlights a specific

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<sup>76</sup> I met a number of Guruwa in other villages and bastis who had had similar difficult experiences during the PW.

example of the way in which ageing bodies and masculinity coagulate into a certain embodied masculinity in Kamaiya and Tharu communities.

Over the course of a number of conversations, I came to see how this Guruwa situated himself and was situated amongst various hierarchies and forms of capital. His position initially reminded me of the criticism of Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity outlined previously by refereeing to the Osellas research (2006): i.e. that the Guruwa represents a counter discourse to Brahmanic hegemonic forms of masculinity. However, after further examination this appeared not to be the case. This is a consequence of the instances in which the Guruwa's performance of masculinity referred to Brahmanic masculinities (for example, in the ways he positioned himself as a spiritual reference point in the *basti*) but these performances didn't subvert the hegemonic status of Brahmanic masculinities.

Here I am concerned with the local level<sup>77</sup> of hegemonic masculinities a level at which, once more the notion that Brahmanic masculinities are hegemonic and as such the reference point for many (but not all) performances of masculinity by the Guruwa. Despite this there are some significant disconnections that relate not solely to differences in the performance of certain religious practices but to also to other performances and practices (such as drinking and smoking) that appear to have little to do with Brahmanic masculinities. However, such disconnections cumulatively do not constitute a counter-hegemony.

When I discussed with the Guruwa the inroads that Brahmanic religious practices have made into the Tharu communities, as Guneratne mentions above, he seemed ambivalent about this, and for that matter about modern forms of medicine as represented by the local pharmacy. The ambivalence indicated here indicates that this performance would like to be seen as a counter-discourse, but due to the position of weakness and marginality from which this comes as the Guruwa are only really

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77 Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 849) outline three levels of hegemonic masculinity; local (typically found in ethnographic and life-history research), regional and global.

influential in their *bastis*, and when a Bahun man would enter the *basti* they would be inferior there too. This marks a key difference in the masculinities I am considering here, from the example of Malayali masculinities that the Osellas explore (2006, 50), which come from a quite different position i.e. one more of strength and direct and consistent opposition. Having considered the Guruwa in Kampur *basti* and the ways in which the performances of masculinity that respond to but don't subvert Brahmanic masculinities, I now conclude this chapter with a consideration of the central arguments that have been made in this chapter.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter began with a consideration of the embodied masculinity in the Kamaiya system prior to July 2000, and went on to discuss Kamaiya men's transition to freedom and the associated changes in their embodied masculinities. Upendra's experiences as a rickshaw driver illustrated the changes in how Kamaiya masculinities are embodied following freedom. I discussed the implications of various aspects of consumption and associated changes in the interplay between men's bodies and masculinities. These forms of consumption illustrate how the relationship between Kamaiya men's bodies and the prevailing ways in which their masculinities are constituted is changing. Finally, I explored some of the influences disrupting the tensions between Kamaiya men's bodies and Kamaiya masculinities by considering their ageing bodies and their implications for religious practice. This results in older Kamaiya men focusing on Tharu religious practice. Bourdieu's notion of physical capital has been particularly useful throughout this chapter, especially in guiding the analysis of how physical capital can be, and is, exchanged for other forms of capital. Kamaiya men's physical capital has consistently declined, previously through exploitative working patterns and currently through physically unsustainable work and poor diet. However, their responses to the decline in their physical capital are far from uniform, and are influencing the broader changes taking place in Kamaiya religious practice.

This chapter has shown how the distinct social worlds of bonded labourers and rickshaw drivers produce certain bodies, reflecting Wacquant's work on boxers:

...specific social worlds invest, shape, and deploy human bodies. (Wacquant, 1995, 65)

Bodies produce certain masculinities that produce certain bodies in a cyclical process, although we have seen various instances where changing practices are modifying these processes in what Connell (2009, 67) calls social embodiment or body-reflexive practice. I have explored these through consideration of everyday practices such as drinking and various forms of labour that have important implications for men's bodies and masculinities. This led to a focus on embodied masculinity, which is where bodies and masculinities meet to provide a position from which Kamaiya men negotiate various positions from which we can begin to understand their embodied subjectivity.

A number of the men that I met showed significant pride in their bodies, especially when it was clear that they were stronger and 'better' than those of other men – for example my own, those of PLA cadres or 'weak' Bahun men. While all men's bodies are problematic in some respects, especially when they age or are injured, they can also be a source of pleasure and joy. While the male body emerges as a site of tension, this does not mean that Kamaiya men are alienated from their bodies, as Haldeman suggests (1996, 144). On the contrary, they engage with them both as a source of strength and sustenance and at times of weakness. For the Kamaiya men discussed in this chapter, the body is a site of negotiation with various forms of masculinity. As I have shown, such negotiations are productive of certain masculinities; and certain masculinities are productive of certain bodies.

This chapter has shown how Kamaiya men's bodies are subject to certain pressures that mainly to meeting certain expectations relating to the ways in which normative Kamaiya masculinities are considered. The Kamaiya man has to have a certain body to meet certain masculine ideals and successfully compete with other men in specific settings. Physical strength, virility and control over their bodies emerge as important corporeal aspects of Kamaiya masculinities that many Kamaiya men constantly appear to be trying to achieve, with varying degrees of success, and which, like other aspects of masculinity, are never fully achievable. This is something Judith Butler has also noted:

...bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled (Butler, 1993, 2)

This chapter has considered various aspects of embodied Kamaiya masculinity in this context. I have shown through exploring activities such as drinking and the masculinities that relate to drinking, and the performance and position of the Guruwa present counter-performances that reject but don't subvert Brahmanic hegemonic masculinities. This should also be considered alongside the formative ways in which Kamaiya masculinities in *Kampur Basti* relate to PLA masculinities (I explore these throughout chapters five-seven). Conversely, this chapter has illustrated instances in which Kamaiya men are relating and referring to Brahmanic embodied masculinities. Dipendra is a good example of this, as his use of skin whitening products on one level is to admit that lighter, Bahun skin colour is more desirable. This clearly relates to a vision of masculinity shaped by the Bollywood (Brahmanic) bodies and masculinities he considers desirable. However, Dipendra's behaviour could be considered a reflection of sankritisation, or perhaps of a form of sankritisation that in this instance has a very embodied form. Ultimately, some Kamaiya men such as Dipendra are attempting to move closer to the embodied Brahmanic ideals of masculinity, while others such as Prakash and the Guruwa seem ambivalent about this or were in fact in some ways rejecting this.

At the local level<sup>78</sup> this chapter has begun to point towards a perspective on masculinity that considers Kamaiya masculinities as being shaped through their rejection and/or embrace of certain (but not all) aspects of Brahmanic masculinities, a perspective that broadly works within Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity

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78 Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also outline the regional and global levels at which hegemonic masculinity can be explored. This chapter has shown that their notion of hegemonic masculinity at the regional level also has resonance for Kamaiya men's lives and masculinities as portrayed here, but I do not have the space to explore this in any depth. The regional level is the level of culture or the nation-state as illustrated here through exploration of the importance of Bollywood masculinities (which are hegemonic at the regional level) and the products that its stars promote, such as skin-whitening cream.



(2005). This chapter illustrates that men's bodies have to be a major part of understandings of Kamaiya masculinities and these interactions between different masculinities. In the next chapter, I explore how changing patterns of work and types of movement are reconfiguring aspects of Kamaiya masculinities.

## **Chapter 6 - Kamaiya Masculinities, Work and Mobility**

This chapter focuses on various aspects of work and masculinity. First, I connect masculinity and work theoretically, to provide a framework within which the various components of the chapter can be analysed. My central argument is that changing working patterns are producing a range of new masculinities in Kamaiya communities which can be difficult for Kamaiya men to achieve. These changes are primarily as a consequence of this group of formerly bonded labourers leaving this system and encountering a local modernity in which certain opportunities are available that were not within the Kamaiya system. Cecile Jackson, in one of the few considerations of men and work in a Development Studies context, identifies a need for:

...ethnographies of work which enquire about how masculinities are performed, reproduced and reformulated in everyday working practices.  
(Jackson, 2001, 19)

The chapter partially unfolds from this perspective, I consider the cyclical process in which new working patterns produce certain masculinities, which in turn produce certain working patterns. This reciprocal relationship has important implications for many aspects of Kamaiya men's lives. I also illustrate how it is possible to find out a great deal about male subjectivities by understanding the work that they do.

Work is an important component of masculinity (for example, Cockburn, 1983, Jackson, 2001) and, as I show below, work of certain types can represent parts of the transition into and out of certain masculinities. Men in a diverse range of locations are considered men through their work and how it facilitates meeting the expectations of 'breadwinner' masculinities. I critically engage with the notion of the Kamaiya breadwinner below. Morrell and Swart indicate that men in the Third World's 'masculinities are centrally constructed around work' (2005, 102).

This raises the question of why work is so important for masculinities. Jeff Hearn (1999) locates a response to this question in relation to the appeal of work through some of the benefits and problems that working masculinities can bestow:

Work is a source of power and resources, a central life interest, and a medium of identity, as well as being a source of worry and concern. (Hearn, 1999)

This is a response to the central question explored in this chapter: if masculinity and work are important for each other, why is this so? I discuss why some types of work appeal to some men more than to others to show how a range of new work-related masculinities are emerging in Kamaiya communities. For example, education and literacy are now potentially available to Kamaiya men, which emerges as shaping new masculinities within Kamaiya communities that rely on education and literacy to bestow gendered notions of success and masculine competence. This is an interesting time to consider the Kamaiya in this context as they have so recently been freed from the Kamaiya system of bonded labour, which by definition restricted their opportunities to engage in diverse types of work. More broadly this chapter considers the ways in which post-freedom Kamaiya masculinities are changing and adapting to the expectations associated with the dominant modes of masculinity that many poor Nepali men try to perform (such as 'breadwinner' or 'householder', modes that Osella and Osella (2006) have explored in research in Kerala). However, I explore not simply the links between work and masculinity but also how the workplace is important for certain manifestations of masculinity. Ava Baron discusses this in relation to working-class masculinities:

Research now demonstrates that the workplace is a key site for the construction of masculinity and male identity. (Baron, 2006, 143)

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the workplace is often a space in which certain masculinities are performed, for instance the streets in which Dhangadhi works as a rickshaw driver. This refers to the relational nature of masculinity, as workplaces are places where men spend significant amounts of time these are important settings in

which masculinities are forged. Work featured prominently in how the men in my field sites presented themselves to me; furthermore, they often asked me about my own working practice in some depth. If we accept that work and the workplace are important for masculinities, we must also ask how lack of work can be problematic:

In the rural cultural milieu, masculinity is linked to the ability of a man to protect and materially support a family. An unemployed man is an emasculated one at best. (Chowdhry, 2005, 5192)

...unemployment has been accepted as one of the major challenges to masculinity. (Morgan, 1992, 99-119)

The experiences of Kamaiya men that I discuss in this chapter provide a new insight into the implications of unemployment for men. When I asked several Kamaiya men about the nature of unemployment in the Kamaiya system they seemed to find the idea inconceivable. No one could remember ever being unemployed as by definition as a slave this was quite irrelevant. Furthermore, within the system Kamaiya labour was not seen as work in the same ways that work is considered after freedom (something this chapter explores in some detail). Kamaiya men are learning about employment and unemployment, largely for the first time, as such they now have similar experiences to most other poor Nepali men.

Finally, if work (and unemployment) and the workplace are key considerations for masculinities, what are the implications of the systematic change for working patterns, that the end of the Kamaiya system represents? I discuss whether we are beginning to observe the emergence of Kamaiya 'breadwinner' masculinities that can be difficult to attain. Colette Harris addresses this question in research on Tajikistan:

The image of man as virile provider is also not unproblematic today with so few employment opportunities (Harris, 2004, 127)

This process is interesting in relation to the Kamaiya as it allows reflection on how a group of men who were previously largely not subject to such 'breadwinner' pressures are responding to these pressures and expectations of them as men.

The negative implications of the Kamaiya system for how Kamaiya men were positioned came up in a number of meetings with Banshi Chaudhary,<sup>79</sup> the chairperson of a Kamaiya NGO, KPUS. I quote directly here from a presentation I was given by Banshi about the KPUS and the situation of the Kamaiya:

In Tharu Language, the term 'Kamaiya' means a breadwinner or earner of the Family esp. a male person but unfortunately it lost its originality and freedom; and spoiled the meaning.

There is a sense that expectations of men in the Kamaiya system were subverted and that the Kamaiya owner was seen as the provider because the Kamaiyas' activities under the system were not considered work. In the Kamaiya system the men's activities were largely restricted to meeting the demands of their owners, principally through agricultural labouring of various kinds. The principal manifestation of working masculinity in the Kamaiya system subverted the notion of the Kamaiya breadwinner. That Kamaiya men were previously 'providers' is difficult to establish in the Kamaiya system, although there is a clear suggestion from the KPUS that prior to the Kamaiya system<sup>80</sup> the men were considered breadwinners. This chapter shows how the old expectations of Kamaiya men are reemerging, partly as a consequence of their freedom.

As various links between masculinity and work have been established, if one can identify changes in working practices and locations, such as the changes associated with the end of the Kamaiya system or the Maoist PW, one would assume that there

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79 Banshi is quite an interesting young man, whose story of overcoming the oppression of the Kamaiya system and getting an education against the odds. In some regards he is one of the leading Kamaiya politicians in Kailali.

80 No one I spoke to seemed to know when the time prior to the Kamaiya system emerging actually was.

would be related changes in masculinities. This chapter explores changes in how masculinity and work influence each other in three main areas. The first section looks at how changing patterns of land ownership and work impact on masculinities in the framework outlined above. The second and third sections extend the analysis to two related areas – literacy and mobility/migration, both of which directly affect the relationship between Kamaiya masculinities and work. In the three sections below, then, I explore the emergence of a range of new masculinities related to these changes. Ultimately I consider whether the changes in working patterns result in work constituting a scene of constraint in which masculinity is ‘done’ and ‘undone’ (cf. Hall et al., 2007); or whether work has the potential to liberate and empower men and open up a range of subject positions and associated benefits. In conclusion, I discuss how while there is a re-emergence of the Kamaiya breadwinner, this is very difficult for most Kamaiya men to achieve. Cumulatively, the three main sections of this chapter describe the reconfiguration of what it means to be a Kamaiya man who provides for his family. I explore the issues involved in this change in the next chapter.

Before moving on to consider the implications of literacy and mobility for Kamaiya masculinities, I first consider how changes in land ownership and the Maoist PW led to the emergence of new manifestations of Kamaiya working masculinity.

### **How are working patterns changing following freedom<sup>81</sup>**

Changes in working patterns and practices emerge as a result of multiple processes. This section focuses on two recent events that facilitated a range of new working practices and masculinities; the end of the Kamaiya bonded labour system in 2000 and the Maoist PW (1996-2006). This situates this section in a wider debate relating to the nature of freedom in bonded and post-bonded labour (Brass, 1990, 1994, Brass and Linden, 1997, Breman, 1974, 2003, Breman et al., 2009, Prakash, 1990).

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81 In the previous chapter I explored rickshaw driving in some depth, hence I have not included it in this section to allow more space to explore other new forms of work and associated masculinities. I return to rickshaw driving towards the end of the chapter.

Following Ramachandran (1990, 170), if we accept that 'free' wage labour and bonded labour are different positions in a continuum of servitude, where do Kamaiya men lie on this continuum since the abolition of the Kamaiya system? In some ways they are closer to the free wage labourer, although, as this section shows, in certain regards aspects of Kamaiya working lives are similar to the working practices and associated levels of servitude that prevailed in the Kamaiya system. This chapter illustrates how freedom has conferred both certain opportunities as well as constraints for Kamaiya men. Closer consideration of masculinity in this context highlights how gender is critical to such changes. Post-bonded labour practices in Kamaiya communities have resulted in manifestations of Kamaiya masculinity that were previously neither visible nor attainable. This section provides an perspective on the wider debate about the nature of post-bonded labour in a framework in which gender is central. One way of looking at such issues is by examining how land and land ownership are becoming markers of Kamaiya masculinity: following freedom this has been an area of considerable change for some Kamaiya.

### **Land Ownership and Rural Kamaiya Masculinities**

As Radhika Chopra (2004) indicates in relation to agriculture, certain forms of 'hard physical work' are an important part of achieving 'manliness'. This seems to be the case for Kamaiya masculinities both during and after the Kamaiya system. Therefore, hard work remains an important part of Kamaiya masculinities following freedom, although this is achieved in slightly different ways. These changes are reflective of Kamaiya masculinities moving from being defined by the Kamaiya system to being more informed by poverty (in ways that are similar for many poor Nepali men). The importance of hard work, relates more broadly to some of the ways in which farmer, or rural masculinities, are normatively composed:

The good (male) farmer is tough and strong, able to endure long hours, arduous labour and extreme weather. (Little, 2002, 666)

While this has remained important for Kamaiya masculinities, the whole family has remained involved in agricultural work following freedom, so there are important aspects of continuity in working practice (which will be considered in more detail in the

subsequent chapter). Many Kamaiya are involved in the same sort of agricultural work as before, though working on their own land or for wages rather than working for an owner. Furthermore, a small number of Kamaiya men have become wage labourers on their previous owners' land, although the demand for such labour has decreased with the mechanisation of agriculture. It should also be noted that while I did not encounter this, there are consistent reports that there are Kamaiya living in situations of bondedness that have remain unchanged despite the legal cessation of the Kamaiya system.<sup>82</sup>

Having outlined continuity in relation to types of work during and after the Kamaiya system, I now look at some of the ways in which working practices have changed for Kamaiya men following their freedom. This section is related to landownership, which is perhaps the most important marker of freedom and emerged as a central concern for many Kamaiya. Owning land is implicated as important for masculinities in several studies (Jackson, 2003, Watson, 2000). Jackson sees this in relation to certain forms of provision:

Male identification with provider roles and expectations is also connected to land and masculinities. Provision is not only about the production of a daily food supply, but also about intergenerational provision of heritable land assets for sons. (Jackson, 2003, 463)

This again raises interesting questions about communities that until very recently had no or very little land, either to grow food on immediately or as an asset to pass on to subsequent generations. I was told that within the Kamaiya system, Kamaiya worked on landlords' land and the landlords would then give each Kamaiya a certain (considered small) amount of rice as payment for their work. Occasionally within the system, Kamaiya also had a small piece of land (given to them by their owner) on which they grew a small amount of additional food. Ultimately within the Kamaiya

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82 Kamaiya organisations such as the Freed Kamaiya Society (FKS) and KPUS consistently highlight this point.

system it was the owner and not Kamaiya men who were seen as the provider for Kamaiya families.

Have the Kamaiya who received land from the state, such as the families in Kampur, now begun to view it as part of the way they are supposed to provide (and be) as a man? For the men in Kampur *basti*, having something tangible to pass onto their sons was clearly important, as their fathers had not been able to do this. Owning land seemed to be an important marker of being freed, a way to prove ones freedom from the Kamaiya system. However, the poor quality and small quantity of the land that Kamaiya families have received might subvert the importance of land to masculinity when seen in relation to provision. Each of the 25 households in Kampur received 5 kattha<sup>83</sup> of land from the state. While this land provides some crops for the household, it is insufficient to feed a family all year round, so additional income from alternative sources (mainly daily wage labour and hunter-gathering) is required.<sup>84</sup> While many Kamaiya men in Kampur were proud to show me their cultivated land (particularly as this was a tangible illustration of their freedom) there was a sense that it was not enough. The state provides a small amount of land in very marginal locations, often a long way from any market; this is not adequate to prove one's worth as a man through the various aspects of provision highlighted above.

This section has shown that land is important for Kamaiya masculinities, although this importance complicated due to the kind of the land they Kamaiya are receiving from the state (if they have received land at all). Amongst the Kamaiya community there is a belief that they are entitled to land from the state; many Kamaiya men told me that more than anything, they wanted enough land to farm and feed their families. Following freedom, the land they owned was not sufficient to provide for their families, and this created an imperative to pursue other ways of providing for their family and proving their worth as a man. However, while some Kamaiya men now own land this cannot fully account for Kamaiya working masculinities: from the wider

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83 This is a measurement of land used in Nepal, 5 *kattha* equates to 0.15 hectares.

84 There was a broad consensus that the amount of land given to settled Kamaiya families was not sufficient.



perspective, changing patterns of agricultural labour in India are associated with higher levels of work outside agriculture (Breman, 1993, Rao, 1999). Having explored land and masculinities here, I now consider how the Maoist PW led to the emergence of a range of masculine identities that have little to do with land ownership and agriculture. In the section below I explore the ways that joining the PLA represented a new opportunity for work and breadwinning for some Kamaiya men.

### **What are the implications of the Maoist PW for work related Kamaiya masculinities?**

This section explores the implications of the Maoist PW in relation to work considering the opportunities that the PW and subsequently a post-conflict political mobility, the Tharuhat, provided for Kamaiya men. Barker and Ricardo (2006) discuss how some young men see joining an insurgency as a way of earning an income as well as attaining more power, particularly in contexts of rural poverty. In the Nepali context such links emerge as problematic, as following this argument one would assume that those from poorer backgrounds would be more likely to join the PLA. However, a closer analysis of the composition of the PLA indicates that Bahuns were overrepresented and Tharu underrepresented (as was outlined previously in Chapter Four). Additionally, income in the PLA was and remains relatively low, at around 3000 NRS a month. While some Tharu and Kamaiya men joined the PLA, this was not necessarily a consequence of a rational choice relating to generating income. There are clearly other factors at work here that relate to other aspects of masculinity and power, which I return at the end of this section.

Prior to the PW and the growth of the PLA there had been very low levels of recruitment into the Nepal Army, which was far from representative in relation to ethnicity;<sup>85</sup> and it has only recently started to accept female recruits. For the Kamaiya men who joined the PLA, it represented an opportunity that had not been available to

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85 According to official figures in 2009 (Nepal Army, 2012) there were 4343 i.e. 4.76 percent Tharu/Chaudhary/Rajbansi in the Nepal Army (NA), while Bahun/Chettri were overrepresented as they constituted 52 percent of the NA's numbers.

them prior to the emergence of the PLA: soldiering as an occupation.<sup>86</sup> To explore this in more detail I now present Ramesh, a Kamaiya man who had been a PLA cadre who I met on a number of occasions.

### **Ramesh and the emergence of soldiering/political Kamaiya masculinities**

Ramesh was a 23-25-year-old ex-member of the PLA who had been involved in many battles during the PW. In some ways he represents a new type of highly-politicised masculinity in Kamaiya communities that confers a range of benefits upon him that are not just economic. Ramesh told me that he had joined the PLA because one of his friends was joining and he did not want to miss out. Like all the other PLA cadres I spoke to, he never mentioned any assumed financial benefits or considered himself coerced into joining (despite both these factors potentially being influential). His reasons for joining seemed to be that he was bored in his *basti* and wanted excitement. He told me he wanted to do something besides just digging the fields. Ramesh downplayed the risks associated with joining the PLA, although he was aware of them. Ramesh provides an insight into risk-taking as a way of proving masculinity, Connell (2000, 188) has explored this more broadly in relation to working-class men and their work. A different way of thinking about why Ramesh joined the PLA relates to how it facilitated his exploring and proving aspects of his masculinity, within a context in which this represented a new livelihood opportunity for him. As such this section indicates that soldiering in the PLA represented an expansion in potential working masculinities amongst Kamaiya men.

Ramesh had not been much interested in politics before joining the PLA, but was energised by the political education he received there. During the PW Ramesh rose to the position of battalion commander leading about 100 PLA cadres. He enjoyed this position of power as it carried significant responsibility (with associated higher levels of pay), and he was keen to continue in this sort of role in the Tharuhat. Such positions of responsibility and power were unattainable for lower class Tharu men prior to the PW. The war had been an exciting and interesting time for Ramesh. He told me that

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<sup>86</sup> I did meet a small number of female Kamaiya former combatants although the vast majority of the current and former Kamaiya (and Tharu) PLA combatants I met were male.

while he did not enjoy fighting he found it, and being in the PLA, easy, and did not remember it with any difficulty or distress. He seemed very proud of the fact that he had killed many people during the war and, unlike the vast majority of the other cadres I spoke to, knew that he had killed. When telling me that he had killed many people, both he and his companions laughed for some time. I asked him why they were laughing about something so important, and Ramesh told me that as many of his comrades had been killed, he did not care at all about the enemies that he had killed. He had survived, and he looked back on those times in a way unlike that of anyone else I spoke to. He spoke about his experiences in almost jovial terms. He told me on several occasions that while being in the PLA was hard at times, generally he had had fun. Perhaps this was because he was now detached from the overarching ideological discourses within the PLA, where such narratives would have been disapproved of.

Ramesh told me that the signing of the CPA and establishment of the cantonments had resulted in his decision to leave the PLA in 2008. Ramesh had lived in Kampur PLA cantonment, but had left due to the boredom he felt there and was very critical of the place. He was no longer able to engage in the same sort of activities or work that he had done previously, and the lure of a new group specifically focusing on Tharu issues where his PLA experience could be utilised more actively and with clearer and more tangible results, proved too strong a pull. Similarly, Laxman Tharu (the Tharuhat leader and ideologue) had moved from a senior position in the PLA to form the Tharuhat following the signing of the CPA, providing inspiration for a significant number of Tharu to leave the PLA. The reasons for Ramesh leaving were multiple, but broadly it was because he wanted both to leave the PLA and to join the Tharuhat, where he could maintain or even increase his status.

Furthermore, he had found the transition from moving around the hills and plains of far and mid-west Nepal to the cantonment difficult. He had been to areas of Nepal he had never seen before, from the far western border, to Pokhara towards the east in the Western Development Region. Ramesh had not travelled far prior to joining the PLA, and this was certainly one of the attractions of joining. I return to mobility in the final section of this chapter.

He talked at some length of his boredom and frustration at being restricted to the cantonment. He had resented the fact that some cadres were chosen to leave the division and join the Young Communist League (YCL) on the work of the PW while others remained in the cantonment. He still greatly missed his comrades in the cantonment, but realised that leaving as he had meant that he could not be in touch with them again. It seemed to have been a difficult and traumatic decision, as it meant losing contact with the comrades with whom he had become very close during several years of fighting and living together during the PW. In the cantonments it was seen as the ultimate betrayal: not all desertions are the same, and leaving the PLA to join another political group, irrespective of whether the new group is violent or not, is the worst by far. Sadly, despite the fact that I met people in his battalion, none would talk about Ramesh. More broadly, people in the PLA were not willing to discuss desertion at all.

Many of the groups and organisations that have emerged in post conflict Nepal such as the Tharuhat have formative associations with the PLA and, more generally, with the PW. Critically, this has opened up a range of employment opportunities for young men leaving the PLA who join these groups. This partially reflects what Barker and Ricardo pinpoint as one of the problems of post-conflict situations; that alternative employment options may not be seen as desirable (2006). Wendy Hollway's (1984) notion of 'investment' helps in exploring the continuity of Ramesh's behaviour more deeply. For Hollway, investment is somewhere between emotional commitment and vested interest, and relates to both the perceived and real benefits that a specific position provides. Ramesh invested in his role as a PLA cadre and was able to maintain this investment through joining the Tharuhat. This provides a richer way of thinking about why he continued to pursue dangerous types of work which also relates to his leaving the PLA and how he viewed those he left behind.

Ramesh saw those who had remained in the PLA in the cantonments as complacent and lacking engagement with the issues that had originally inspired most of them to join up. He considered remaining in the PLA as of little value and boring. Moving to the Tharuhat enabled him to carry on the work he had started when he joined the PLA. Many members of the Tharuhat that I met echoed his scepticism about the PLA and

UCPN(M) improving the Tharu situation. Ramesh believed that the PLA had reneged on its promises to the Tharu and other marginalised groups, as there was little or no representation of the Tharu at senior levels in the PLA or the UCPN(M). Ramesh used an example often mentioned in these discussions: the marginalisation of Laxman Tharu, the Tharuhat's leader, as a clear example of discrimination against the Tharu by the UCPN(M). However, as I explain below, a number of other reasons relating to how he valued certain forms of employment and associated masculinities contributed to his leaving the PLA.

In the areas of Kailali where this research was undertaken in 2009, the Tharuhat movement<sup>87</sup> had significant influence among the groups that have emerged in post-conflict Nepal, and to an extent this movement represented a employment opportunity for certain Tharu men with certain experience. Ramesh's narrative about moving from the PLA to the Tharuhat highlights the importance of specific masculinities in relation to certain forms of activity and helps to explain why he made the move. He remained focused on his soldiering career; his background in the PLA made him eligible to become heavily involved in training the Tharu Army.<sup>88</sup> Ramesh was unforthcoming about some aspects of his role in the Tharuhat. He talked of many other Tharu who had left the PLA to join the Tharuhat and were involved in the same sort of training as he was. Other than this, he refused to be drawn on some of the links between the Tharuhat and the PLA, other than saying that Laxman Tharu's example had inspired many Tharu in the PLA to leave, although he would not give me the exact number of ex-PLA in the Tharuhat. Working for the Tharuhat was immediately less stable and paid less than remaining in the PLA; although there was the assumption this would change when the movement gained more influence. Therefore other, non-economic interests and investments, such as investing in certain dangerous ways of being a man, are important here. Ramesh's joining the Tharuhat and becoming involved in its paramilitary activities may have been a reflection of his previous

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87 See Maycock (2011) for more on the Tharuhat movement.

88 Various claims about the nature of the Tharu Army have been made in the media and in interviews with Tharuhat members. Some said it was not an army at all but more of a volunteer force along the same lines as the YCL, while others discussed the paramilitary nature of this wing of the Tharuhat.

investment in his behaviour and the associated levels of excitement as a PLA cadre during the PW.

Through joining the PLA and subsequently the Tharuhat, Ramesh represents a type of masculinity that is newly possible in Kamaiya communities. It is achieved by doing certain types of work and is politically informed and sometimes violent. More broadly, a range of new employment-related masculinities are emerging for the Kamaiya men I encountered while doing my fieldwork. Both the PW and the end of the Kamaiya system have resulted in important changes in the implications of work for Kamaiya masculinities and how masculinities correspond with working practice, as explored in this section. One additional area of change for some Kamaiya men is an increase in literacy through education. Although there has always been a class of Tharu who are highly educated, for the Kamaiya the possibility of being literate and developing related masculinities is relatively new. The following section considers literacy with regard to Kamaiya masculinities.

## **How do changing literacy and educational levels influence Kamaiya masculinities?**

Literacy and formal education have conventionally been associated with upper-caste Bahun men and some upper class men of lower castes. As a consequence of the Kamaiya system literacy rates were extremely low amongst this community. This was due to a number of factors, such as the long hours Kamaiya were expected to work (leaving little time to go to school), the early age at which Kamaiya were expected to start working and the often negative attitudes of landlords to Kamaiya getting an education (Sharma et al., 2002, 20). Owners did not consider it particularly useful for Kamaiya to be educated or literate as Kamaiya within the Kamaiya system were only really viewed in terms of their physical contribution. While the vast majority of Kamaiya children in the Kamaiya system didn't go school, there were a number of examples of informal education being given by elder Kamaiya around basic literacy. Despite these restrictions on education within the Kamaiya system, following its end, there are now increasing examples of Kamaiya men who are not just literate but also

highly educated, a well-known example in Kailali being Banshi Chaudhary, who was formerly a rickshaw driver, but is now the chairman of KPUS)<sup>89</sup>. This section discusses the emergence of Kamaiya masculinities related to education and literacy.

Similarly to Laura Ahearn's research on literacy in another part of Nepal (2001, 46), when I asked a range of Kamaiya what being literate meant, this was understood as instead of signing documents with a thumbprint, those who were literate were able to sign with their names. This section will illustrate that changes in literacy levels is another process that has the potential to change Kamaiya working practices and how masculinity is associated with such practices. However, no simple association between increasing literacy rates and changes in working patterns can or should be assumed (cf. Jeffrey et al., 2005). Here I explore the implications of higher levels of literacy for the masculinity of one young Kamaiya man, concluding with a consideration of whether these changes and the focus on literacy can be seen as rejection or adoption of Brahmanic masculinities that often focus heavily on educational achievement.

According to Cheria, literacy levels are extremely low in the Kamaiya community, particularly for Kamaiya women:

The literacy rate for Kamaiya is 15.7% compared to 39.8% for Nepal in general and in general 25% for Tharu. The literacy rate for males in Kamaiya families is 17.2% and for the females a minuscule 3.6%, less than a tenth of the national average. (Cheria, 2005, 20)

I asked various Kamaiya men and women why there is such significant gender inequality in Kamaiya literacy rates and was told that traditionally, when Kamaiya women marry they move to their husbands' house, and many have little contact with the household they grew up in thereafter. As a consequence, many Kamaiya parents

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89 Banshi Chaudhary has become a leading figure within Kamaiya politics, cf.

[http://archives.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news\\_details&news\\_id=13367](http://archives.myrepublica.com/portal/index.php?action=news_details&news_id=13367) (accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2012). He is also the only Kamaiya in the central committee of the Tharuhat Terai Party, the preeminent Tharu political entity in Nepal.

see little point in educating their daughters for someone else's benefit. Conversely, their sons are expected to look after them in old age, so investing in their education is an investment in their comfort in later life (sons educational advantage is something Stash and Hannum (2001) consider a consequence of a 'rational cost-benefit analysis'). This is a clear example of what Mukhopadhyay and Seymour consider a patrifocal approach to education (1994) and is a wider reflection of how Kamaiya family life focuses on men and boys. There is an interesting tension here between the assumption that higher levels of education are associated with more positive attitudes towards gender equality (United Nations, 2011, 20) and the fact that education in itself may increase gender inequalities, as Maslak (2003) explores in more detail. As changing literacy levels are a consequence of freedom this illustrates that such changes have the potential to change gender relations in these communities, something that will be considered in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

It is difficult to contextualise the figures above historically, as many Kamaiya were illiterate while the Kamaiya system was in existence and the data from this time are problematic. Many Kamaiya told me that educating their children was extremely important to them, and following freedom more children are going to school than ever before. The Nepali State's education policy following the abolishment of the Kamaiya system and the end of the PW included stipends for Kamaiya and other low-caste and indigenous groups, although at the field sites where I worked there was little evidence of this. The local schools I visited close to both field sites still appeared to be demanding fees from Kamaiya families, many of whom could not pay. Furthermore, even if a school offers free education there are other barriers to Kamaiya children's attendance such as the cost of books, uniform and other items. Additionally, the language used in schools across Nepal is Nepali, which some Kamaiya children find difficult to understand. More broadly, both Gates and Murshed (1998) and Pherali (2011) indicate that the imposition of Nepali in schools has fed into the wider grievances and marginalisation of non-Nepali-speaking peoples in Nepal which were important factors in relation to the Maoist PW.

Yabiku and Schlabach report that in Chitwan district, attending school delays employment while school attainment accelerates employment (2009). Sadly this study



does not address the Tharu community, which seems strange given that the Tharus are the largest ethnic group in that district. Evidence from elsewhere has shown that even in the unlikely event that a Kamaiya student reaches higher education it should not be assumed that higher literacy levels lead to a good, well-paid job (Jeffrey et al., 2005), as I discuss below.

Issues associated with education and literacy kept emerging throughout my research intertwined with changing notions of masculinity in locally specific ways. In many settings, not least in Kampur *basti*, it is difficult to assess the literacy of the Kamaiya men with whom I lived accurately. For example, the household survey I undertook on my arrival there indicated a range of literacy and education levels. However, after spending several months in the *basti* I understood that the responses relating to education and literacy were not accurate for a number of reasons, principal among which was the way I had entered the *basti* and was known there as an educated researcher based at a university. This appears that this influenced how literacy levels were presented to me.

I now return to Prakash, who I introduced in Chapter 5. His mother tongue is Dangaura Tharu, which is predominant throughout Kampur *basti*. He also speaks fluent Nepali and Hindi due in part to the proximity of the *basti* to India and the significant influence of India on this part of the district. Despite this linguistic proficiency, Prakash seemed to want to hide his illiteracy from me. Initially he told me that he could read and write, and he had clearly developed some strategies to give the impression that this was the case. Occasionally I would communicate with him via SMS on his mobile phone – he was one of the few people to have one in Kampur – and I only found out after some time that whenever I sent him an SMS (in Nepali) he would go to a friend who was one of the few people in the *basti* who could read, have the message read to him and then dictate his response. The friend who did this for him told me about this and asked me not to mention it to Prakash, as it would cause him significant embarrassment. Even though it was clear that most people in the *basti* were illiterate, Prakash wanted to give me the impression that he was not. This refers in part to the nature of our relationship, but also to the sort of man that Prakash wants to be – or at be least seen to be – which is not the sort of man one finds readily in Kampur: someone ‘modern’,

with the obvious trappings of wealth (mobile phone, branded clothing, a motorbike and so on)<sup>90</sup> and who moved around a lot, preferably spending time with a sequence of beautiful women. For Prakash it appears that literacy is also part of this vision: he equated being able to read with people and places outside the *basti*.

Throughout my research I met a number of disparate groups of Kamaiya men in different settings and engaged in different forms of employment. Their different positions often equated to their different perceptions of education as both a process and a means by which they expected to achieve well-paid employment. Conversations with a number of Kamaiya rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi who were largely illiterate, although a few could read a little, were illuminating. Many believed that their illiteracy was one of the main reasons for their poverty and inability to rise to a financially and socially better occupation, despite few examples of Kamaiya men either reaching higher levels of education or doing sedentary and better-paid forms of work. These men's illiteracy seemed to lead to a number of exploitative relationships, principal among which concerned renting rickshaws. Most of the rickshaw drivers I spoke to did not own their rickshaw but rented them for a fixed price every day.<sup>91</sup> The rental fee had to be paid irrespective of whether they made any money or not, and on some days they earned no money at all. There have been a number of government schemes to provide loans to rickshaw drivers to buy their own rickshaws, although all seem to have been unsuccessful. The rickshaw drivers were the focus of a lot of NGO<sup>92</sup> and INGO work relating to HIV/AIDs, as though their needs can be reduced to this area of concern, ignoring their illiteracy and exploitative relationships caused, in part, by it.

Despite higher levels of education being out of reach at both field sites, some of the children, mainly boys, went to school some of the time, which was increasing the literacy level in their communities. Furthermore, some Kamaiya boys stayed in school

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90 Prakash had all of these except the motorbike. He occasionally borrowed one from a friend to go to Dhangadhi or further afield.

91 For an analysis of the rickshaw rental market in Bilaspur, central India see Sood (2009).

92 KPUS, which was prominent in Kampur Kamaiya *basti* used to rent a number of rickshaws to some Kamaiya at longer-term rates, but this scheme was short lived.

for several years despite the problems outlined above. Basanta stood out in this regard; he had reached the highest level of education that anyone in Kampur Kamaiya *Basti* had achieved, having sat (but failed) his School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams. Below I explore what higher levels of literacy mean for Kamaiya masculinities, using Basanta as an example.

### **Basanta and Kamaiya educational masculinities**

As discussed above, it is relatively rare for Kamaiya men to be literate, and even rarer for them to reach the level of education that Basanta had. Education is a path to a kind of manhood neither possible nor even seen as desirable by Basanta's relatives or his contemporaries in Kampur *basti*. Basanta is Prakash's younger brother, and both worked in a small shop close to the highway. I was unable to find out whether this shop was specifically Prakash's or was owned by the family more generally. Unlike Prakash, Basanta was unmarried and lived with his parents on the other side of the cantonment towards the north. He was very focused on getting a formal education, and Prakash supported him financially while also expecting him to work in the shop so that he could leave to go on various trips, mainly to Dhangadhi. The extent to which Basanta was expected to work in the shop seemed to have had a negative impact on his studies, as I discuss below, but Basanta felt it important to help his family in this way.

More generally, the differences between Basanta and his brother and the majority of the other young men in the *basti* resulted in his being considered a kind of outsider, and he was the butt of many jokes. Laura Ahearn has explored similar implications of education for Magar boys:

...studious [Magar] boys were likened to high-caste Bahun and Chhetri boys, who despite their higher ritual (and often economic) status, were seen as weaklings. (Ahearn, 2001, 70)

Similarly, many Kamaiya men viewed being educated as being like a Bahun, which for many in this community had negative connotations given the recent history of bondedness, often by Bahun owners. In relation to Basanta, his level of education was

an important difference as he was one of the few people in the *basti* who was literate and he viewed his education as a means of improving both his and his family members' lives. He was a little younger than the group of young men with whom Prakash spent most of his time, sometimes at the Skype Bar, which seemed to contribute to his status in the group. Of the many aspects of Basanta's masculinity, educational achievement seemed to be highly determining as he invested in it more than in any other way of being a man, such as labouring, drinking and smoking or hunting. Investing in a range of subject positions (which for Basanta relate to education in important ways) over a period of time leads to the "construction of a sense of self" (Moore, 2007, 118).

Basanta was something of a pioneer in pushing at the boundaries of what is possible in relation to masculinity in Kampur. This had consequences for how his masculinity was embodied, as his body was not central or important to his livelihood and therefore not as important in relation to proving himself as a man as it was for the majority of the men in the *basti*.

Richard de Visser's (2006, 2009) notion of trading competencies in relation to masculinity is useful here. De Visser undertook research with young male university students to explore how, like Basanta, they focused on certain masculine competencies at the expense of others in order to develop a coherent masculine self. Basanta traded competency in some aspects of masculinity for his emphasis on education. This was different to the predominant pathways to the achievement of successful masculinity in Kampur and Dhangadhi, which brought negative consequences such as jokes that brought his masculinity into question. The frequently negative response of other men in the *basti* to Basanta and his educational endeavours illustrates how the educationally informed masculinities that Basanta represents constitute a new type of challenge to the normative ways in which Kamaiya masculinities are configured. Basanta's behaviour agrees with Michael Flood's (1999) assertion that men may or may not correspond to the cultural ideals (and power) associated with certain masculinities.

Basanta represents a new form of masculinity in Kampur that is reliant on education. Why did he, in particular, follow this trajectory and different vision of manhood and

success? How can we understand the impetus behind his deciding to follow an educational path to manhood, especially in a context in which such pathways are rare and involve a number of negative consequences?

One response to this question is to view Basanta's education as a diversification strategy by his parents. Basanta's family viewed the costs associated with his education as an investment, assuming that in the future he would be able to send them large remittances to support them. If it did not pay off he could simply work for the family in other ways. Despite these plans for his future, which appeared to be shaped as much by his family as by him, Basanta had many distractions and diversions from his studies. Principal among these, perhaps ironically, was the expectation of his family that he spend much of his time in the small roadside shop. As Prakash was so often away, his wife and Basanta frequently attended to the shop. This greatly disrupted his studies which, strangely enough, his family did not seem to acknowledge given their emphasis on Basanta getting an education to generate future income for them. I spent time with Basanta at the shop, talking to him and to various people who visited. Initially my presence created a lot of interest, but over time this subsided so I was able to spend more time with him when he was less distracted. Along the road there were several small teahouses and small shops selling a range of basic goods. Of these, the family shop was the only one owned by Kamaiya, with the others mainly owned by Dalits who had moved down from the hills and settled next to the road. This meant that most of the people coming in were Kamaiya from Kampur *basti* who wanted to support the shop. Customers from the PLA cantonment were rare, as PLA cadre tended to use the shops closer to the cantonment. While working in the shop Basanta would try to do some reading, although most of what he was learning required a computer, and he was frequently disturbed, which annoyed him.

His family were openly sure that Basanta would be a success and his parents expressed their pride at his reaching such a high level of education through studying at the local computer college in the adjacent village. It was not clear what his education would lead to, not least as there was no electricity in Kampur for much of my time there so Basanta was not able to apply what he was learning. Furthermore, potential employment opportunities either in the state or NGO/INGO sector would appear to be

very limited, with these settings being particularly dominated by the upper-castes.<sup>93</sup> This raises broader questions about education leading to the accumulation of cultural capital, and whether this investment will pay off for Basanta and his family. Bourdieu (1984) explores this in relation to the working classes investing in education in order to attain cultural capital despite the fact that education does not necessarily lead to paid work. For Bourdieu, education does little to change the class structure and therefore does not necessarily lead to the accumulation of cultural capital as confirmed in Jeffrey et al's (2005) research in India. So while Basanta's family's expectation that his education would lead to employment of a certain kind is not uncommon, it may not be fulfilled.

Despite these problems, Basanta hoped that his training would enable him to leave the *basti* and get a good job in Dhangadhi or one of the big cities in India. As I discuss in the last section of this chapter, many young men have left the *basti* to find work in other places in Kailali or in India, although no one from the *basti* could afford to migrate to the more financially lucrative Persian Gulf. This put pressure on Basanta to be successful through his studies, but greater pressure will come when he finishes his training and has to leave the *basti* to find work. This is some years away, and he was relatively pressure-free while I was in Kampur.

More broadly, Basanta and the way his masculinity is so focused on education represents something new for Kamaiya men in Kampur *basti* and Dhangadhi, although it should be noted that he was very much alone in this position in his community which perhaps helps to explain his relative isolation. As stated previously, educational masculinities as represented by Basanta are not currently the norm in Kampur *basti*, but this might change over the coming years as literacy becomes both more common and more popular. Having discussed Basanta's navigation of his difficult path to

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93 Having visited many offices of various government and NGO/INGO offices in and around Dhangadhi the only places in which Kamaiya seemed to be working were in NGOs specifically focusing on the Kamaiya community. While the 1990 constitution included an article (Article, 26, 10) on affirmative action for 'economically and socially backward groups and communities' (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, 1992) in practice this has had little or not influence.

manhood, I now consider mobility that is an important part of Basanta's vision of his future as he will be expected to leave the *basti* to find highly skilled and paid work. More broadly, mobility emerges as a range of processes that are important in shaping Kamaiya masculinities in my research settings. Mobility is a diverse and fractured process which equates to relocation to an urban setting such as Dhangadhi for some men while others might migrate to India or another part of rural Nepal. I discuss these processes and how they relate to certain masculinities next.

### **What are the implications of mobility caused by work for Kamaiya masculinities?**

In the final section of this chapter I focus on how new forms of work are leading to various forms of mobility that are changing Kamaiya masculinities. Here I retain the focus on work although mobility is one way of achieving certain types of work, this emerges as conferring a masculine advantage for those who are able to be mobile i.e. certain men. This section considers the ways in which movement is an important component of modernity (Appadurai, 1996). Furthermore, this section reflects Sharma's (2007b, 22-25) discussion of mobility, as opposed to migration, exploring various aspects of mobility and how these relate to certain masculinities at particular times in the life-cycle.<sup>94</sup> Where the word 'migration' is mentioned it is the word the author cited for mobility in this sense. Mobility and masculinity in South Asia have been explored in Nepal (Sharma, 2007b, Sharma, 2007a), South India (Osella and Osella, 2000, 2006, Osella and Gardner, 2004), North India (McDuié-Ra, 2011) and Pakistan (Charsley, 2005). These studies cumulatively find that mobility and mobility are important aspects of masculinity in the region.

The Kamaiya have specific history of limited mobility due to the constraints inherent in the Kamaiya system. While the system dictated that Kamaiya were not free to move when and where they liked, sometimes Kamaiya children (particularly girls) moved as a consequence of demand for domestic labour in urban areas (if their owner permitted

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<sup>94</sup> The notion of mobility I use here doesn't take into account other influential forms of mobility, such as women moving from their natal to marital home.

this) (Giri, 2004). This section presents a new perspective on how mobility is becoming an important part of masculinity in Kamaiya communities. Following the abolishment of bonded labour, certain types of mobility have become becoming closely associated with certain new masculinities and stages in the male life course. Kamaiya men are adopting mainstream pathways to becoming adult that have existed in other Nepalese communities for many years (Hausner, 2007, Sharma, 2007a, 2007b). Their increasing mobility illustrates their acceptance of broader, more mainstream currents of masculinity; this is relevant not only for the men who move but also for the *bastis* to which they return. I discuss the consequences of such mobility below.

This section offers a fresh perspective on several longstanding debates about mobility and bonded labour. The literature broadly agrees that bonded labour is linked to migration and mobility (Breman et al., 2009, Bourdieu, 1984), but the nature of this link is disputed. Rogaly et al. (1978) see migration in West Bengal as a means by which bonded labourers can change their situation, whereas Breman (1996) reports that migrant workers in Gujarat have limited scope for influencing their situation, whether they migrate or not, as migration facilitates new types of bondage. The implications of mobility for bonded labour relations are contested, and I consider this in relation to a Kamaiya man below.

In the Nepali context, mobility is conventionally understood in relation to poverty (Peralta, 2007, Donaldson, 1991). Shrestha's (1991) research explicitly focuses on landlessness as a cause of migration, and Bhandari points out the importance of land in patterns of migration:

My findings support the hypothesis that individuals from households with relatively less access to cultivated land are more likely to migrate in search of work compared to those from a relatively well-off household with more land holdings. (Bhandari, 2004, 475)

What follows in this section does not reflect this, as one would assume that people with little or no land (such as the Kamaiya) would move. My fieldwork in both Kamaiya *bastis* found that only the men move. More broadly, the studies mentioned above do



not consider gender or other forms of identity and how these might be important to understanding various forms of mobility. Sharma's (2007b, 193) research on masculinity and mobility in Nepal indicates that such studies cannot account for the fact that around 90 per cent of those who migrate outside of Nepal are men. He calls for a greater focus on masculinity to complement studies of poverty and land. Sharma's research highlights the importance of masculinity in explaining mobility and what it means for local communities.

Sharma (2007b, 192-193) views Breman's analysis of migration as being too focused on economic factors (migration is understood as a consequence of poverty). However, Breman's analysis, while economically informed, does take account of the social and cultural dimensions of mobility. While he does not explicitly talk about masculinity, there is a great deal about the links between masculinity and mobility in his work on migration (Breman, 1985, 1996). Breman's analysis of migration provides an interesting and meaningful setting for the discussion below. Breman suggests that certain types of humiliating bonded (and other) labour led to the migration of the lower castes (1996). This is complemented by Kapadia (2002, 155), who views migration as a response to the arrogance of the upper castes and the humiliation inherent in these labour relations. Such forms of humiliation are gendered in profound ways: as we saw previously, for the Kamaiya, this partly relates to the subversion of the possibility of the male breadwinner. Rogaly et al (1978) complement this position, finding that men migrate because they are expected to provide for the family. If their situation either in the Kamaiya system or afterwards through lack of land subverts their position as a breadwinner, mobility provides a potential means by which they can reassert this aspect of their masculinity.

A consideration of masculinity can complement a range of studies of mobility. For example, Broughton (2004) indicates that migration can facilitate new forms of income generation and provides the opportunity to 'prove' masculinity in new and exciting ways that contrast with what is available in declining rural areas. While mobility potentially provides a means of subverting local hegemonic masculinities, Broughton does not fully explore the implications of men moving to new places in which new hegemonic ways of being a man predominate. In the following discussion mobility

emerges as an inherently gendered and diverse process in which men – and often men of a certain age (15-30) – are associated with mobility. The various interactions between masculinity and mobility are specific to certain communities such as those of the Kamaiya, where mobility is emerging as something that some men, but not women, are expected to do.<sup>95</sup> Due to their collective history of bondedness there is no history or normative path to masculinities associated with migration. These patterns of mobility, and the masculinities they reflect and produce, are relatively new in these communities, with Kamaiya men following in the footsteps of other Nepali men before them.

Considering the formative ways in which masculinities are relational (cf. Connell, 2009, 54), mobility leads to further complexity in the ways in which masculinities are constituted. This brings into focus the importance of relationships between men and men, and between men and women in a range of changing locations that is relevant to the Kamaiya communities in which I undertook my research in diverse ways relating to forms of mobility that have become more possible in recent years. Opportunities for mobility correspond to both places in the wider geographical horizon (although restricted to Nepal and India for Kamaiya men) and to types of work resulting from higher levels of industrialisation in both the Indian and Nepali economies. Mobility can also involve exposure to specific configurations of economic and gendered relations. As I discuss below, these processes of mobility to places in which certain gendered relations exist seem to complicate Kamaiya masculinities.

There are multiple interlinked forms of mobility, some of which are not new, as mobility has been a feature of Nepali life for many years (cf. Hausner, 2005, Sharma, 2007b). Following the end of the Kamaiya system, many new opportunities for work and movement have emerged for the Kamaiya. However, there are other influences on mobility, such as the instability of the PW and pressure, especially on young men, to join the PLA during those ten years that have resulted in more recent changes to

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95 While I did not encounter Kamaiya women who had migrated or were planning to migrate during my research, this does happen in relation to certain labour practices such as those associated with the Kamlari system of female domestic workers (cf. Giri 2009, 2010).

mobility. Hausner (2007) explores migration to and through several border towns and explores some of the ways in which the PW affected pre-existing patterns of migration:

If migrants to India more often cited economic reasons as their primary motivation for moving, migrants newly resettled in Nepalganj more often cited the conflict itself (although these two motivations should not be viewed as entirely separable entities). (2007, 114)

Hausner found higher levels of migration the further west her field sites were – i.e. in areas more affected by the conflict – so assumes a link between the PW and increasing levels of migration. I explore such assumptions in relation to the narratives and experiences of migration that I discuss below. The remaining part of this section considers several accounts from young Kamaiya men and their reasons for mobility, which challenge Hausner’s assumption that the PW provided important motivation to move.

This section has raised several questions. How are Kamaiya men dealing with the growing expectations of them to be mobile? What is their experience of mobility? Do increasing levels of mobility result in their moving from one situation of bondage to another in India and Dhangadhi? Castles (1987) indicates that absolute poverty is a barrier to migration; however, I argue that poverty, whether absolute or not, changes the specific forms of migration that are possible for certain groups. The Kamaiya are a good example of this, and a subversion of Castles’ perspective and a consideration of masculinity and mobility can contribute to explaining this. While there are many forms and destinations of mobility, such as the recent trend for significant numbers of young Nepali men to migrate to the Gulf,<sup>96</sup> this section focuses on migration to two sites –

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96 I interviewed a number of young men who were planning to migrate to the Gulf; they were all Bahuns from affluent households. For this group of men, to migrate is not enough: the destination is of critical importance. This group had already assumed that they would migrate to India (some had spent time in Indian colleges and universities) and viewed this as a backup plan if their plans to migrate to the Gulf did not materialise.

Dhangadhi (in a form of urbanisation) and India (an often temporary, circular form of migration). I begin with Ram, who regularly moved to India for work.

### **Ram, mobile Kamaiya masculinities and working in India**

While there is varying mobility from and to Nepal, mobility to India is critically important in the Nepali context, and particularly in the Terai. The figures are very unreliable in this area, partly due to the open border between India and Nepal and compounded by poor data collection. In 2001, 760,000 people had officially migrated out of Nepal, 77 per cent of whom had gone to India (McDonald, 1994). Seddon et al (2000) estimate that between 0.5-1.3 million Nepalis temporarily migrate to India. Sharma contributes an important gendered analysis of the above figures in which his notion of masculinity adds significantly to the understanding of mobility in Nepal:

The significance of mobility to India lies in the possibility of what it offers to the individual man who moves and the household and how it relates to the experience of other men in the community. (Sharma, 2007a, 3)

To explore some of the implications of mobility to India for Kamaiya masculinities I now discuss Ram, a Kamaiya man that I met on several occasions when he returned to Kampur. There are a number of reasons why I chose him for inclusion in this chapter, principal among which is that of all the young men I met in Kampur he is the most complicated, and his moving to India is a critical part of this complication. He was something of an enigma during my time in the *basti*, which made him very interesting to me, partly due to the fleeting nature of his presence in the *basti* as he was a migrant worker and was only intermittently there.

Ram is about 20 years old – neither he nor his mother were sure of his exact age. My research assistant and I both thought he looked much older. He has six brothers and sisters, one older sister and the rest younger. He was dismissive of his siblings and had little time for them, despite their obvious affection and reverence. One of his younger brothers told me that this was because he travelled and was away in India so much. His family were largely unaware of the hardships of Ram's working life in India; he worked as a labourer in various places, mostly in Uttar Pradesh (UP), a state that

shares a border with Kailali; hence he was able to return home easily. Despite going to India on a frequent basis he was uniformly critical about it, although he had found certain income-generating opportunities there that he felt were not available to the same extent in Nepal.

Like most young men in the Kampur *basti*, Ram was illiterate. While he was not proud of this, he was assertive about it. Education and the path that Basanta had chosen had no appeal for Ram, as this was not generally seen as a valid route to making a living or, more importantly, to being a man. For Ram, being a man is closely connected to hard and seemingly unrelenting physically demanding forms of manual labour and the associated income that it generated (reflecting Chopra's (2004) point mentioned previously that hard work is important for manliness). Lynn Bennett adds an additional level of nuance to the perspective on hard physical labour, which is positioned in opposition to Bahun notions of work and masculinity:

Any [Bahun] man who can afford to pay someone else to do the heavy farm labour for him. None of Narikot's respected elders, nor indeed any of the younger generation of men who have gone to school, would demean themselves by doing physical labour. (Bennett, 2002, 24)

Ram is illustrative of this point as here we can see Ram performing a type of subaltern masculinity that is positioned in opposition to less physically demanding masculinities (such as Bahun masculinities). From this subaltern position he is able to generate a sense of pride and confidence as a man despite this being low paid and status work, something that Bennett doesn't fully consider in her research.

Ram felt challenged by men such as Basanta. He did not seem to understand the point of education, which was not common in the *basti*; it was not what Kamaiya men do to make a living, if indeed it turned out that Basanta could do so. Being more literate had nothing to do with the Kamaiya being freed; many of those who had kept the Kamaiya in situations of bondedness were highly educated and despite working all the days and hours they could, many Kamaiya remained extremely poor while many Bahun were lazy but still rich. He was sceptical, too, of office-related work, of which politicians are

seen as the most obvious example, and there was widespread disdain for politicians, irrespective of political allegiance. Ram's views were reminiscent of the perceptions of some of the older men in the *basti* about the expectations of work and associated masculinities.

Over a series of interviews with Ram when I asked a straightforward question his mother responded instead of letting him answer. This was the only family where this happened during my fieldwork in Kampur: a father or a husband might intervene in an interview or discussion, but never a female relative. This clearly frustrated Ram, whose relationship with his dominant mother seemed to contribute greatly to how he perceived himself and, of course, to how he was perceived in Kampur *basti*. Away from his mother he was more open and expressive; when she was present he said very little and responded to her various requests with a begrudging and slightly crestfallen silence.

I developed a good relationship with Ram's family, especially with his mother and some of his younger brothers and sisters, who were regularly at Prakash's house where I was staying. I was able to get a slightly different impression of Ram and his experiences of migration from his family to the one he presented. Ram's family home was very close to Prakash's, and I spent most of my time in this area of the *basti*. His father was not in the *basti* but I could not discover whether he had died or left the *basti* for some reason. Ram's family and other people in the *basti* would not talk to me about it, indicating that something bad had happened that the family (and by extension other villagers) felt ashamed and embarrassed about.

In his father's absence it was clear that Ram's mother was very much the head of their household. While this is not uncommon in the *basti* due to the significant levels of outmigration by men, the fact that it was permanent in Ram's household was unique and interesting. As Ram was the oldest son, it would be assumed that he would take on responsibility in his father's absence and more of a leadership role in the household. However, this was not the case at all. When he was in the *basti* his mother retained her position of authority and responsibility in the household and, more widely, in the *basti*. In other houses, such as that of Prakash and Basanta, even when

their father was present the sons often took on dominant leadership roles in the family, due in part to their higher income and ability to work for longer hours. The younger and more economically active generation adhered closely to the most highly valued ways of being a man (such as consuming in certain ways), which were evolving further away from the sorts of masculinities predominant in the Kamaiya system.

Knowing Ram's family background is important, as it helps to contextualise his mobility. As the eldest son, there were certain expectations of him regarding providing and leadership in the household which he seemed to find difficult to meet. His mother had given him a small amount of money for him to move to India with in the first instance (around 2005 in the winter), and she had encouraged him to go there. From his family's perspective, Ram moving to India might have been a diversification strategy like that of Basanta's family regarding his education. Similar impetus behind mobility has been explored in other contexts (cf. Herzfeld, 1985), and this might help to explain why his mother was so keen that he go to India.

On several occasions I had the impression that being away from his family, particularly his mother, was also an important reason behind Ram's moving to work to India. This does not mean that he did not fulfil some of the expectations to provide materially for his family. Ram provides an interesting example of a man adapting to this way of life and of how this in turn has become an important part of his masculinity. Most Kamaiya men have no experience or wider history of mobility, making it difficult and potentially dangerous. Sharma (2007b, Chapter 6) convincingly illustrates the importance of knowing someone at the destination point who can help to find work, show one around and provide an entry into the social networks associated with certain diasporas which in some ways recreate the social worlds of home. Marius-Gnanou also makes this point in relation to seasonal migration in Tamil Nadu:

Without social networks, migrants are more vulnerable to intimidation or non-payment of wages, and are unable to get out of debt or overcome a crisis.  
(Marius-Gnanou, 2008, 133)

Ram's experience provides an insight into the wider experiences of Kamaiya men who often move without an established social network. Ram told me that he always migrated alone, and often only met other Tharu while travelling but had never met another Kamaiya on his journeys, and appeared not to want to. However, the isolation and vulnerability that this led to was sometimes difficult. This refers to what Breman identifies as part of the motivation for Dalit men from Gujarat to move:

Their motivation for migrating is the anonymity which accompanies them in the outside world... they are not immediately identified and stigmatized [as Dalit]. (Breman, 1996, 238).

Mobility relates not simply to material considerations (which in some instances may be negligible anyway) but also to the range of ways of being (a man) that mobility facilitates. While mobility was not a wholly positive experience for Ram, there were benefits. Insightfully, he told me that when he was in India he was neither a Kamaiya nor even a Tharu: he was simply a poor Nepali like the many other Nepali men in India searching for work. Ram seemed to be constantly striving to transcend the *basti* and to become associated with other parts of India, as he felt this gave him more freedom. While I was in Kampur, Ram was rarely in the *basti*. This enabled him to give the impression that in this way he was different from most men in Kampur, despite doing similar work to most of them. This suggests that the location, and not the type of employment that Ram was engaged in and aspired to, is central to the image he wanted to present of a man different to the other inhabitants of the *basti*. He principally achieved this through his mobility.

Ram opted out of many social activities when in the *basti* and did not attempt to behave like the more popular and 'successful' men of his age. The time he spent in India and the work he did there formed his sense of masculinity, and he brought the way he experienced his ethnic identity in India back to the *basti*. He was not overly engaged with any of the recent political manifestations of Tharu identity such as the Tharuhat, and found little, if any, economic benefit in participating in politics of any kind; nor, with all the pressures he was already under, did he have time for it. When in the *basti* he was not at all interested in Kamaiya or Tharu festivals or religious



practices. This again implies that he wanted to distance himself from these aspects of Kamaiya identity and ritual in Kampur and preferred a kind of anonymity in India.

There is some irony in the fact that while many Kamaiya men such as Ram have always lived close to the Indian border, they (and a small number of women) have only been able to cross the border since the abolishment of the Kamaiya system. The Indian border is only 3 km from Dhangadhi and about 12 km from Kampur *basti*, making it very easy to go to India and back in a day if required. This created a different sense of being 'away' and being 'at home' for Ram. On average he stayed away for three or four months at a time. Breman (1996, 53) calls such mobility 'circulation', to describe the brief nature of these movements, the lack of consistency in the location of mobility and the type of work undertaken. One positive implication of this type of circulatory migration that Ram's movement reflects was for his inheritance. This type of movement didn't seem to question his inheritance and in fact strengthened his position, as it was assumed that when he did inherit the families land financially he would be in a strong position, as a consequence of moving to India. This would then allow him to improve the land his family had, as well as potentially buying more.

Ram travelled by the cheapest and therefore slowest means possible, often taking several days to reach the *basti* and then return to his next period of work. If something went wrong (i.e. he lost his job or was robbed or cheated) he could quickly and easily get back to Kampur, which was both an advantage and a disadvantage given that part of the reason for his mobility was to get away from his family. This reflects wider changes in transport and communication that make such mobility much easier (Almeida, 1996). Ram usually moved to urban areas in India, often in and around Delhi, where he told me the most work is found). One result of his moving frequently and erratically back and forth from Kampur to various urban areas of India is the blurring of the boundaries of 'urban' and 'rural' masculinities; Campbell and Bell (2000) call for caution in making distinctions these two located masculinities. I had the impression that Ram would rather not return to Kampur, although he told me that things might change when he got a wife. He was unmarried and had no girlfriend; he appeared to have little interest in such matters and one might almost think that they passed him by. He assumed that when he had made enough money he would come back to the

*basti* with some savings, and his family would arrange a marriage for him. As he was at the upper end of the average age range at which men get married there were growing expectations that he would be married soon (I return to marriage in the next chapter).

Having discussed how mobility provides a means by which Ram has been able to construct a different masculine identity to those that predominate in Kampur, I now consider his experiences of mobility.

Ram engaged in a broad range of unskilled labouring work in India. He essentially did whatever work was available, most of the time working as a road cutter. This required very long hours of physically demanding labour. He had no protective clothing, and his chronic cough was the result of all the smoke and tar he had inhaled while working on road-building projects over the years. His manual work had made his hands some of the roughest I have ever shaken. His appearance seemed infused with the dust of his work, even though the dust itself had long gone. The work drained him completely; his mother told me that when he came home he often said very little for days, as he was so exhausted. Breman's (1996) research in Gujarat found that migrant workers had limited scope to influence their situation whether they migrated or not: migration can create new types of bondage. This was apparent in Ram's experience: he had very few options in relation to what sort of work he did. He was one of many other men moving around India in search of work and providing a pool of cheap, disposable labour for various employers.

Ram took an evident pride in his work-related endeavours and the fact that he rarely took time off, as he would not be paid if he did. He was proud to work as hard as he did, but there were negative consequences. When he returned to the *basti*, as he did every couple of months on average, he was distant and almost vacant until he readjusted to being back and recovered from his recent period of work. He was there when I first went to the *basti* but he left soon afterwards, so I was not able to spend much time with him. I saw about three months later when he returned and over the week or so before he left again to work in India. There was a kind of mental and physical emptiness for a few days after he returned from India.

Sharma indicates that mobility can be explained partly in reference to the economic opportunities that it represents. It facilitates the sending back of remittances which enables men to fulfil an important aspect of their masculinity, providing for their household:

...these men viewed their mobility as a possibility to attain their masculine identity by being able to secure some money, experience a distant place and integrate themselves within the village life. (Sharma, 2007a, 9)

In one sense mobility can facilitate meeting expectations associated with 'breadwinner' masculinities in Kamaiya communities. This has been explored elsewhere, with migration making an important contribution to men's ability to maintain their gendered, breadwinner roles (cf. West, 2001). Although this may not be the case for all men who migrate:

Migration to Delhi challenges tribal masculinity. It moves tribal men away from the environment where their masculinity is produced and also gives tribal women new opportunities for independence and mobility. (McDuié-Ra, 2011, 8).

The critical difference here is that McDuié-Ra studied men and women migrating together. As a consequence remittances were less important in this situation, resulting in a greater disconnect from the places that these men and women migrated from. In my (and Sharma's (2007b, 2007a)) research only men migrate, thus links to home are more important and sending money back is a way of proving one's success as a man who has migrated. Like many men I met during my research, Ram's future plans revolved around seeking better-paid work simply in order to make more money. While I was in Kampur he was not able to send much back to his family by way of remittances due to his very low wages.<sup>97</sup> This gave him a relatively low standing in the *basti*. Ram

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97 For more on gender differences relating to remittances see Orozco, Lowell and Schneider (2006) and Carling (2008).

seemed to feel it necessary to come back if only to keep up the impression that he was supporting his family – not just financially, but also emotionally and in relation to security. The appeal of mobility for Ram is broader than the fact that it enables him to provide economically for his family as he was not very successful in this: for him it was partly to do with the way that mobility is becoming an important marker of masculinity. So for some men moving is becoming part of proving one's masculinity as a Kamaiya man.

Srivastava (1984) reports that migrants often receive both delayed payment and extremely low wages, raising the question of why people migrate if it brings such hardship. Ram told me how various factory and road construction company owners had cheated him throughout his time working in India, not paying him properly and treating with disdain and sometimes violence. As these owners are closely linked to various branches of the Indian government, including the police, Ram had no recourse to justice and was forced to leave in some cases without any pay, due to both the threat and the reality of violence from the police and private security staff. Clearly there were many more powerful men than him in these settings, with Ram at the lower ends of multiple forms of stratification. These experiences compromised and challenged his personal security and his masculinity, which was becoming increasingly reliant on his experience of mobility. Despite these challenges and being confronted by various forms of violence combined with alternative masculinities that he had not encountered previously, he remained committed to his status and position as a man who moved. The *basti* presented less obvious threats, and although his low income subverted his status there, being such a man was an aspect of his masculinity that he was able to successfully affirm there.

I now turn to notions of success in relation to mobility. As I have stated, the idea of competency in masculine practices helps to explain certain masculine behaviours (cf. Connell, 2009, 58). It is not enough to simply move; it is also important to be considered successful as a result. Ram showed no obvious signs of success, perhaps because he had had little success in his working life in India; and consequently disposable income was in short supply for both him and his family. Like all the other people I spoke to who had moved to India, he felt significant pressure to send as much

money home as possible. The more money sent back to the *basti* the more successful the sender was seen to be, giving him good standing in the *basti* relative to other men. How the money was made did not seem to matter. This helps to explain the disconnection between the often harsh and sometimes brutal working conditions experienced, and perceptions of these conditions amongst the men's families in Kampur. Ram moved not just for economic reasons but also to fulfil the expectations of his family as the eldest son in a context of limited economic opportunities.

Success in relation to mobility and masculinity also relies heavily on the consumption that it facilitates, as Osella and Osella discuss in detail:

Migration helps maintain one's prestige by concealing one's occupation and by splitting the moment and site of wealth accumulation from its moment of consumption, enabling and encouraging a focus upon the result, cash earned.  
(Osella and Osella, 2000, 121)

This is important for men such as Ram. The work he did was difficult and earned him little status either in the *basti* or in India. His relatively low wages limited his potential to consume in ways that would accord him status. He had bought some clothes in India of which he was proud: while he was not able to consume in the same ways as some of the other young men in Kampur, what he was able to buy had a certain kudos as it came from India. Being able to consume in these ways was important part for Ram and the way he was trying to portray the appearance of successful masculinity, despite the many barriers (such as his low income) that made this difficult.

To conclude this section, Ram's work in India has led to a new type of masculinity that depends on various aspects of mobility to create an image of success. We have seen that mobility represents both a range of opportunities (and not solely economic ones) and, conversely, constraints, particularly in relation to his experience of exploitation and violence associated with the types and locations of his work in India. This section has shown that mobility is leading to types of masculinity in Kamaiya communities that were unthinkable prior to the abolition of the Kamaiya system.

Having considered Ram and migration to India, below I look at moving to the district capital, Dhangadhi. This form of mobility has other implications for Kamaiya masculinities. The following section examines how for some Kamaiya men, moving to Dhangadhi is associated with a certain stage in their lives. This moves the focus of this chapter onto considering how the wider transition from boyhood to manhood is changing for many Kamaiya men and boys.

### **To what extent do mobility and changing patterns of work contribute to the transition from boyhood to manhood?**

It is extremely difficult to quantify the trends relating to internal migration due in part to changes in the size and nature of administrative units and boundaries (external migration and remittances have more often been the focus of academic research (cf. Sharma, 2007b). However, several broader trends emerge, such as an significant movement of people from the hills to the Terai (cf. Gurung, 1989). As outlined previously the movement of people from the hills to the Terai increased significantly following the eradication of malaria (Guneratne, 1996, Rankin, 1999). Dhangadhi is an important destination for many people moving from the hills and other areas of the far-west Nepal. It is a regional centre for trade, business and leisure, and as such is a site of both temporary and permanent migration. Many people from Kampur *basti* take the one-hour bus ride to Dhangadhi to find work or sell their (rare) surplus of crops. A broad range of goods and services are available there so it is an important shopping centre for men from both the Kampur cantonment and the *basti*, especially those who are unmarried and without children and thus have more disposable income. Commodities bought there have status: for example, a new t-shirt from Dhangadhi is seen as more special than one from one of the markets closer to Kampur.

In this final section of this chapter, I discuss Dhangadhi as the destination of a number of Kamaiya rickshaw drivers and whether their move to Dhangadhi can be seen as part of their becoming adult. Previously within the Kamaiya system this transition was made through changing roles and responsibilities within the Kamaiya system. For boys this principally involved changing from tending to livestock to working on the fields with other adult Kamaiya. According to Cheria (2005, 46) this happened around 14 when a son would be considered a full Kamaiya and therefore responsible for repaying

debt (or *Sauki*). Therefore, within the Kamaiya system the transition from boyhood to adulthood was determined by one's age and associated position within the Kamaiya system (something outlined in Table One above), (Cheria, 2005, 46)

Following the end of the Kamaiya system the rights of passage associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood are becoming more varied. This section provides an insight into the changing importance of certain types of movement for the formation of particular Kamaiya masculinities. Additionally, this section also looks at the longevity of movement and explores how the masculinities associated with movement are affected if these men return to their village.

Osella and Osella (2000, 120) find that a range of attributes, including marriage, fatherhood and the ability to provide, which relate to the prevailing norms of the householder, come together in the formation of men's adult status. Migration, while essential to becoming an adult male, can also be an important influence on the transition to mature manhood:

Migration may accelerate an individual's progress along a culturally idealized trajectory towards mature manhood; it may accentuate characteristics already locally associated with essentialised categories of masculinity. (Osella and Osella, 2000, 118)

Movement can contribute to the transition to adulthood in various other ways (cf. Gough and Edwards, 1998): it facilitates certain forms of employment and consumption which can provide a route to recognition as an adult man. This section also discusses how movement can represent a challenge to masculinity and to being seen as an adult man.

To explore such processes in relation to the Kamaiya I return to the rickshaw drivers discussed in the previous chapter. Rickshaw driving is a specifically male occupation: throughout my fieldwork in Nepal I never saw a woman doing this job in Dhangadhi or anywhere else. More specifically, the high physical toll involved makes it an occupation for young men, and it is unusual to see rickshaw drivers over the age of 40 because the

intense nature of the work shortens rickshaw drivers' working lives. This is one of the main contradictions of this type of work: it is entirely dependent on physical strength, but is itself harmful to the health of those engaged in it. This also applies to the other forms of labouring that Kamaiya men did (which for example, included using pesticides without any protective clothing). In this section I show how a certain form of movement (i.e. movement to Dhangadhi) to become a rickshaw driver, has resulted in this type of work being associated with young men and a certain stage in their lives. Many of the young Kamaiya men there have a pre-existing link with Dhangadhi: for many the link is with rickshaw drivers already there.

The links between rickshaw driving and other seasonal and temporary work are interesting and illustrative of how many see the former as one of the poorest forms of employment, both socially and economically. For example, at times when there is little demand for agricultural labour rickshaw driving was a way of generating an income. Rickshaw driving is one of several types of work done by the Kamaiya men living in Dhangadhi so there is significant flexibility in their working practices. Other forms of work include agricultural labouring and jobs on building sites. McDuie-Ra highlights these more fluid masculinities below:

...migration to Delhi necessitates the adoption of more fluid ways of being masculine and also makes these expressions more possible and visible than back home. (McDuie-Ra, 2011, 14)

This reflects the ways in which masculinity is relational. Movement to urban areas provides examples of a far wider range of ways of being a man than are evident back in the Kamaiya men's villages. However, despite this fluidity, and depending on the season, many Kamaiya men worked as rickshaw drivers most days for their income. The rickshaw driving acted as a kind of sponge that soaked up labour when other options were not available.<sup>98</sup> This contradicts to some the analysis of masculinity in relation to work (cf. Harland, 2005) that finds that for young men, the type of work can

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98 The links between the decreasing availability of factory work and increasing numbers of rickshaw drivers in India are explored by Chitra Joshi (2005).



be more important than having work itself. This did not seem to be the case for the rickshaw drivers I met, for this extremely poor group, having any work was the most important factor. The men who did this work seemed to have little choice and so some employment, however difficult and transient, is clearly better than none.

Moving to Dhangadhi and becoming a rickshaw driver is associated with a certain stage in the lives of these young unmarried men. They were under few of the pressures associated with being a man in their home villages and were partially immune to expectations of income generation and household leadership.<sup>99</sup> For Upendra (who was mentioned in the previous chapter), moving to the city equated to a range of freedoms that were impossible in his village and provided him, and other young men, with the opportunity to explore aspects of their youthful masculine identities, which to a certain extent run counter to the expectations associated with adult Kamaiya men. There is an interesting contradiction here, as part of the transition to being seen as an adult man involves performing certain masculinities that would be considered juvenile in the village.

Upendra did not seem to mind that he had not been to school and was illiterate. After the abolition of the Kamaiya system his family had received unhelpful assistance from the government. Like several Kamaiya families I met, they had been settled in a place that was already occupied by other families, in a remote and rural area of Kailali. The lack of available work in his village was an important reason behind his move to Dhangadhi. This specific variant of movement is a well-worn path for young Kamaiya men from rural areas of Kailali district. Importantly, only young men moved in this way.

Upendra moved to Dhangadhi at about 13 years of age and I met him when he was about 20. He told me that he expected to stay in the city for another ten years or so., He planned to move back to his village to start a family when he was older, although it should be noted that a very small number of Kamaiya men have moved to Dhangadhi with their wives. The age-specific nature of Upendra's movement benefits both those

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<sup>99</sup> There were some expectations in terms of remittances; however, these tended to be unfulfilled.

who move to the city and those who remain in the village, as it reduces competition for the limited amount of work available in the latter. It is rare for these young men to stay permanently in urban areas such as Dhangadhi, as being in the city is associated with a certain stage in their lives. This stage was between the ages of around 12-16 to 25-30. Geographically, Upendra's village was not far from Dhangadhi – he could get there in a couple of hours – but emotionally it seemed a significant distance from his family and village. He showed little interest in going back to the village and had little contact with his family there.

Upendra did not seem to want to talk to me about his family other than to tell me about an older brother who had also been a rickshaw driver but had now moved back to the village. Apparently his mother and father were old and could not understand his life in the city. Upendra knew he would be in Dhangadhi for a limited period of time, and that a combination of declining fitness and pressure to marry would determine the timing of his return home.

Upendra's views on Dhangadhi were largely positive, although not everything had lived up to his expectations, not least in relation to the income he was told he would earn, and his treatment by others in the city. He enjoyed living there and this was clearly an exciting time for him, especially compared to his village. Life in Dhangadhi was filled with both risk and excitement. He had been the victim of various crimes – principally theft, but also beatings – and had been physically and verbally mistreated by his customers and others. On one occasion the police had treated him badly for no apparent reason other than that he happened to be a Kamaiya. Upendra saw the police as reflecting the interests of the upper castes and unsympathetic to groups such as the Kamaiya and, by extension, the Tharu. When he once tried to report a group of men who had stolen his wages he received no help at all, was made to wait a very long time and was generally treated badly by the police. Such experiences are common for the Kamaiya.

While moving to Dhangadhi facilitated the performance of certain masculinities that were not possible in the village, there were also negative consequences and ways in which the masculinity of the rickshaw drivers was undermined. For instance, it is

common to determine the price of a rickshaw journey before it begins, but it is not unusual for the passenger to pay less than agreed or nothing at all on reaching the destination. If we see some forms of movement as part of certain stages in Kamaiya men's lives and a move closer to being seen as adult, we must also consider how this might be subverted. To examine this I turn now to the emergence of subaltern Kamaiya masculinities in the city. McDuié-Ra has considered the implications of very similar processes:

For tribal men being a minority community in Delhi can be very emasculating. In practice, it means that tribals cannot retaliate in the face of racism and discrimination, whereas at home they can. (McDuié-Ra, 2011, 14)

This is partly to do with the low socio-economic status of the men McDuié-Ra discusses here, and is relevant to Kamaiya rickshaw drivers. For McDuié-Ra, tribal masculinity is reconfigured in the city in a subaltern form, through which tribal men:

...relish their role as outsiders and take pride in navigating and surviving the city for themselves and other members of the tribe and clan. (McDuié-Ra, 2011, 14)

It provides a way for these men to maintain the appearance of coherent maleness through a subaltern form of masculinity. This helps us to move away from seeing these men as simply performing subordinate masculinities to a situation which restores a higher degree of agency to them, although still in a wider framework in which Bahun masculinities can be considered hegemonic. Furthermore, it helps to explain why these men remain in urban areas despite the difficulties this entails. Kamaiya men such as Upendra manifest the emergence of this subaltern masculinity in jokes at the expense of their passengers, particularly Bahun and upper-caste passengers, who they see as being the rudest of their fares. Joking is important for young men in a variety of workplaces: for example, Collinson (1980) states how joking can be an illustration of resistance and group solidarity amongst male workers.

Another important part of the rickshaw drivers' subaltern masculinity is their strong sense of camaraderie. A large part of Upendra's enjoyment of life in Dhangadhi was

gained from the friendships he had developed with a number of fellow rickshaw drivers which included sharing the frustrations and problems of their daily working lives. Importantly these groups of young men were able to speak Tharu and eat Tharu food in these settings. Myron Weiner (1978), writing in relation to India, sees being able to live with people of the same linguistic and cultural background as a key motivator in the interstate migration of ethnic groups. Upendra shared a very basic room with other Kamaiya rickshaw drivers. His physical space here was very limited and contributed to his close bond with the other young men living there. When I asked if I might visit his home he was very reluctant to tell me where it was, saying that it was not a good home and that he was ashamed of it. He had no friends in Dhangadhi apart from Kamaiya rickshaw drivers, and did not mix socially with men of other caste and class backgrounds. As only men do this job and move for this reason he had no friendships with women, Kamaiya, Tharu or otherwise. The bonds between Kamaiya men in the city are strong, which makes this an important component of subaltern Kamaiya masculinities in Dhangadhi.

There are many reasons why people choose to migrate to towns and cities in Nepal such as Dhangadhi. Upendra' principal reason was that it seemed to be a stage in his life to be led in the city, and we have seen above this is associated with a specific subaltern form of masculinity. Other groups of young men in the city had different reasons for having moved there, for example for a type of work or for education; the sons of landlords had been forced to move by Maoist threats of, or actual, violence. Upendra and the rickshaw drivers I met did not seem to have been badly affected by the PW, and it had not contributed to their decision to move to the city in any significant way. They saw the PW as having happened to other people and elsewhere, more broadly Upendra was ambivalent about politics altogether. For him, the only negative impact of the PW was that curfews and fighting in or close to the city entailed the shops closing and limited work for him; on the other hand, when strikes (*banda*) were called, bicycles and rickshaws were the only forms of transport permitted to move around and so there was plenty of work for rickshaw drivers. While there was some violence in some of the rickshaw driver's villages due to the PW, it was not the reason behind the rickshaw drivers that I spoke to moving to the city.

Movement clearly has a profound influence on the masculinity of men such as Upendra, given that moving to the city means dealing with discrimination and masculinities they do not encounter in their villages. However, the sustainability of such changes is questionable, due to the future plans of many of these young men: while migrating to cities such as Dhangadhi is an important stage in their lives, most see it as temporary and plan to stay in the city as long as possible and eventually return to their villages. There was a begrudging acknowledgement that one day they would have to return home to meet the other requirements associated with being an adult man such as getting married (if not married already), providing in various ways and raising a family. There seemed to be an understanding that they would move to Dhangadhi to work as rickshaw drivers when young and move back, once they had made some money in the city, to settle down in a different occupation (mainly agricultural work). Marriage and 'homebuilding' are also important reasons for moving back forming additional components of the wider transition to adult manhood, which are considered in the subsequent chapter.

In this section I have shown that the implications for masculinity of movement and of their employment at the destination of the movement are formative. Having discussed how Upendra negotiated moving to Dhangadhi in this section, I conclude this chapter with a broader consideration of what the changes in work, literacy and patterns of movement mean for Kamaiya masculinities.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has illustrated how following their freedom there is greater diversity in how Kamaiya men can be considered successful: there is the man who has land; the man involved in politics, the educated man<sup>100</sup>; the man who moves. In the Kamaiya system, being a successful man meant being obedient and hardworking, and many of the expectations were the opposite to those that Kamaiya men are dealing with now. While the Kamaiya system was largely based on exploitation, within it the men had

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100 Despite the immediate negative consequences of Basanta's educational efforts, I include education in this list of proving one's success by focusing on the assumed future success that education will bring for Basanta.

clearly-defined roles and associated expectations. Now things are far more complicated and in some ways more difficult for these men. The formative links between masculinity and work, while changing, have remained constant. As I have shown, Kamaiya masculinities are becoming more complicated and diverse following freedom. Osella and Osella find that:

Male identities are continually negotiated between various positions as men pick their way through competing demands and maintain precarious balances. (2000, 118)

If changing patterns of work, literacy and movement are creating the potential for new positions of maleness for Kamaiya men, Osella and Osella's (ibid) 'negotiation' is potentially more difficult. Here I look at the notion of masculine competency which, while becoming more complicated, consistently emerges as central to the new performances of masculinity highlighted in this chapter. Richard Howson discusses the wider importance of success (or competence) in relation to men's power:

...for men, power relations are crucial to their identification as masculine and that power is enabled through amongst other things: success, in particular configurations of practice. (2011, 4)

If men are, or are seen as, unsuccessful (for example in their employment) it has negative consequences for their power and positions in society. I have shown that the specific competencies relating to certain types of rickshaw driver, soldier, student etc. are often heavily invested in, and in some instances traded for, other competencies, as in Basanta's focus on education. These men have to be seen to be competent in at least something, normally related to their work. The appearance of success (or assumption of future success) facilitates at least the appearance of a coherent, functioning man. As Osella and Osella (2000) have shown, a key part of the link between masculinity and migration is money and being able to spend it in certain ways. For men such as Ram and the rickshaw drivers, this link is complicated given their low economic status and their resultant inability to consume in ways that would confer status upon them in the eyes of other men and women.

Ram invested in competence by moving as a marker of his manhood. He was aware of other competencies, such as those related to education, but one cannot be adept in all possible ways of being a man. One has to work within a specific set of class, geographic, economic and other constraints and attempt to find a space in which to develop competence. These processes are further complicated by investment in specific competencies (or ways of being successful) that evolve over time due to changing life stages. A range of diverse factors, among which the PW was influential, shapes masculine competencies possible at any given time. While the PW seems to have facilitated certain opportunities for masculine competency, for some men, most obviously those who joined the PLA such as Ramesh, it conversely constricted competency in other areas; for example education was negatively affected during the PW with many schools and colleges closing during the war with some remaining closed following the war.

More broadly, I have shown in this chapter that with the abolition of the Kamaiya system Kamaiya men are increasingly expected to be as competent as other Nepali men of low caste and class. Without a history of masculinities relating to such factors as movement or literacy these paths to manhood can be particularly difficult for Kamaiya men. The changes illustrated in this chapter constitute the re-emergence of the Kamaiya 'breadwinner'; i.e. the growing expectation that Kamaiya men provide for their families in ways that did not apply in the Kamaiya system.

As the quote from KPUS at the start of this chapter indicates, there is a sense that prior to the start of the Kamaiya system, Kamaiya men were successful breadwinners and provided for their families. The Kamaiya system subverted this through various forms of oppression; furthermore, it was the landlords who were the providers during this period. With their freedom, Kamaiya men are expected to be breadwinners once more. Furthermore, organisations such as the KPUS and FKS now call on the State to provide for Kamaiya in various ways. In some regards this represents a shift in the patronage Breman has discussed in relation to the *Halipratha* system of bonded labour (1974, 1993). With the end of the Kamaiya system, it seems that aspects of patronage are still expected by the Kamaiya, but now not from owners but from the State.

The changes in their work, literacy and movement can all be viewed as part of this change as they seek to meet the new expectations of them. However, it should not be assumed that men are the only breadwinners (Jackson, 2001, 12-17). While I have focused on the emergence of the male Kamaiya breadwinner role here, Kamaiya women contribute to their households significantly and in multiple ways. This chapter reflects on the changing expectations that Kamaiya men are beginning to negotiate and how providing for the family is becoming a critical component of Kamaiya masculinity: of proving one's worth as a man. Partly as a result of the increasing complexity of the links between masculinity and work in Kamaiya communities, successfully providing is extremely difficult for many Kamaiya men. More generally, for them to be seen a successful is now more difficult than ever with a greater range of pressures and expectations than ever before.

To conclude, I have shown in this chapter that certain forms of work, literacy/education and movement are resulting in the formation of a range of new masculinities in Kamaiya communities, some of which can be considered subaltern. While more broadly there are instances in which one can observe masculinities that are more subordinate in the way they relate to certain hegemonic forms (for example those that emphasise physical labour). In other examples (such as education) the changes in masculinities I have outlined above represent a move closer to the hegemonic ideal. This is reflective of a widely held understood assumption about the nature of Brahmanic masculinities which are assumed to be highly invested in education. This helps to explain why most other Kamaiya men viewed Basanta, and his education negatively. Such interactions between masculinities will be considered in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis.

This chapter has shown that meeting the range of new expectations and competencies associated with these changing masculinities (such as the breadwinner) is becoming part of the transition to adulthood for Kamaiya men. So modernity is multiplying the possible ways of being a man, but this also opens up more ways to fail. However, while important, these changes in these aspects of Kamaiya men's lives (as well as the importance of bodies explored in the previous chapter) are not the only prisms



through which to explore changing Kamaiya masculinities. In the following chapter certain changes in social relations that are influenced by and influencing Kamaiya masculinities will be explored. This provides another perspective on the ways in which Kamaiya men are adapting to life following freedom and how Kamaiya masculinities are becoming more closely aligned to the normative contours of peasant masculinities in Nepal.

## **Chapter 7 – Changing Kamaiya Masculinities in Family Settings**

Through its consideration of Kamaiya men's bodies, consumption and patterns of work, literacy and movement, this thesis has so far shown that their masculinities are changing in a range of ways. Kamaiya manliness is now possible through a broader range of gendered performance and practice than before, although, as discussed in the previous two chapters, it also entails new constraints and difficulties. This reflects Judith Butler's (1993, 95) view that gender is often performed in a context of various constraints. I have discussed various subaltern performances of masculinity in response to the changing circumstances and hierarchies of masculinity within which they are situated. This chapter considers another area of Kamaiya men's lives in a range of settings that coalesce around a broad definition of family life.

The previous chapters explored a range of reciprocal relationships between aspects of modernity and masculinity that illustrate change as well as continuity in both. Being a 'modern' man in the context of locally-specific manifestations of modernity in my research setting reflects Karen Kapadia's reflections on modernity in rural India that I outlined in the theory chapter, that indicated that modernity is uneven and multiple (Kapadia, 2002, 152-153). Previously we have seen its diverse implications of modernity for Kamaiya men and their masculinities. As Kapadia and many others indicate (such as, Appadurai, 1996, Pigg, 2002), the ways in which modernity is unfolding in Kamaiya communities refers to the local and regional contours of this process. Kamaiya masculinities are shaped through their interactions with Brahmanic masculinities and through considering these interactions it has been indicated at multiple points that Brahmanic masculinities are considered both modern and hegemonic. This is perhaps the most obvious position in the masculine hierarchy where notions of modernity and masculinity come together; a range of subaltern

masculinities are emerging in response to this. This perspective of modernity, which this thesis takes, is further complicated by the way that masculinity is:

...neither tangible nor an abstraction whose meaning is everywhere the same. In practice, people operate according to many different notions of masculinity. (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994, 12)

Until now I have looked at both modernity and masculinity and how at times they are thought of as being the same thing while at others they seem to be moving further apart. So in some (but not all) instances, what it means to be a man as well as what it means to be modern may be viewed in the same performances. For example, as I indicated in the Chapter 6, the fact that Kamaiya men can now move in ways not previously possible is one manifestation of modernity in their lives. The forms of movement explored in the previous chapter are becoming intertwined with certain masculinities and leading to profound changes in the lives of many Kamaiya men; and not just those who are moving.

The previous chapters have pointed towards the predominant model or image of adult Kamaiya masculinity following freedom (i.e. shaped by modernity): becoming the breadwinner. Although the masculinities through which it is possible to achieve breadwinner subject positions are diversifying, this also provides more ways to fail, which can make it difficult to meet the expectations associated with this ideal. While Kamaiya men have provided for their families in various ways both before and since the abolition of the Kamaiya system, the way that such provision is associated with their masculinities is changing, with the transition from the Kamaiya system to peasant modes of production causing associated transitions in Kamaiya masculinities. This chapter engages with aspects of the transition that are associated with occupying the breadwinner subject positions involved in marriage and fatherhood. Paradoxically, while the emergence of the breadwinner is a reflection of modernity in Kamaiya communities, I show here that certain aspects of modernity also constitute major subversions of breadwinner masculinities. I discuss how changes in marriage and other relationships with women and in fatherhood, while important parts of being seen as a modern man and of the breadwinner ideal, can be subverted by the very

performances and practices that attempt to meet the expectations associated with these subject positions. For example, I explore the implications of movement in relation to fatherhood. Some Kamaiya men move to meet the breadwinner ideal and provide for their families even though their movement is a major subversion of other, mainly non-economic, aspects of provision for their families.

This chapter illustrates some of these paradoxes of modern masculinities. Before considering what some of these changes have meant for Kamaiya masculinities as performed in family settings, and wider changes taking place in Kamaiya families themselves, I look at the main components of this chapter – marriage and fatherhood – and what they mean for the emergence of the Kamaiya breadwinner position, which is shaping Kamaiya masculinities in important ways. The central focus of this chapter is on the changes in the importance of marriage and fatherhood to the reproduction of Kamaiya masculinities. This will facilitate an engagement with marriage and fatherhood as aspects of the transition to adulthood.

The focus of this chapter is an analysis of two formative aspects of Kamaiya breadwinner masculinities that has emerged following their release from the Kamaiya system. I consider aspects of what Townsend calls the ‘package deal’ of fatherhood, which comprises the following elements (which change over time):

...[these four interconnected elements] having children, being married, holding a steady job and owning a home. (2002, 2)

Chapter six discusses the latter two aspects of the fatherhood package deal; here I investigate the others: having children and being married. I depart from Townsend’s analysis with deeper questioning of what these mean for Kamaiya masculinities and visions of manhood. Osella and Osella point towards this analytical path in their research in Kerala, helping to better frame and problematise not just Townsend’s position but also, more broadly, how ethnography tends to represent these aspects of being a man:

In existing ethnography, the idea of a man as somebody who will marry a woman and become a good provider, a father, a husband (of whatever sort) goes uninterrogated. (Osella and Osella, 2006, 2)

Masculinity (or the ideas of what a man should be) is associated with these factors without considering other ideas of maleness (not least those that relate to relationships between men, to which I return later in the chapter). This provides the context for this chapter, and my analysis takes up Osella and Osella's challenge and considers what changes in marriage and fatherhood mean for Kamaiya masculinities. Again, the changes are a consequence of modernity and masculinity reciprocally relating, influencing and at times converging. I interrogate and analyse how, through practices relating to the family and men's role as the breadwinner, Kamaiya men are both complicit in and challenge prevailing gendered expectations of them. This provides a prism through which these changes in Kamaiya masculinities can be shown to relate to different hegemonic and other forms of masculinity. To further develop the theme referred to in other parts of this thesis, I ask where, in Kamaiya men's social lives, we can see the performance of subaltern masculinities; where we see performances that refer to hegemonic norms; and what modernity has to do with these differences in the family setting.

I principally develop these questions through the accounts of three Kamaiya men in order to illustrate the impact of modernity on Kamaiya masculinities as performed in the family. The changes relating to marriage and fatherhood that I explore in this chapter provide a prism through which to consider my argument that modernity has profound implications for Kamaiya masculinities, particularly through the increasing diversity of the potential ways to be a Kamaiya man.

This introduction has conceptually extended what has come before by situating the focus of the chapter in the context of changing and multiple patterns of modernity and masculinity. Before discussing changes in marriage and other relationships between Kamaiya men and women and fatherhood, I set the context with a broad exploration of the effect of the transition from the Kamaiya system on the gender division of labour in the research setting.

## **Changing relationships between Kamaiya men and women**<sup>101</sup>

This section looks at the changes I observed in how relationships between Kamaiya men and women were conducted. I reflect on both modernity and the changing masculinities that relate to the breadwinner or aspects of adult Kamaiya masculinities relating to provision. Marriage is the normative approach to relationships between Kamaiya men and women and is seen as critical to adult masculinities I discuss in this section, as Osella and Osella found in their research in Kerala:

The production of the normative household through the institution of marriage is the ultimate outcome of processes of gendering. (Osella and Osella, 2006, 2)

Marriage is found in various forms in all societies, although its specific manifestations and gender implications vary significantly (Stone, 2010, Chapter 1). Lynn Bennett indicates the importance of marriage among the upper caste Bahun/Chhetri communities where she undertook her research:

...marriage reveals a great deal about the relative status of men and women, and about the structures of caste and kinship. (Bennett, 2002, 71)

While this section of the chapter principally focuses on marriage and various discourses associated with it, I also consider other types of relationship between Kamaiya men and women. The discourses about these relationships are particularly important to understand the changes that are taking place. Here I consider marriage not in isolation but in conjunction with how Kamaiya men in a range of settings talked

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101 At no time during my fieldwork did I hear about sexual relationships between men (or women). However, this does not mean that homosexual relationships of various kinds are not evident in my fieldwork sites or in the Kamaiya community more generally. On the few occasions I discussed homosexual relationships with men, I was told that if any such behaviour was happening in Nepal it was most likely either influenced or carried out by Western or Indian men. Homosexuality on these occasions was not talked about in a pejorative or discriminatory way; it was simply not a consideration at all.

about their relationships with women, their girlfriends and the debated relative merits of love and arranged marriage. Marriage is an important marker of successful masculinity. Subtle changes taking place in the links between adult masculinities and marriage form the core of this section, which considers the implications of these changes for the practices associated with marriage, what this means for these masculinities and how the transition from the Kamaiya system is implicated in these changes.

Some historical context is required to contextualise the analysis that follows. Few studies contribute specifically in relation to the Kamaiya, although research on several Tharu sub-groups has considered various marriage practices (for example, Guneratne, 2002, Hu, 1957, Kittelsen, Gurung, 1999, Mathur, 1967, Maslak, 2003, McDonough, 1984, Puri, 2011, Verma, 2009). Below I give an account of how Kamaiya men discussed marriage with me. Our conversations were about how the Kamaiya system influenced marriage and other relationships between Kamaiya men and women. The Kampur *basti* Guruwa was particularly keen to impress his perspective on these aspects of Kamaiya cultural practice on me; such matters form an important part of his role and associated status in Kampur *basti*.

The major change in relation to marriage on which the Kamaiya men reflected was how marriages are arranged. Historically, Kamaiya families arranged a marriage between two babies (as in Prakash and his wife Amita's case) or the unborn children of two women pregnant at the same time. Although arranged marriages are the norm in Kamaiya communities, practice associated with this type of marriage has evolved significantly: the prospective bride and groom tend to be much older (around 15-20) and, as I discuss below, they have some influence on the arrangements. Consequently the age at marriage is rising. This change is important, considering how agency is changing in this context with younger Kamaiya men discussing the possibility of love marriages, and it can be situated in the context of wider changes taking places in Nepal (cf. Ghimire and Axinn, 2006). I also discuss significant continuities below.

The older Kamaiya men considered it particularly important that marriages were arranged by families and were endogamous in the Kamaiya group.<sup>102</sup> This remains the case, although it seemed to be less important to younger men. 'Exchange marriages', in which two sisters from two households are exchanged, remain common. This means that the men stay in their family's house, while the two women who are exchanged, swap households. This practice has been observed in Tharu communities for many years (cf. Hu, 1957) and this has helped to reduce the importance of dowry payments within Tharu communities. More broadly, Kamaiya communities are patrilocal; i.e. a married couple lives in the home of the husband's father or now more frequently in the husband's house. The Kamaiya tend to live as extended families, as was the case in both *bastis* considered in this thesis, although following freedom the reach of extended family in this sense has shrunk significantly. The normative Kamaiya kinship model relates to various forms of patrilineal extended households.

Beyond the immediate family are extended relationships that are interchangeably considered as family/friend relations. This equates, for example, to the sharing of specific resources and the pooling of labour at certain times such as planting and harvest time. This necessitates a closer examination not least due to the predominance of the extended family system in some (but not all) of the Kamaiya communities in which I undertook research. As has been indicated in the previous chapter there are changes taking place in relation to working practices. There is increasing diversity in how the Kamaiya make a living with some Kamaiya now diversifying away from subsistence agriculture. To an extent this has resulted in a challenge to extended family networks due to the collective labour demands of subsistence agriculture declining. Therefore, there emerges below varying degrees of separation from extended family systems and a range of alternative family compositions. Here, too, evolution and changes are taking place that can be understood through a consideration of how masculinity and modernity come together,

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102 Stratification within the Kamaiya sub-group is getting more complicated following freedom (particularly in relation to class). Therefore, it is unclear as to the extent to which marrying any other Kamaiya or Kamaiya from certain backgrounds (such as someone from a family with land) will become increasingly important in future years.

resulting in, for example, men moving in ways not previously possible that have implications for marriage practices.

I now turn to some of the changes in marriage and other relationships with women that younger Kamaiya men discussed with me. The following section shows that modernity has influenced not only these relationships but also how such changes are given meaning and discussed. I consider various premarital relationships, with a particular focus on Surendra, a Kamaiya rickshaw driver who had moved to Dhangadhi. The section below illustrates that while premarital relationships are not new in Kamaiya communities, modernity is changing their nature and extent, as well as how they are discussed. Older Kamaiya men did not want to discuss such relationships, while for the younger men, talking about girlfriends – and for some, pornography (viewed on mobile phones) – seemed to be an important way of establishing their status as men.

### **Non-Marital Relationships**

There are important gender differences in how non-marital relationships are configured and changing in Kamaiya and other communities in Nepal, as the extract below reporting that sex before marriage is significant amongst young men in Nepal, with associated risks, highlights:

[While] our results show no evidence that delayed marriage currently entails an increase in risky sexual behaviour on the part of young women, they do show that about one in five young men engage in premarital sex. These young men tend to initiate sex nearly four years before they marry and begin living with their wife, potentially exposing themselves to the risk of HIV and other STIs. (Caltabiano, 2008 , 38)

Caltabiano does not address how such risk-taking might be a reflection of the performance of certain masculinities. She sees education as responsible for such changes, particularly the rising age of marriage. While education may play a part in these changes, other aspects of modernity are also important here. The significance of premarital sex necessitates an exploration of how unmarried young Kamaiya men talk



about and behave regarding such relations, particularly since increasing numbers of young men such as Basanta and Ram have an arranged or a love marriage later in life rather than at birth. Traditionally marriages were arranged and committed to at birth (I didn't hear of any of these promises of marriage being broken). However, the marriage ceremony took place around puberty the woman passed puberty after which time she was expected to move to her husband's house. Below I explore how such practices are changing significantly. To explore some of the ways in which young Kamaiya men are pursuing premarital relationships and talking about them, I turn to Surendra, who had moved to Dhangadhi to work as a rickshaw driver.

### **Surendra**

As discussed previously, Dhangadhi has an attraction for a diverse range of people who move to the city for a wide number of reasons. I have already explored rickshaw drivers' experiences of moving to and living in the city to show that this form of movement is becoming associated with a certain stage in their lives and the transition to adult masculinities. Here I argue that the sexual relationships and masculinities associated with these performances that are possible in Dhangadhi are part of the reason why young men such as Surendra move to and stay in the city. As discussed in the previous chapter, movement is becoming an increasingly important pathway to adult manhood in Kamaiya communities, with many Kamaiya men from rural areas of Kailali district moving to urban destinations in both Nepal and India. This section explores the part that certain non-marital relationships (such as those with prostitutes and girlfriends) play in such movement.

Surendra clearly enjoyed being a rickshaw driver despite the difficulties involved in the work. He is a Kamaiya man of about 18 and had lived in Dhangadhi for about 4 years when I met him. He lived with Upendra and other rickshaw drivers in a shared room in a city backstreet just off the road that leads to the Indian border. He had worked as a rickshaw driver since arriving in the city, occasionally doing some building work when it was available, although he did not seem to make much effort to find a permanent alternative job. As discussed, being a rickshaw driver is associated with a stage in some young men's lives before they marry. Being unmarried in the city was an important part of the freedom that Surendra felt as an inhabitant of Dhangadhi. He was free from

many of the pressures of being a man in the village and immune to expectations relating to income generation and household leadership. The behaviours that he talked about were not possible in his village, or at least did not constitute any part of the performances of masculinity considered appropriate there. Moving to the city provides such young men with an opportunity to explore aspects of their masculine and sexual identities. Below, I discuss not only the changes in non-marital relationships but also the changing discourses associated with them.

Surendra grew up in an exclusively Kamaiya *basti* in a remote and rural area of eastern Kailali district. He had had no schooling and was illiterate. Before moving to Dhangadhi he had found occasional work as an agricultural labourer. With the abolition of the Kamaiya system in 2000 his family was freed, but received no government assistance and settled illegally at the edge of a forest which was important for their livelihoods due to the many resources it provided (more broadly for the Kamaiya the forest has a particular cosmological importance (Guneratne, 1999b, Verma, 2010)). His family was very poor and there was little work in his *basti* so, like other young men from there, he moved to find work in Dhangadhi. His *basti* was two hours from Dhangadhi via two buses; he showed no interest in what was going on there and seemed reluctant to think about having to go back there at some stage. He and his family could not afford mobile phones. Surendra knew he would be in Dhangadhi for a limited time, and that loss of fitness and increasing pressure to marry would determine when he returned to his village.

Conversations with Surendra about women were interesting, as he was more open than many of the other young Kamaiya men, who were initially reluctant to discuss such relationships with me. They tended to open up with time and in certain places, such as the Skype Bar. This was not the case with Surendra, however, and he was soon very forthcoming and clearly wanted to talk about his experiences with women in Dhangadhi. These conversations, almost irrespective of their content, were an important part of the performance of his masculinity. He wanted it to be known that he was successful with women, and wished to project a certain vision of maleness that he felt would give him status in Dhangadhi where, as discussed earlier, Kamaiya men face daily subversion of their masculinity.

Part of the appeal of Dhangadhi for Surendra related to the masculinities that are possible there, of which I explore those relating to sex in this section. His discussions about women indicated that non-marital relationships were an important part of the image of maleness that he wanted to project. Not only this type of relationship but also the discourses and narratives associated with them are new. So modernity here, as it relates to moving to Dhangadhi, is not only making such relationships possible but also facilitating a space in which men can talk about them in new ways and project their maleness through these conversations. I mentioned this earlier in relation to discussions about women in the Skype Bar, reporting that both having sex with women and talking about it in certain ways are important markers of masculinity. They are an important part of the performance and validity of the subaltern masculinities that Surendra produces in order to find and retain a place in the masculine hierarchies in Dhangadhi. I return to this below.

Moving to Dhangadhi facilitated a range of new opportunities for Surendra in relation to sex, often involving prostitutes. Kamaiya men such as Surendra find it difficult to meet women in contexts other than a brothel, therefore girlfriends were rarely discussed unless in relation to a girl back in the village. I formed the impression from a number of interviews that some of the young Kamaiya men would rather not have sex with prostitutes, but for some it was part of a masculinity specific to the city. Furthermore, contributing to conversations about their sexual experiences was a way of affirming their position in the group, which can be considered marginal.

While there were prostitutes in areas close to his *basti*, being in the city provided an anonymity that was impossible at home. Surendra saw having sex with prostitutes almost as a natural part of being a young man, and this was a significant part of how he talked and thought about being in Dhangadhi. He told me that he had lost his virginity when he was young, before moving to Dhangadhi, although he had had sex so many times he had forgotten exactly when it had occurred. He seemed almost proud that he engaged in unsafe sex despite being aware of HIV and condoms. He did not like to use the latter, and some of the prostitutes he had been to, did not seem to care about them either. There was a kind of defiance in how Surendra talked about this

risk-taking: almost irrespective of the consequences, of which he was aware, he preferred to have unsafe sex. Here I draw on Holt and Thompson's (2004) 'rebel' model of masculinity, which the authors consider the specific aspect of the performance of masculinity here. They see these masculinities as the opposite to that of the breadwinner, as they subvert components of the latter, such as providing. This is reflective of Connell's (2005) notion of protest masculinity, which helps to provide a perspective on Surendra's behaviour: he is rejecting prevailing masculinities because that is what he feels is expected of him at this stage of his life in Dhangadhi.

As discussed in previous chapters, subaltern masculinities have been produced through practices that are in contrast to the Brahmanic hegemonic masculinities focused on abstinence. On a number of occasions Surendra mentioned that he had slept with more women than his male Bahun passengers, who he tended to feminise due to their assumed abstinence and physical weakness. I have discussed other manifestations of subaltern Kamaiya masculinities through considering drinking and the pride in rickshaw driving and hard manual work. Sex is another reflection of this and another way of responding to and rejecting the assumed abstinence of hegemonic Brahmanic masculinities. Due to his caste and class positions, Surendra will never be able to occupy hegemonic positions of masculinity; however, drinking and having sex provides him with a way of subverting them at least briefly and at a very personal level. Importantly, this does not constitute a subversion of the hegemonic form, but sex and the way Surendra talked about it provides a perspective on how he is negotiating it through the production of a subaltern masculinity.

This is an obvious area for asserting a type of masculinity that is largely dependent on women for its validity. I often detected varying levels of bravado and exaggeration in such conversations, peers had a role to play, especially in exaggerating to them and encouraging them to visit prostitutes themselves and talking about their visits subsequently. The only problematic aspect of relationships with women was the lack of financial resources to pay for a prostitute, which cost the equivalent of a bad day's pay (about 60-100 rupees). Surendra was more than happy to talk to me about sex. He and the other young Kamaiya men seemed to see sex in commodified terms due to its association with prostitutes.

Surendra was certain of his prowess in relation both to the number of women he had sex with and being able to do what he wanted with them. He seemed less certain about various other things that could be a way of asserting his masculinity (such as consuming in certain ways), perhaps with the exception of drinking. His comparison of his prowess to that of Bahun men, who, he was sure, were either not having sex at all or were doing so with far fewer women than he was, partially reflects the animosity between Connell's (2005) subordinate and hegemonic masculinities. The performance of subaltern masculinity outlined here suggests a different type of agency that would be assumed of subordinate masculinities. This is a reflection of Surendra who is someone who in many ways is in a marginal position in relation to class and caste as well as masculinity. While he is in a marginal position, this is a position from which in certain ways he is able to reject the masculinities that correspond to hegemonic positions. I do not think this can be understood simply as, to use Connell's terminology, a protest form of subordinate masculinity. Richard Howson (2006) criticises Connell's use of Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which does not reflect the flexibility in how the term was originally theorised in relation to class. Adding flexibility to our understanding of Surendra's negotiations with hegemonic masculinity outlined here provides space for thinking about agency differently in this context. The discussion about sex in this section provides another way to consider how subaltern masculinities respond to hegemonic ones that are complicated and fluid. Surendra actively differentiates himself from hegemonic masculinities by behaving sexually in the, often risky, ways outlined here in response to Brahmanic hegemonic forms. Osella and Osella consider Brahmanic masculinity as:

...social high status associated with control, detachment, power. (2006, 49)

However, the 'non-hegemonic style' (ibid: 49) that is being explored here in relation to Surendra does not question the status of Bahun masculinities, as they ultimately remain hegemonic. The new and constantly emerging ways in which subaltern masculinities interact with hegemonic masculinities, are more complicated than Connell's theory would suggest, is a theme running through this thesis. I return to this in the final chapter.

This section has shown that being a rickshaw driver is associated with a specific life-stage and specific behaviours, such as Surendra's relationships with women. When discussing future relationships, Surendra drew a clear distinction between his current behaviour with women in Dhangadhi as a rickshaw driver and how he would conduct his relationships with women when he moved back to his *basti* to work as a labourer or agricultural worker. Surendra might inherit his parent's smallholding when he moves back home, although this alone would not provide enough to sustain a family. His family will also arrange a marriage for him with a Kamaiya woman almost certainly from his village. Osella and Osella help to situate this in returning the focus to marriage:

While we can delineate several styles of masculinity and competing aesthetics (e.g. the vegetarian teetotaler versus the meat-eating 'party' man), marriage and setting up home is unquestionably necessary for all men, part of the *doxa*—the utterly taken for granted. (Osella and Osella, 2006, 204)

So while not all men move to Dhangadhi or India or get an education, there is an expectation that all Kamaiya men will marry. Surendra saw a wife as part of a quite different life-stage than that associated with being a rickshaw driver. He seemed hesitant about this, and did not know who his family would arrange for him to marry and whether she would be attractive. Surendra did not favour the love marriage, as he considers that his family know him best and are thus best placed to choose him a suitable wife; I return to this below. He wanted a Kamaiya woman who, unlike him, must be a virgin. This was important to him, and he seemed unable to see the hypocrisy of his expectations in this regard. More generally, as he was relatively free in some sense while in Dhangadhi he seemed happy to accept the life path mapped out for him by others, principally his parents. There was a sense of inevitability about this trajectory, although I had the impression that he would like to find a way to stay in Dhangadhi.

Having considered pre-marital relationships and how these relate to certain life-stages that are becoming more pronounced as a consequence of moving to Dhangadhi, below

I examine changes in marriage practices and discourses. While all Kamaiya men marry, changes are occurring that question the doxa and bring marriage into focus as something that, while critical to Kamaiya masculinities, is less taken for granted. The following section responds to the following question: If marriage is essential to the achievement of adult masculinity, what are the implications for masculinity of changes in marriage practices?

### **Continuity and Change in Kamaiya Marriage Practices**

Before moving on to explore changes in marriage practices in more detail, I present the ways such practices were configured in the Kamaiya system prior to 2000 in order to provide a context for what follows. Although landowners' marriage practices<sup>103</sup> seem to have influenced those of the Kamaiya very little, I was given various accounts of how marriage was influenced by the Kamaiya system itself. While there were networks of communication amongst Kamaiya families in the Kamaiya system, communication was problematic, making arranging marriages (and other things) difficult. The most profound impact of marriage prior to 2000 was that the wedding celebrations were a potential source of debt. Events such as weddings are often relatively expensive to arrange and are normally associated with celebration including lots of drinking and eating meat. Both families might also expect payments, although the popularity of exchange marriage reduced the impact of this (which was a major reason why exchange marriages are popular). It was common for the costs associated with marriage (and other events such as funerals) to contribute to the debt that kept the Kamaiya in bondage. As there was little surplus money or food to cover such costs, many families took out a loan from their owner. Marriage put additional pressure on already very meagre household resources.

To provide further context for the analysis of changing marriage practices in Kamaiya communities, I now look at changes in the wider context of Nepal. A broad range of studies indicate that various interrelated changes are occurring in marital practices in Nepal. For example, using the 2001 Nepalese Demographic and Health Survey, Caltabiano and Castiglioni highlight the following changes:

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103 Please see Bennett (2002) for an account of Bahun marriage practice in Nepal.

Age at marriage for women is rising, as is the proportion of women who will never marry. Although the median age at marriage in Nepal is rising, it remains lower than that of other countries in the region... The proportion of young men having premarital sex has risen; that proportion varies little across regions and ethnic groups. (Caltabiano, 2008 , 36)

These changes form a background against which to situate the specific changes I discuss below. Furthermore, in a study focusing on 14-22 year olds, Choe et al (2004) indicate that the later age of marriage is associated with specific changes, including higher levels of education, living in urban areas and the higher involvement of young people in the processes associated with marriage decision-making. However, one of the central issues with much of this research is the lack of engagement with various class, caste and ethnic identities, which shape marriage practices to a significant extent. Changes occurring in relation to differing practices of certain ethnic and caste groups such as the Tharu are generally not reflected in this research which is largely survey-based. What my discussion of the changes explored below offers that the above papers do not, is an exploration of how changing masculinities and gender roles are implicated in these changes.

In many ways Ghimire and Axinn's (2006) paper is highly relevant to the following sections of this chapter. Their study based on the Chitwan Valley Family Study involved a household survey followed by a series of interviews. The Chitwan district of mid-west Nepal has many similarities to Kailali insofar as it is also in the Terai and includes a large population of Tharu. Ghimire and Axinn observed the following changes in Chitwan Valley:

More young people are taking part in the selection of their own spouse, marrying at older ages, starting childbearing later and limiting their fertility. These are monumental changes in the lifetimes of the current residents of Chitwan valley, making the family experiences of young people much different to those of their parents. (Ghimire and Axinn, 2006, 194)



Such changes are significant, but the report would be more meaningful if the analysis had explicitly considered caste and ethnic identity; the authors engage with a unitary and opaque 'Nepali family system', even though diverse family arrangements exist both within and between specific caste and ethnic groups such as the Kamaiya. Furthermore, despite Chitwan district having a high proportion of Tharu residents, the authors do not consider changes specific to Tharu and Kamaiya marriage practices in any depth.

The above studies are interesting as they are based on the analysis of a number of surveys and indicate some significant changes in marriage practices in Nepal, but there are significant weaknesses. They pay little attention to a number of issues relating to marriage that I consistently encountered. For example, the debate on 'love' versus 'arranged' marriages was referred to repeatedly and was a major concern for many of the young men and women that I interviewed. I reflect on some of my discussions about love and arranged marriage with various Kamaiya men below. In Nepal love marriages are becoming increasingly common and popular, especially in urban areas such as Kathmandu (Choe, 2004) and hill areas (Niraula and Morgan, 1996, 43). This raises a related question: are inter-caste marriages also becoming more common because of the rising incidence of love marriages?<sup>104</sup> If so, in what ways are such marriages becoming more acceptable? Nancy Levine indicates that in Nepal that there is significant complexity in relation to marriage:

In Nepal, the situation is somewhat different [to that in India]. There are no regular patterns of cross-caste intermarriage: its manifestations are various; it can involve great disparities in status; link diverse groups; and occasionally even run counter to the normal direction of marital inequality, that is, it occasionally is hypogamous. (Levine, 1987, 80)

While this was written 25 years ago this appeared to still be the case during my fieldwork. Inter-caste marriage is indeed complex, and claims about significant changes here must be made with caution. The examples given below indicate that

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104 The July 2009 budget introduced financial incentives for inter-caste marriages.

broadly speaking, marriages between Tharu and non-Tharu are met with disapproval, although marrying someone from another Tharu subgroup is less problematic.<sup>105</sup> There are more examples of the former, especially in the PLA cantonments where it is actively encouraged. Below, I provide one example of such a marriage in the PLA and explore whether this can be considered a reflection of modernity and/or simply a manifestation of Maoist ideology as it relates to the PLA. I also consider the PLA's attempt to set an example to communities close by the cantonments by encouraging practices such as inter-caste marriage and promoting women to far higher positions of responsibility and power than they are able to acquire in other settings in Nepal.

The research explored above is based in various parts of Nepal, although it largely lacks specific reference to the Kamaiya or, more broadly the Tharu. However, a number of studies relate specifically to the Tharu (but not explicitly to the Kamaiya): some of these consider marital practices.<sup>106</sup> Christian McDonough carried out research on the Dangaura Tharu (the wider Tharu subgroup to which most Kamaiya belong) for over 20 years and suggests that the central organising principal in Tharu marriage is clan exogamy in a framework of locally distinct endogamous groups (1984, Chapter 9, 2000).

In a study on the Tharu in Chitwan district, Arjun Guneratne's (2002) study of how marriage is politically represented by certain political groups (principally the Kamaiya Welfare Society and BASE)<sup>107</sup> reports certain changes in marriage practice. Principally this relates to the endorsement of intermarriage between various Tharu subgroups as part of an effort by such organisations to create a pan-Tharu unity. Guneratne identifies certain generational differences here, with the younger generation of Kamaiya more receptive to such changes (ibid, 157). Alongside the wider changes outlined previously, Tharu-specific research provides a context in which I consider the

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105 The only exception to this being any potential marriage between a Kamaiya and the son or daughter of a Tharu landlord, this would have been considered quite problematic.

106 Despite the lack of research on the Kamaiya, Giselle Krauskopff has compiled an extensive bibliography of anthropological research on the Tharu which highlights studies of marriage (1995).

107 For more information on these two Kamaiya specific organisations please see Krauskopff (2002).

various changes in marriage below. In the following sections I discuss what being in the PLA means for marriage practices and then explore the implications of living close to the PLA cantonment has for the Kamaiya men in Kampur *basti*. First, I consider the debate about love marriages and arranged marriages as a way of exploring how modernity is shaping Kamaiya marriage practices. This is not included in the literature discussed above, but Kamaiya men frequently talked about it during discussions on marriage and relationships with women.

### **Arranged Marriages**

I have shown that the 'breadwinner' is one of the predominant modes of adult masculinity in Kamaiya communities and have outlined the importance of marriage for to be able to live up to this masculinity: being married can be equated with being an adult man. Here I turn to a specific form of marriage predominant in Kampur *basti* – arranged marriage. Arranged marriages have been considered an obsession within anthropology in South Asia (Osella and Osella, 2006, 24) but also a bedrock of maleness (Derne, 2000).

While there appears to be significant continuity in relation to arranged marriages, closer examination of the practices associated with these marriages reveal changes which are important regarding both how agency is implicated in these practices and how masculinity and the being an adult man are implicated in them. As marriage is so important to Kamaiya masculinities and adulthood generally, this deserves detailed examination. To a certain extent this section follows Osella and Osella's (2006) invitation to critically engage with this part of the masculine doxa.

The marriages of all of the couples living in Kampur *basti*'s 35 households were arranged, and the rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi assumed that when they returned to their villages they also would have an arranged marriage. In research in a number of Tharu communities in Uttarakhand in India, 83% of marriages in a sample of 1000 couples were regular (i.e. arranged) (Verma, 2009). One could argue that part of the doxa relating to breadwinner masculinities in Kamaiya communities is not just that men marry but that they will have an arranged marriage. Arranged marriages are an important part of life in Nepal and are still formative of the boundaries between

different caste and sub-caste groups. For the higher castes they are a means of maintaining caste 'integrity' (or religious purity) and allow families to establish a range of connections and alliances, as Mary Cameron (1998) explores in her study from the far-western hills of Nepal.

Those men who were unmarried clearly aspired to an arranged marriage. There were no non-arranged marriages in the *basti* that I was aware of. However, this was not the only type of marriage talked about in both the *basti* and Dhangadhi. Laura Ahearn (2001, 2004) explores changes in literacy and marriage practices in a framework of social change in a Magar village in Palpa district in western Nepal.<sup>108</sup> Amongst the many changes she discusses that have occurred from the 1990s onwards, she identifies a significant increase in love marriages in her research village. She sees this as a consequence of higher literacy rates, which are:

...both a catalyst for social change and a result of numerous other types of social transformation. (Ahearn, 2004, 305)

As discussed in the previous chapter, although higher literacy is having an impact in Kamaiya communities it is still not clear what this will mean for these communities. It is unclear that this will necessarily lead to better and more highly paid forms of work, as state and NGO workplaces are dominated by the upper castes. The impact of literacy on marriage is also unclear. The most highly-educated person in Kampur *basti*, Basanta, did not have a different perspective on marriage to any of the other men there. For him at least, being literate did not influence his focus on achieving an arranged marriage. It will be interesting to see whether there is an associated increase in love marriages as literacy rates increase following Ahearn's association between the two, although as this section has shown, it is too soon to make such a link in these fieldwork sites.

Ultimately, unlike in the PLA cantonment on the other side of the highway I did not hear of any love marriages in the *basti*. In a broad range of discussions with both men

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108 The Magar are an ethnic group more often found in the mid-western hills of Nepal.

and women there, love marriages were uniformly referred to negatively. These conversations tended to treat arranged and love marriages as though both were distinct possibilities, whereas as I show below, it is more complicated in reality. I was consistently told that one's parents and wider family were best placed to make this important decision, although young men and women seem able to influence the process to a greater extent than ever before. High divorce rates,<sup>109</sup> family breakdowns and infidelity were often mentioned in relation to love marriages. Divorce is certainly a possibility in Kampur *basti* and among the Kamaiya I met in Dhangadhi. It did not seem to be associated with any significant stigma, but I heard of no examples in either setting.

While arranged marriages are the preferred form of marriage, the practices associated with them are changing. One of the changes is in the way some (but not all) marriages are arranged. Traditionally, marriages were arranged when a girl and a boy were born, providing an opportunity to forge connections between sometimes already-related families. This is occasionally the case; for example, Prakash had been married in this way. Once betrothed in this way the girl lives with her family until puberty and then moves to her husband's house (or his family's house). The younger Kamaiya men and women seemed unhappy with this practice. They are now manipulating the arrangements so they are more to their liking, and up to a point are able to choose or reject a potential husband or wife, although young men appear to have more scope in this than young women. This extremely important decision can be viewed as another example of modernity interacting with gender roles and providing more opportunities for men. I discuss the broader implications of modernity for gender roles in my two fieldwork sites in the conclusion to this chapter.

The PLA is another important influence on how the various merits of arranged and love marriage are seen and discussed. As I show later, the Maoists actively encourage both love and inter-caste marriages (Ogura, 2010). The section on Balram, below, provides an example of the changes in marriage practices for PLA members which are having an

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109 In many parts of the world increasing numbers of marriages are ending in divorce or separation. (UN: 2011: 16).

effect elsewhere, especially in the *basti*. There were some interesting conversations about marriages in the cantonment, where inter-caste and love marriages were the normative arrangement. This caused controversy in the *basti*, as some disapproved of the Tharu cadre in the cantonment. Their love and inter-caste marriages challenge Tharu culture and particularly the Guruwa. I did not encounter any inter-caste marriages between different Tharu subgroups or, more controversially, between a Kamaiya and someone from a non-Tharu background, in the *basti*. The latter was considered especially problematic. In this context, arranged marriages went some way to maintaining the integrity of the *basti* and the boundaries of Kamaiya identity.

As I have shown in this section, arranged marriages constitute a significant indication of Kamaiya adult masculinity. I have also discussed how, while love marriages are talked about although not yet practiced in Kampur *basti*, a kind of discrete self-arranged marriage is now becoming possible, and Kamaiya men and women now have more say in who they marry than ever before. These influences seem to be evolving over time but do not yet challenge the arranged marriage system: they are more an evolution from it. I turn below to an important change that clearly reflects the implications of modernity for marriage practices in Kamaiya communities. Having consolidated the links between marriage and adult masculinities, I now explore the implications for adult masculinities of marriage being arranged later in life. This engages with the idea that not being married challenge to achieving normative adult masculinities.

### **Delayed Marriages**

A tension has been emerging from the various parts of this chapter explored to date. As being married is an important part of achieving maleness and successfully occupying certain masculinities, we must also consider what not being married means for Kamaiya masculinities. What are the implications for masculinity if the age at which people marry is increasing? Does this change the importance of marriage for Kamaiya masculinities? Chowdhry (2005) views non-marriage as a crisis of masculinity, as marriage is similarly one of the main markers of masculinity in his fieldwork sites in India. This section critically engages with this notion and explores whether this is also the case in Kamaiya communities. Initially I discuss why marriages are being made later

in life, and then move on to consider the consequences of this for adult Kamaiya masculinities reliant on cohabiting married status to be considered complete.

As I have stated, historically marriages were arranged when or before a Kamaiya boy and girl were born. As such, marriage itself was not such an important marker of masculinity per se, but cohabiting in marriage was critical. This is important, as since a significant number of marriages in Kamaiya communities are arranged at birth, and cohabiting in marriage is more definitive in the life course. This normally occurred when the girl passed puberty and moved into her husband's house. As I have discussed, this is evolving significantly, with some men as old as 20 not yet married and enjoying some of the freedoms associated with this. In Kampur *basti* a growing number of men marry at 16-20, when they are expected to cohabit with their wives.

Getting an education seemed to contribute to delaying the marriage of some Kamaiya men such as Basanta. Unlike Prakash, Basanta was unmarried and there were no obvious signs of marriage on the horizon. Basanta became very shy when conversation turned to girlfriends and potential wives. He spoke of his education as the principal reason for not having a girlfriend, as he had little time for such things. He seemed uncomfortable talking about this in a group setting, although he was more expansive in one-to-one conversations. He was more comfortable talking about potential wives than about girlfriends, perhaps because marriage was a more distant prospect. I had the impression that he was not very interested in young women – or wanted me to think this because he could not back up his interest with experience.

It was assumed that Basanta's education would facilitate his marrying a better wife, hence the delay in getting married. When I asked his parents why they had arranged a marriage for Prakash and not for Basanta, I was told that the oldest son was the most important in this context. A marriage would be arranged for Basanta when he finished his studies and had found the good job that his family expected him to secure, which would also increase his status and give him access to a more attractive wife from a 'better' (i.e. richer) family (perhaps from a non-Kamaiya sub-group). Basanta's single, non-married status did not seem to trouble him, but was certainly formative of his status in the *basti*, as cohabiting marriage is a key marker in the transition from

boyhood to manhood. Income generation and providing for one's family are the other major markers of being an adult man, and Basanta was not meeting these predominant expectations of a man of his age. All the other young men in his age range were involved in physical work, and many were married. This may explain why he was not particularly popular in the *basti* and was something of a peripheral figure in the wider social life of the settlement.

Another principal way in which modernity is delaying the age of marriage is changes in mobility. As I have shown, certain forms of mobility are becoming more significant in Kamaiya communities, particularly for Kamaiya men. For example, part of Surendra's desire to stay in Dhangadhi was to put off marrying, which he saw as an end to his current life and the freedoms he enjoyed in the city.

Ram, who was often away from the *basti* working in India, had not married when I met him during my fieldwork period. He told me that he did not have a girlfriend and seemed to have no interest in such matters. Ram assumed that when he made enough money he would return to the *basti* with some savings and his family would arrange his marriage. As he was towards the higher end of the age range at which young men tended to get married in Kampur *basti* there were growing expectations this would happen soon. For different reasons, Surendra, Ram and Basanta had been able to delay their marriage and all appeared happy to do so, perhaps due to the uncertainties involved in their respective life courses. No one was certain that they would become successful in later life, despite their investment towards such an eventuality. As and when they could show signs of success – for example, higher income and associated status – their marriages would be arranged. Marrying later also benefited these men in that they were able to influence how their marriages were arranged. The increased influence that young men had over the arrangements than young women is another reflection of the multiple ways that modernity seems to offer men more opportunities than women, something that will be returned to in the conclusion of this thesis.

The changes in when and how marriage is arranged explored here have important implications for agency. It is clear that Kamaiya men are able to influence aspects of their marriage in ways that were unthinkable for their fathers. These changes are



taking gendered forms, with young men experiencing more involvement and exercising more agency than young women in relation to the marriage process, although within the limitations of the arranged marriage system itself. This section has explored Kamaiya marriage practices and how Kamaiya men are negotiating changes in these as a reflection of certain aspects of modernity; and has explored how marriage remains important for achieving adult masculinities, although the links between being married and being considered adult man are evolving. Such an evolution illustrates both the resilience and the mutability of the institution of arranged marriage in Kamaiya communities. So while young Kamaiya men are able to exert more agency here, the arranged marriage remains part of the doxa of adult Kamaiya masculinities.

In the section below I examine the masculine performance of one Kamaiya PLA cadre who was regularly in Kampur *Basti*, leading to wider questions about what being in the PLA means, and whether it can be equated with being a 'modern man' (as the term is understood locally). Unlike anyone else in the *basti*, this PLA cadre had married for love and outside his caste.

Inter-caste marriages are very much encouraged in PLA cantonments as an example of the progressive nature of the PLA and, more broadly, the Maoist movement. Balram, a 22-year-old Tharu PLA cadre based in the Kampur PLA cantonment, was regularly in Kampur *basti*. When I first met him he had recently made a love marriage to another PLA cadre based in the same cantonment, who had subsequently been moved to another satellite cantonment of the PLA's seventh division.<sup>110</sup> His wife was of different caste and ethnic background to Balram, which was discussed at length in the *basti*. As Guneratne (2002) and Cameron (1998) indicate, endogamy is critical to both setting and maintaining boundaries between various groups in communities such as the Tharu in Nepal. Relationships in the same caste but of differing sub-castes elicit severe punishment from the families involved and society, such as ostracism from the family and village, violence and even death. Inter-caste marriage represents a significant challenge to Kamaiya ethnic identity and normative marriage practices, and marriage

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110 After encouraging these marriages, commanders often separated newlyweds to avoid 'distraction'.

between Kamaiya and non-Kamaiya is rare. However, intercaste marriages between PLA cadres are the norm.

Balram told me that he would have married earlier but had to focus on the PW – there was no time for such things during the war. However, in the cantonments, with stability, security and spare time, relationships and marriages seemed to be at the forefront of many cadres' minds. Balram did not want to talk to me about his relationships prior to or during the PW, but was sure that his wife had been 'good' during the PW; i.e. that she was a virgin when they married.

While caste did not seem important to Balram, it was critical that his wife was also a PLA cadre. It was unthinkable for him to marry someone without the experience of the PW and commitment to the Maoist party. As seemed common in relationships in the cantonment there was limited contact prior to marriage, so while love and inter-caste marriages are encouraged, senior cadre are influential in this context in encouraging marriages generally and particularly those between cadre. Furthermore, cadres in various positions of power in the PLA influenced these relationships in various ways, although not to the extent that parents arrange marriages. While Balram's marriage appeared to be a love marriage, upon closer examination it had aspects that were closer to arranged marriage. Despite the constraints of PLA marriages, which locate them somewhere between love and arranged marriage, aspects such as intercaste marriages represent a significant change to predominant Kamaiya marriage practices.

The previous chapter discussed work and forms of provision that contribute to the prevailing aesthetic of adult masculinity in Kamaiya communities – the breadwinner. This chapter has explored types of relationships between Kamaiya men and women that also contribute to this manifestation of masculinity, and has shown that providing for one's family, which can be a major challenge in itself, is not enough; a cohabiting marriage is also important. I have explored changes in practices associated with marriage, principally how Kamaiya men can influence how marriages are arranged, and how, as a consequence of modernity, they marry when they are older. Despite all these changes, arranged marriage is still preferred. We have seen that this has implications for achieving adult masculinity. Ultimately, being married remains a major

part of adult masculinities in Kamaiya communities, and a marker of being a successful man. This chapter has shown that change and at times contradictions are occurring in marriage practices, which are not undermining the importance of marriage for Kamaiya masculinities but repositioning marriage as a marker of adult masculinity.

I now turn to another major element of adult Kamaiya masculinities, fatherhood, which constitutes another terrain of masculinity that modernity is changing.

### **How is modernity changing Kamaiya fatherhood?<sup>111</sup>**

Despite several changes, marriage remains an important component of adult masculinities. In this section I consider the extent to which being a father is also important for these masculinities in my Kamaiya field site communities. Alongside being married, working and providing, being a father was considered part of the doxa of adult Kamaiya masculinities that I engage with here. Previously we saw the rickshaw drivers in Dhangadhi at a specific stage in their transition to becoming a man. When I asked them about children, they told me that they would have a family when they moved back to their villages. Becoming a father is part of the transition to adult manhood and represents a different stage in these men's lives which they very closely associated with being married. The importance of being a father is often discussed in research on men in South Asia, as Chowdhry illustrates below:

At the same time, even after marriage, a man is still not fully considered a "man" till he has had an offspring, specially a son (same expectation as from a woman). (Chowdhry, 2005, 5192)

This section explores the extent to which this remains the case for Kamaiya men following freedom, and whether being freed from bonded labour has resulted in any changes to the importance of fatherhood for Kamaiya masculinities. This is situated within the wider changes taking place with modernity, with a particular focus on the

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<sup>111</sup> Grandparents are an important part of life in each of the two fieldwork sites, especially in *Kampur basti*, although I do not consider these roles and relationships in this chapter.

implications of the new forms of movement discussed earlier. While considering what fatherhood looks like in the two fieldwork sites I also examine the normative meanings associated with being a father. As Jonathan Parry indicates, being a father had a certain meaning in South Asia:

The stereotype of a father is of a rather stern, authoritarian and remote figure who must be treated with the greatest deference and respect. (Parry, 1979, 160)

Modernity questions the stereotype that Parry mentions here. What if a father is absent and has moved for some reason? Does education change fatherhood in any way? Before moving onto explore the impacts of movement for fatherhood in more detail in the section below I consider what the changes following freedom from the Kamaiya system have meant for Kamaiya fatherhood, particularly in reference to lineage.

The Kamaiya are a group who prior to 2000 were largely landless and assetless bonded labourers. Prior to 2000, one Kamaiya man told me that all he had inherited from his father was the debt that had resulted in him being a Kamaiya (he meant this quite literally). This indicates the ways that lineage was linked to fatherhood within the Kamaiya system links that appear to have been strengthened following freedom, changes I consider below. Prior to freedom in 2000 the emphasis seemed to be on the symbolic importance of lineage and descent as there was little or no property to be passed on. However, following freedom this has changed as a significant proportion of Kamaiya now have land as well as increasing amounts of possessions due to higher incomes following freedom. This means that as there is potentially more emphasis on notions of lineage and descent which are becoming more apparent amongst Kamaiya communities following the transition to freedom. There is now more for fathers to pass on, particularly land, which puts more emphasis on descent and this is so particularly in relation to sons. This is particularly relevant in Kampur *basti* as opposed to Dhangadhi *basti* due to the differences in the ownership of land and property in both these settings. In the Dhangadhi *basti* considered in this thesis there is a constant fear that land and possessions will be taken away from the families living there, as they

have settled illegally so could be moved on at anytime. While conversely in *Kampur basti* there was a different notion of the importance of descent. This was a more stable setting where any investments made to land and property were seen as fathers improving the situation for their children (in reality their sons). To an extent being seen as a 'good' father in *Kampur basti* was to be seen to be making such investments. Conversely, such investments made little sense in the *Dhangadhi basti* were they could be made worthless if and when a state official decided to move these families on. Ultimately, having land has influenced the ways in which lineage is considered and how being a father relates to this. Having considered the ways in which the links between lineage and fatherhood have changed following freedom, I below I move onto consider the implications of movement for Kamaiya fatherhood.

Having considered some of the implications of the implications of modernity for fatherhood are contradictory. In one sense being a father is part of being a modern, successful and breadwinning family man. However, while modernity does not seem to have impacted on the importance of fatherhood as part of successful Kamaiya manhood, it is making meeting the associated expectations more difficult. Kamaiya men are moving as never before, and can be away for extended periods. It was clear that most Kamaiya men want an active role in their children's lives; however, as they are often moving to find and keep work, this is increasingly difficult. This section considers how changing patterns of movement are impacting on the assumptions of Kamaiya fathers. Only men move, and only men are fathers, and these two actualities do not always complement each other. Osella and Osella explore this in their research in Kerala, focusing on the implications particularly for sons:

In many cases, their father is chronically ill, or absent, and they then become the man of the house. Taking on responsibilities at home, bringing in cash and paddy, building a new thatched house—all this enables a boy to enter the men's world. (2006, 40)

Below, I discuss the impact of movement on fatherhood, asking whether fathers' being absent is more of an opportunity for sons than for daughters. I look at father-son relationships, using the example of Prakash. Obeyesekere indicates that the father-son

relationship 'relates to a certain type of authority structure in the family' (1990, 81). However, he highlights how fathers' absence raises questions about the authority structure. How is this structure maintained when a father is away? What happens when he returns?

Having started the first of the three main chapters of this thesis with Prakash and his experiences as a Kamaiya bonded labourer, I return to him to conclude the last of them. Living with him gave me a perspective on how he was a father, and how the subject positions corresponding to the type of adult masculinity that he tried to occupy relates to being a father. This provides a perspective on the contradictions and tensions involved in his attempt to present himself as a certain type of man: a father trying also to meet the other aspects of adult masculinity. I discuss whether modernity is making it more difficult for Prakash to achieve and sustain certain masculinities related to fatherhood. Are Kamaiya men becoming more involved in the lives of their children as a result of modernity?

### **Prakash**

The last section of this chapter returns to Prakash to explore his relationship with his father and two sons (he had no daughters). I outline his performance of paternal masculinity and how this contributes to his broader masculine identity. While certain aspects of modernity are consolidating the link between being a father and adult masculinities, others question it.

As mentioned, Prakash is about 24 years old, married and has two sons – Balraj, aged 7-8 and Bharat, 3-4. His Kamaiya wife Amita is slightly older than he is, as is common in Kampur *basti*. Their marriage was arranged at their birth and appeared to be relatively happy, although when drunk Prakash often spoke about women he said he slept with on his trips out of the *basti*, which may partly explain why he was so keen to go on such trips. Living with them, I acquired a relatively rich perspective on their domestic life compared to my insights on other households in the *basti*.

Like the other households in Kampur *basti*, Prem and Amita had built a traditional mud and reed hut close to the two-room brick and corrugated iron building built for each

resettled family (in which I lived). The hut contained the kitchen and most socialising took place there. It was a happy household. Living with Prakash, Amita and their sons on and off for eight months, I was able to reflect on how my relationship with this family influenced how I saw Prakash as a father. Initially he had been keen to portray himself as a man who was engaged, caring and involved with the lives of his wife and two sons.<sup>112</sup>

Like all men in the *basti*, Prakash was publically affectionate and visibly involved in caring for his children. He played and spent time with both, especially in the mornings. Besides this he contributed relatively little around the house, and Amita did all the cooking and cleaning and collected most of the firewood and plants from the forest. Prakash helped with planting, harvesting and maintaining their land, and worked in his family's small shop, although Amita and Basanta were there more often as he was frequently away.

As I spent more time with him, I was able to see that Prakash's relationship with his sons and his behaviour when I initially moved to Kampur *basti* were not entirely reflective of how he was as a father. He seemed keen to project a certain image of fatherhood to me, although over time this subsided and it became evident that he was not engaged in his sons' development to the extent that his performance of fatherhood had initially implied. It was interesting to see him attempting to present an interpretation of fatherhood of which he seemed to think I would approve and which referred to how PLA men behaved as fathers in the cantonment over the road, to which I return later in this section.

Two main contradictions emerged over time in Prakash's initial projection of fatherhood. Both were caused by his attempting to adhere to the expectations of consumption (as also illustrated by; Osella and Osella, 2000) and moving (as also illustrated by; Sharma, 2007b) as important and influential markers of Kamaiya

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112 The focus in this section is on father-son relationships purely as a reflection of the fact that Prakash had two sons and no daughters.

masculinity. I consider first what consumption meant to Prakash in his role as a father, and then the implications of his various trips out of the *basti*.

Prakash wanted to portray himself as a certain type of man who is not readily found in Kampur *basti*: someone with the obvious trappings of wealth who drinks alcohol, eats meat, owns a mobile phone and a motorbike, wears branded clothing and so on, and who moved, preferably spending time with a sequence of beautiful women. This placed him in constant competition with other men in the *basti* and the PLA cantonment, despite the reality that he was not able to consistently achieve these aims.

Prakash felt that it was too late for him to learn to read and write, and anyway he already had much more than his father at his age – his own land, business and freedom. He spent a lot more time with his older son, Balraj, who was more interactive and quick to learn, than with Bharat, who was often ill and was more dependent on this mother than Balraj. However, his commitment to them was more theoretical than practical, as he said that money problems prevented him from sending them to the local school fifteen minutes' walk away. There are no fees for the first four years of school, and following this the fees were relatively low at 4000 NRS pa: and many *basti* families with far less income than Prakash's managed to send some of their children to this school.

There is a contradiction here between how Prakash wanted to be seen as a father and how as a man he consumed in competition with other men. It seemed strange that he could not afford school fees for his sons when he was able to drink so often in the Skype bar and elsewhere and to own a mobile phone costing over 6000 NRS. In various conversations Prakash mentioned that having such a phone was vital to his work and providing for this family, although he could not explain how the phone was necessary for labouring and running a small roadside shop. His mobile, while expensive, was an important component of the sort of man he wanted to project. He used it conspicuously and always had it on show, and it was the most expensive possession that anyone in Kampur owned. The pressure on Prakash to be seen in a



certain way and considered a certain kind of man seemed to undermine the importance of educating his sons.

As mentioned, Prakash was often moving, although not to the extent of some other men from the *basti* such as Ram. On average he was away for at least half of each week on various trips that did not seem to bring obvious economic benefits. In this section I consider what this form of movement meant for his role as a father. Prakash was often out of the *basti* and was keen to go on as many trips as possible. He had once worked in India for six months but had not been successful and was treated badly, so he left. While I was in the *basti*, his trips tended to last a couple of days at most and involved going to Dhangadhi, often to political meetings. This created a distance between Prakash and his family which undermined his authority in his household, as in many ways his younger brother Basanta was more involved in the lives of his two sons. This did not seem to trouble Prakash to a great extent, as moving as he did and being involved in political work gave him a sort of profile that seemed most important to him. This was part of Prakash's efforts to differentiate himself from the other men in the *basti* while also providing a basis on which to compete with the PLA cadre in relation to political engagement (which was quite evident in the political discussions in the Skype bar and elsewhere).

I asked Prakash how his fathering differed from that of his own father. He said that he had been older than his father when his children were born, he had more freedom than his father and was able to do what he wanted to a greater extent. What also seemed different was Prakash's difficulty in meeting the image of fatherhood he had initially portrayed to me. His father may have behaved in similar ways and been similarly disengaged from the lives of his children, but not as a consequence of the sorts of consumption and movement that created the contradictions in Prakash's performance of fatherhood explored here. One can question the extent to which Prakash's father would have felt it necessary to perform the style of fatherhood that Prakash attempted, ultimately unsuccessfully. This performance related not just to the sort of father that Prakash wanted to portray to me but also to how the male PLA cadres parented their children, which has had an important influence on fatherhood in Kampur *basti*.

The PLA cantonments in Nepal are home to many new relationships and births, as illustrated in the above account of Balram's marriage. In response to this, following the establishment in 2007 of the PLA cantonment, the leadership ruled to ban female cadres with children under three from the cantonment. I was not able to quantify the number of women excluded from Kampur PLA cantonment as a consequence of this rule, but in another division nearly 250 women have left their cantonment in this way (Ogura, 2010). This has affected many young families in the cantonments, although the women and children are allowed to return after their child turns three. The consequences of this for male cadres came up in a number of interviews. The predominant model of fatherhood in the cantonments was a man engaged in the lives of his children in more profound ways than those of Kamaiya fathers in Kampur *basti*. The ban affected women and children more than men, although the former lived close by in villages such as Kampur, so visiting was often easy. However, the male PLA cadres with whom I discussed it were resentful, as they wanted to play a prominent role as fathers and the ban challenges this. Furthermore, the ruling has a number of consequences, as it results in many female cadre living in the villages surrounding the cantonments, providing an economic opportunity but also occasionally creating additional tension between local communities and the cantonments.<sup>113</sup>

There are many reasons why fatherhood and gender roles are configured differently in the PLA cantonment and in the *basti*. The difference could be a consequence of the higher level of education in the cantonment or exposure to a form of Maoist politics which sees gender equality as important. More practically, it could also be because PLA men had plenty of free time in which to take an active role as fathers and husbands and share household responsibilities. Male PLA cadres were heavily involved in childcare in the cantonment and could often be seen with babies and young children in black and red outfits that matched those of their parents. Initially seeing babies and young children around the cantonment was confusing: it was not what I had expected in a military setting. PLA fathers showed a strong interest in their children and were

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113 This was expressed in negative rumours about female PLA cadres such as that they stole food from the villagers or had AIDS and so were not safe to live close to.

greatly involved in their care, complementing such behaviour with more equitable gender roles in the cantonments. Women and men in the cantonments share many responsibilities such those of Amita mentioned above, but would not be expected to do so outside these spaces. It was considered progressive and positive in the cantonments, although the extent to which such changes will be sustained when the couples leave is unclear.

The interactions between Prakash and PLA cadre does seem to confirm Connell's (2005) insight that masculinities are relational and often masculinities are performed for other men. However, the example of Prakash outlined here indicates that the situation is more complicated than this, more detail is required in order to consider what particular performances of masculinity have more effect than others. The equitable gender roles in the cantonment seem to have affected Prakash less than the male PLA cadres' involvement with their children. Why was it important to him to appear more like male PLA cadres as a father than as a husband? Despite the amount of time I spent with him, I am still unsure of the answer. However, whatever the answer is now, the cadres' influence on masculinities within and outside the cantonment will change when the latter closes.

This section on Prakash has shown that while he initially seemed to be significantly involved in the lives of his sons, this was not entirely true. His vision of the modern man that he wanted to project to me and to the male PLA cadres whom he knew, related to being a certain kind of father, which shows the importance of fatherhood to this vision of the modern man. This section has also shown how the realities of Prakash performances of fatherhood are some way distant from this vision. Through considering such inconsistencies, the example of Prakash explored here illustrates that the uneven workings of modernity in Kamaiya communities both consolidate and subvert fatherhood as they do the other aspects of adult masculinities explored earlier.

## **Conclusion**

So far I have discussed the implications of freedom from the bonded labour system and the wider process of modernity for Kamaiya masculinities. I have focused on how,

post-freedom, Kamaiya breadwinner masculinities are the normative mode of adult masculinity in Kamaiya communities. Osella and Osella complement this focus with their research in Kerala:

Worker, breadwinner, provider do seem to be characteristics around which dominant masculinity coalesces. (Osella and Osella, 2006, 204)

In response to the Osellas' observation that being a man along the lines they indicate above is conventionally unexamined in South Asian ethnographies, this chapter has examined the notion of the Kamaiya breadwinner as it relates to marriage and other relationships, and to Kamaiya men's roles as fathers. I have shown that being both married and a father remain important components of adult Kamaiya masculinities, despite the many changes taking place in their communities. However, marriage practices and images of fatherhood are shifting and changing as a consequence of various aspects of modernity (for example, movement, landownership etc...). These changes do not undermine the importance of being a husband and father for adult masculinities, but they subvert how Kamaiya men are able to meet the expectations associated with these areas of masculinity in some ways.

The nature of the changes to marriage and fatherhood are significant and mixed. This chapter has illustrated how the family is a setting for both change and continuity in Kamaiya masculinities. This and the previous chapters have shown that the implications of modernity are uneven, reflecting Kapadia's (2002) analysis of modernity highlighted at the start of this chapter. In some ways modernity consolidates what has come before: for example, while changes are occurring in how marriages are arranged, this is still the preferred form of marriage in Kamaiya communities. Love marriages are made in Kampur PLA cantonment but not in Kampur *basti*, although as Ahearn (2001) indicates, this may change when literacy levels increase. The discussion of love and arranged marriage in this chapter contributes to the fragmentation of the notion that the changes discussed in this chapter can be thought of in terms of 'modern' and 'traditional', as highlighted in research elsewhere in South Asia (cf. Appadurai, 1996). Love marriage cannot be simply equated with

being 'modern', while arranged marriages cannot simply be associated with 'tradition'. I have outlined a situation in this chapter that is more complicated than this.

I have discussed how Kamaiya men negotiate new ways of being men within the local parameters of the 'modern'. The example of the influence of the PLA on Prakash's presentation of himself as a father is illuminating here. Modernity has changed the style but not the substance of his performance of fatherhood. One of the implications of modernity discussed in this chapter is that it provides an opportunity for representations such as Prakash's, of the sort of father he wanted to project, to become detached from the actual practices to which they refer. Furthermore, arranged marriages are being influenced by those who are actually getting married to a greater extent than ever before, particularly by young men. It is becoming increasingly important for young Kamaiya men to make it known that they are influencing this process, whereas previously it was desirable for them to be seen as compliant with their families' marriage arrangements for them. Part of unmarried men's performance of masculinity is changing with the greater expectation that they show a certain agency in this context. Despite this change, however, marriages continue to be arranged and parents still ultimately decide what will happen. So while we can see masculinities with higher levels of agency in the context of arranged marriages, again this does not fully correspond with actual practice in relation to how the arrangements are made. It is tempting to equate love marriages with a higher level of agency, but the example of PLA love marriages, in which senior cadre can shape what happens, show this to be simplistic perspective. Agency is implicated in complicated ways by the changes taking place in arranged marriages and the growing popularity of love marriages that Ahearn (Ahearn, 2001, 2004) highlights in her research.

To conclude, I briefly consider Prakash in relation to Kamaiya adult masculinities that have emerged from this and the two previous chapters. It is clear that to an extent he corresponds with the main contours of breadwinner masculinities predominant in the Kamaiya communities considered here. He is married, has children and a reasonable, steady income. However, being a modern man raises a number of tensions for Prakash through his moving and often being an absentee father, both of which are important

manifestations of his masculinity that do not coexist easily. Post-freedom Kamaiya masculinities provide both opportunities and complications for Kamaiya men. Modernity in this context has opened up the possibility for more diverse performances of masculinity, although overall it seems difficult for them to perform such masculinities consistently. For example, there are expectations on Kamaiya men to provide for their families that have changed following freedom from the Kamaiya system. However, meeting these new expectations to provide represents a considerable challenge.

However, there are clear benefits for men relatively close to the masculine ideal such as Prakash, in terms of how status and gendered capital relate to masculinity, while young men at a certain stage in their life are able to delay engaging with the expectations associated with adult masculinities through, for example, moving to Dhangadhi or India or getting an education. This is not to say they are not necessarily providing for themselves, but they do not always have the pressure of providing for their families as a result of moving or studying.

Basanta, Prakash's younger brother, seemed farthest away from the normative, adult masculinities in Kampur *basti* with several interlinked negative consequences. It was one of the main reasons that he attracted little respect as a man in the *basti*, and why Prakash was popular and had more status. Prakash was different to Basanta in many ways that correlated with his being far closer than his brother to what a man is expected to be in Kampur *basti*. This chapter has illustrated the importance of marriage and fatherhood in this vision of maleness, and the previous chapters have shown how certain bodies, forms of consumption and ways of providing cumulatively constitute substantial components of masculinity in Kamaiya communities.

In the next and concluding chapter I consider two main areas of concern that flow from the three main chapters of this thesis. I discuss the implications of freedom for Kamaiya masculinities, focusing on how Kamaiya men are adapting to a new position in a much wider horizon and a hierarchy of multiple and diverse masculinities. I then consider how at various times the masculinities considered in this thesis can be considered subordinate, protesting and subaltern, by exploring the negotiations with

Brahmanic masculinities that have consistently emerged. Finally, I consider the contribution this thesis makes to scholarship on the Kamaiya, Nepal and masculinities.

## **Chapter 8 - Conclusion**

This thesis has set out to explore what happens to Kamaiya masculinities as a consequence of the transition from a system of bonded labour to the wider context of locally unfolding modernity. I have shown how, under the Kamaiya system, Kamaiya men's masculinities were configured in various ways in close reference to their owners' masculinities. The transition from bonded to post-bondedness that has been outlined in Chapters 5-7 has explored a diverse range of consequences for Kamaiya masculinities. Through exploring these changes I have 'marked' Kamaiya masculinities and explored aspects of Kamaiya masculinities until now not explicitly considered in pre-existing studies on the Kamaiya or the Tharu more broadly. As such this thesis contributes to studies of masculinity within South Asia as well as research on masculinities within Development Studies. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to research located in far-west Nepal, and more specifically Kailali district which are relatively rare. These are the main contributions this thesis makes to these areas of scholarship and knowledge.

This thesis has shown that since the abolishment of the Kamaiya system, modernity is intertwining with and influencing Kamaiya masculinities in multiple and diverse ways. So while it is important for Kamaiya men to be free (and to be seen as free, which for the Kamaiya largely equates to being able to choose the type of work one does, and for some freedom means owning land), freedom and situating oneself in broader currents of 'modern' manhood is not always easy. Freedom corresponds with a wider possible range of masculinities, although these can be difficult to attain or sustain. Ultimately, I have shown that freedom is associated with both opportunity and constraint for gendered male identities.

I have discussed how, following freedom, Kamaiya subaltern masculinities are different from those within the Kamaiya system, although I have also shown instances of continuity in the three main chapters of this thesis. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 each view the continuity and change associated with modernity at my two fieldwork sites through a

different foci. I have discussed how Kamaiya masculinities refer to different images of maleness, changing patterns of consumption and ways of being seen to be modern involve certain consumption patterns (as similarly explored by the Osella and Osella (2000, 2004, 2006)). This provides a perspective on how the men's bodies are implicated in the changes I have been exploring. For example, the use of skin-whitening products by some Kamaiya men is recent and carries profound meanings for masculinities; and not just for those men who use them. More broadly, Chapter 5 provides a perspective on how Kamaiya men are responding to a changing and widening horizons of both the images and possibilities of masculinity, and to hegemonic Brahmanic masculinities in diverse ways. Their freedom from bonded labour has opened up a wide and complicated range of possible discourses and settings. At times the Kamaiya masculinities explored in this chapter indicate an appropriation of Brahmanic masculinities, while at others there is a rejection of the assumed nature of these hegemonic masculinities.

Chapter 6 focused on changes in working practice following freedom. Through responding to the research question shaping this chapter, I discussed a range of new working patterns following freedom and the sorts of masculinities these working patterns were producing. This included considering various visions of a 'successful' Kamaiya man, and new ways to get there through for example, education, movement etc. Again, the implications of the transition to post-bondedness are multiple: for some Kamaiya men, the transition to freedom is associated with the transition from agricultural to non-agricultural work. For some men freedom is associated with doing agricultural work in a range of places and for some on their own land. Under the Kamaiya system, their only work was various forms of agricultural labour; there are now opportunities for other types of work in different places. In research with young Dalit men, Anandhi et al (2002) found that the transition to non-agricultural income generation is associated with the performance of hyper-masculinity, particularly in reference to women. I have explored this same transition, which has also had implications for masculinities, although along slightly different trajectories. While there was little performance of hyper-masculinity in my research setting, perhaps with the exception of the Skype Bar, a setting in which the predominant masculinities there very much depended on the 'othering' of women as well as Bahun men.



In Chapter 7, I focused on how locally specific and unevenly-unfolding modernity have led to changes in family life and the relationships between Kamaiya men and women, and how the Maoist PW and the PLA influence the latter. This chapter indicated that the response to the question shaping this chapter is getting increasingly complicated, with a number of tensions emerging in the ways men are expected to behave and fulfil their responsibilities in the family following freedom. For example, I considered how Kamaiya fatherhood is performed in situations where normative Kamaiya masculinities can create tensions around fatherhood. Being actively engaged in their children's lives is important for many Kamaiya men, although modernity makes achieving this more difficult, not least with men's increasing movement for work and other purposes.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have all explored how modernity and the changes associated with freedom have brought certain aspects of the masculine doxa into focus in Kamaiya communities. Modernity is disrupting and changing the doxa, or the naturalness, of masculine identities and the masculine order, making them more visible and subject to questioning. For example, it used to be assumed that the Kamaiya man was the head of his household, was subservient to his owner and worked as an agricultural labourer. This was all part of the doxa of the Kamaiya system which made such assumptions seem natural. However, following freedom not all of these previous certainties seem natural and are being contested, most obviously as Kamaiya no longer have owners. This brings into focus masculinities that were once seen as natural. For example, Chapter six indicated that following freedom there are a range of opportunities associated with work following freedom, but these come with a range of risk. Kamaiya men have to contemplate and at times deal with unemployment and insufficient land with which to feed their families. Despite these changes the position of Kamaiya men as the head of household has remained relatively consistent. However, as increasing numbers of Kamaiya men are migrating for work, the ways in which Kamaiya men are considered the head of household has had to adapt as a consequence of some men being away for significant periods of time.

Ultimately, Chapters 5, 6 and 7 provide a perspective on the production of subaltern Kamaiya masculinities following the end of the Kamaiya system and the subsequent

increasing diversity in potential masculine performance. However, as there is a greater range of possibilities, there are also more ways to fail to meet the expectations associated with aspects of normative adult and other masculinities. Across the three main chapters of this thesis a number of themes have emerged in the responses to the research questions outlined in Chapter One. In this conclusion I discuss two such themes through exploring how this thesis has illustrated that Kamaiya masculinities are marked, and how Kamaiya masculinities are produced in part through their engagement with Bahun, hegemonic masculinities. Considering this second theme in more depth facilitates a consideration the usefulness of one of the main theories engaged with throughout this thesis – hegemonic masculinity. I bring the various consequences of the transition to freedom together in this conclusion by focusing on the ways in which Kamaiya masculinities are influenced in multiple ways by Bahun masculinities following freedom. I finish by crystallising the contribution this thesis makes to studies on the Kamaiya and far-west Nepal.

At the start of this thesis I indicated that the masculine is conventionally ‘unmarked’ (particularly in research in Nepal and South Asia), which is emblematic of the strength of the masculine order, which does not have to justify itself (Bourdieu, 2001, 9). This thesis is an attempt to mark or illuminate Kamaiya masculinities that have been largely unexplored. This has shown that through making Kamaiya men’s gender identities the explicit focus of this research, I have been able to outline a certain gendered perspective on the transition from a system of bonded labour to subsistence agriculture and wage labour within the wider context of a locally unfolding modernity.

I argue in this conclusion, that this thesis has shown that Kamaiya masculinities are marked in ways that Bahun masculinities are not, by exploring how, with freedom, they are constructed through negotiation with hegemonic masculinities. I explore how subaltern Kamaiya masculinities are in fact ‘marked’ in various ways as a function of their position as subaltern. However, modernity is changing how Kamaiya masculinities are marked as this is changing the context and reference points with which Kamaiya masculinities refer. While certain masculinities are unmarked (I have proposed that Bahun masculinities occupy this position), subaltern masculinities are in fact marked as an organising principal of their production. This reflects the ways in which I have

shown that Kamaiya masculinities are produced through negotiation with Brahmanic and other forms of masculinity (such as those within the PLA cantonments). Perhaps the marking of these post-freedom Kamaiya masculinities in this new way is one of the reasons why such masculinities are difficult to occupy and maintain.

This conclusion brings Chapters 5, 6 and 7 together to consolidate the argument that important aspects of Kamaiya masculinities can be understood through their interactions with other (mainly Bahun) masculinities. To conclude this thesis I focus on some of the ways that Brahmanic masculinities are implicated in specific performances of Kamaiya masculinities that I have considered so far.

Before moving on to consolidate the focus on how Kamaiya masculinities reference and are produced through various responses to Brahmanic masculinities, I contextualise this discussion here by returning to a theme that has run throughout this thesis: that Kamaiya masculinities constitute a specific perspective on the interactions between subaltern and hegemonic masculinities, and that such interactions indicate that Bahun masculinities occupy the hegemonic position in both fieldwork sites. While many other reference points clearly also shape Kamaiya masculinities – not least Kamaiya femininities – I have chosen to focus here on Bahun masculinities as a means of considering the wider debate on hegemonic masculinity.

In focusing on the nature of interactions between subordinate and dominant (hegemonic) masculinities, I am situating this conclusion in a debate that directly engages with such questions. This provides a perspective on the extent to which the concept of hegemonic masculinity contributes to the understanding of the complexities of Kamaiya masculinities and the ways that I have marked such masculinities in this thesis. A number of researchers working on masculinity have criticised Connell's (2005) theorisation of hegemonic masculinity for his implicit assumptions regarding hegemony and domination. As stated, hegemonic masculinity is a manifestation of masculinity that predominates over various subordinate forms of masculinity such as complicit masculinity, subordinate masculinity, etc. (ibid). There are several illuminating critiques of this: for example Howson (2006) orientates his criticism in an examination of how Gramsci (1971) views hegemony in ways that are

inherently about contested leadership, in a context of complicity as opposed to one of domination. This has been important throughout this thesis, as I have considered similar types of interactions.

Demetriou (2001, 341) states: 'Hegemonic masculinity and non-hegemonic masculinities are thus constructed as a dualism, as two distinct and clearly differentiated configurations of practice'. This thesis complements this criticism, as this dualism has not been reflected in the preceding chapters as Kamaiya masculinities have consistently been shown to be more complicated. As I have shown, at times the various performances of masculinity cannot simply be related to one specific model or performance in the wider context of a dualism. In some instances Kamaiya masculinities appropriate from Brahmanic masculinities while at others they represent a rejection of the hegemonic form. For example, we have seen Kamaiya men performing masculinities that are in direct contrast to the hegemonic norms, for example, through drinking, while other performances of masculinity, such as the use of skin-whitening creams, constitute an effort to move closer to the hegemonic ideal. Whether rejected or embraced, Brahmanic masculinities are a consistent reference point in many of the preceding accounts of Kamaiya masculinities.

Demetriou (2001) refocuses the notion of hegemonic masculinity in a similar way through the consideration of appropriation and consent as opposed to simple domination. Demetriou discusses 'hybrid' forms of masculinity that involve the borrowing or imitation of subordinate forms; for example in middle-class white men's appropriation of the language and style of subordinate hip-hop masculinities. By exploring various instances of how Kamaiya masculinities respond to Bahun masculinities, I offer my contribution to the approach that Wetherell and Edley call for:

What is missing is more fine-grain work on what complicity and resistance look like in practice. (1999, 337)

To show how this thesis constitutes an example of this type of approach I briefly consider the Osella's (2006) research in Kerala here. This provides a context in which to situate the ways that Kamaiya masculinities interact with Bahun masculinities.

Osella and Osella's research with Malayali men offers one such perspective on how the performance of masculinity is shaped by interactions with Bahun masculinities through both complicity and resistance. In their analysis they initially combine Connell (2005) and Dumont's (1980) positions to reach a perspective indicating that Bahun men and Bahun masculinities could be considered the hegemonic form (2006, 6). However, they see Malayali men and their style of masculinity as representing a counter-discourse, not of weakness but of direct opposition to Brahmanic masculinity (2006, 50). Central to this counter-discourse are quite different set of values that relate to different embodied masculinity, of which drinking is a significant component.

I have shown that some performances of Kamaiya masculinities could be seen as a counter-discourse to Brahmanic masculinities, although not to the same extent or as consistently as the Osellas found in their research. This leads me to ask why the Malayali masculinities in the Osella's research constitute a coherent counter-discourse, while my research has found a far less consistent counter-discourse and resistance to Brahmanic masculinity in Kamaiya masculinities. Perhaps this is due to the different positions in class and caste hierarchies of Malayali and Kamaiya men; alternatively, it might be a consequence of different historical trajectories, with the changes in Kamaiya masculinities explored here shaped to a significant extent by recent experience of bondedness. This raises questions about how the Osellas viewed instances of complicity between Malayali and Bahun masculinities. Masculinities are always relational, and I have shown how Kamaiya masculinities are both complicit with and reject Bahun masculinities. Certain changes such as movement to new locations for work seem not to change but rather to complicate such interactions.

Alongside the unequal implications of modernity, these uneven and varied interactions between Kamaiya and Brahmanic masculinities are multiplying and complicating Kamaiya masculinities. This may relate to the changing myths and assumptions associated with Brahmanic masculinities such as abstinence, non-drinking, effeminacy, weakness etc. The reference point represented by hegemonic Brahmanic masculinities is constantly shifting, as are the realities of the actual performances of Bahun masculinities by Bahun and other men.

One of the consequences of the difference between how Kamaiya and Malayali masculinities are configured in relation to Bahun masculinities is that for the Kamaiya, Brahmanic masculinities remain hegemonic. For the Osellas (2006), the Malayali counter-discourse constitutes an alternative hegemonic position. Connell's (2005) notion of hegemonic masculinity points towards a singular dominant model of masculinity against which all other (subordinate) masculinities are configured, which helps to explain why subordinate masculinities are complicit in their positions of subordination. This theory of hegemonic masculinity also indicates how this position is unmarked, with subordinate masculinities marked in reference to it. However, the Osella and Osella's (2006) research does not fully complement such a perspective, as they indicate that multiple forms of hegemonic masculinity were evident through both Malayali and Bahuns occupying hegemonic positions, which is not possible according to Connell's theory.

Throughout the various instances of the adoption and rejection of Brahmanic masculinities by Kamaiya men, Brahmanic masculinities have been shown to be consistently hegemonic. This is further illustrated by the fact that Kamaiya masculinities are influenced far more by Brahmanic masculinities than the other way around. I found no examples of Kamaiya masculinities influencing Bahun masculinities, and I detected only ambivalence from Bahun men in relation to Kamaiya men, illustrating how in this context Kamaiya masculinities are marked and have limited power – making them subaltern.

I have discussed several instances that allow understanding of certain Kamaiya masculinities with reference to the influence of Bahun masculinities. For example, Kamaiya rickshaw drivers made jokes about and feminised their passengers, particularly the Bahun ones. Guneratne (1999b) indicates that Bahun priests are critical of Tharu and Kamaiya religious practice and have been so throughout living memory. The small Bahun temple in the middle of Kampur *basti* also constitutes a way of exploring the negotiations I am outlining here. In Chapter 5, I mentioned that none of the villagers had ever been into the temple or even tried to look inside, which was a particular problem for the Guruwa. For several villagers this represented an appropriation of land by the Bahun community and it did not fit easily in a context in

which they were trying to establish a subaltern identity referring to and sometimes resisting the hegemonic norms. The Bahun temple was treated with respect, which represents the inherent contradiction of negotiation with hegemonic norms in the Kamaiya communities. Some efforts are made to respect, mimic or adopt certain Bahun masculinities while at the same time subverting the idea of Bahun masculinity in the performance of Kamaiya masculinity.

Certain economic relations and Bahun class identities continue to have a particular resonance with the Kamaiya system and its remnants today. Modernity is important here, as it is associated with Kamaiya men being exposed to a wider range of masculinities and hierarchies. One thing has remained constant: Bahun masculinities occupy the hegemonic positions in the various settings in which Kamaiya men live and work, and when the Kamaiya men move, it is to cities in Nepal or India, where Bahun masculinities are widely hegemonic. The discussion of hegemonic masculinities here indicates that this concept has made a positive contribution to the understanding of Kamaiya masculinities in this thesis. However, this contribution is limited to an extent by some of the limitations of the theory in relation to understanding some of the nuance of Kamaiya masculinities (or the 'fine-grain' of complicity and resistance (Wetherell and Edley, 1999, 337)).

I now turn to how some Kamaiya men talked about Bahun men in ways that one might not expect of subaltern men. I focus here on the implications of their feminisation of Bahun men, with a particular focus on the perceived weakness of Bahun men (something that Laura Ahearn touches on in her research with the Magar (2001, 70)). Subordinate Kamaiya men tend to feminise educated Bahun men, and particularly young men, assuming that they are too weak for physically demanding work and unable to drink heavily. One can see this in the response to Basanta and his educational endeavours, as to an extent the other Kamaiya men in Kampur *basti* consider to be educated to be 'like' Bahun men. To make a living through work that doesn't emphasise bodily capacity and strength doesn't have a great deal of validity for the majority of the Kamaiya men.

The feminisation of Bahun men also is reflected in the discourses of certain ethnic movements such as the Tharuhat, whose leaders often openly criticise and feminise the Bahun dominance against which they are reacting. This represents a challenge for the political leaders of movements such as the Tharuhat as well as Kamaiya specific NGOs such as KPUS and FKS. As a consequence of these men being leaders and some making a living from this, they are moving further away from the Kamaiya masculine ideal that is produced through hard work, and as I have shown particularly in Chapter 5, hard drinking.

The feminisation of Bahun men in various ways by Kamaiya men indicates not just that masculinity is relational but also that it requires a masculine 'other' to push up against and configured in relation to. By exploring subaltern Kamaiya masculinities I have shown that they are constituted through the adoption and rejection of Brahmanic masculinities. Furthermore, I have illustrated that unlike western contexts in which homophobia is often one of the central references against which masculinity is configured and feminised (Kimmel, 2002), for the Kamaiya, Brahmanic masculinity constitutes this reference point, this 'other'.

By exploring Kamaiya men's gendered identity, this thesis has attempted to 'mark' Kamaiya masculinities to consider how these gendered identities are changing as a consequence of the processes of a locally specific modernity. This has also created a space in which to explore how Kamaiya masculinities are composed in relation to other masculinities, and to consider how such interactions are also changing and responding to Brahmanic hegemonic masculinities in new and diverse ways. I have explored how Kamaiya men have made the transition from a specific situation of bondedness. Following their freedom, Kamaiya men have encountered a greater diversity of imagery and performance of masculinity which is reflected in the increasing diversity of ways of being a Kamaiya man and being seen as successful. Breadwinner masculinities are central to how success is considered and manifested in a specific constellation of masculinity. However, with the increased diversity of potential masculinities this also means that there are now more ways to 'fail' as a man and more risks to be considered.



To conclude, the principal contribution this thesis makes to knowledge is that it marks and illuminates aspects of Kamaiya masculinities that until now have been absent from the literature on the Kamaiya (or the Tharu more broadly). Conceptually this thesis makes a contribution to the field of masculinities (particularly in South Asia and Nepal) through using primary research material collected in two Kamaiya bastis to engage with prevailing concepts of masculinity (principally hegemonic masculinities). Furthermore, this thesis makes a contribution to Nepali studies and more specifically to studies located in far-west Nepal, which is an area often neglected in existing scholarship on Nepal. This thesis represents an answer to the overarching question I set out to explore: what happens to masculinities following freedom from a system of bonded labour? In response to this question I have shown that Kamaiya men are now navigating, positioning themselves and being positioned in a much more complicated constellation of masculinity into which they are becoming integrated. This thesis has illustrated how, as many other poor, subaltern men in Nepal have been doing for some time, Kamaiya men are adapting to ways and expectations of being subaltern men, partially through interactions with hegemonic Brahmanic masculinities. More broadly, it has shown how explicitly considering Kamaiya masculinities facilitates a perspective not only on these masculinities, but also on the contours of modernity in far-west Nepal.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

In this final section I put forward a range of recommendations for future study. While I have not considered the production and contours of Kamaiya femininities following freedom in this research, it would certainly benefit from future study. Furthermore, there are other forms of subaltern masculinities around (and sometime in) my two fieldwork sites. While I mentioned this in Chapter 3, I did not look in depth at how, for example, Dalit and Haliya masculinities are being influenced by the changes I have explored in this thesis in relation to the Kamaiya.

In this thesis I have focused on only one form of bonded labour, although there are many others in Nepal. For example, the Haliya are a very under-researched landless

group.<sup>114</sup> The term Haliya, like Kamaiya, refers to a group of people as well as to a system of bonded labour. Haliya means 'someone who ploughs', a livelihood which is predominant in the middle hills, particularly in far-west Nepal. The majority of the Haliya, despite being freed in 2008, remain bonded and are not politically organised as the Kamaiya are. It would be interesting to see how masculinities in other bonded and formerly-bonded groups such as this are changing as a consequence of being integrated into the normative gender orders that relate to modernity in Nepal and South Asia.

I spent some time with a range of Bahun men in Dhangadhi, and occasionally in Kathmandu. They were mainly young men who had been forced to move to Dhangadhi during the PW to escape Maoist threats and violence. I have incorporated my insights from these relationships and conversations into my discussion of Bahun masculinities, but I would like to have given more space to the voices of particular Bahun men to facilitate an exploration of how they too are negotiating their masculinities in contexts in which they appear better placed to benefit from the various opportunities that modernity could potentially equate. Some of these men's fathers were landlords prior to 2000 and probably had Kamaiya on their land. It would be interesting to explore how they are responding to the changes in the ways that their and their fathers' masculinity was constituted in terms of landownership and 'owning' Kamaiya people. It would be fruitful to explore how Bahun and other upper-caste men discuss Kamaiya men and reflect on the Kamaiya system in more detail. This would open up a space in which to explore how they might be appropriating the performances and styles of subaltern masculinities, a process that Demetriou (2001) discusses in detail. The perspective would thus change to one in which not only subaltern masculinities but all masculinities appropriate from other masculinities. However, as I have privileged Kamaiya masculinities and discourse and have not focused on the production of hegemonic masculinities, I was unable to consider this in detail.

Finally, while this research is located in Nepal, my fieldwork sites were close to the Indian border. For the Kamaiya, this border has some significance with many

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114 With the notable exception of Giri (2004, 2009, 2010).

concerned about Indian encroachment of land (concerns that are amplified by various local political parties). Despite the political significance of the border, there are Tharu and Kamaiya in both Nepal and India. It would be interesting to develop a comparative study of Kamaiya on both sides of the border. This would help to frame the ways that different nation states are influencing ethnic and gender identities, and how formerly-bonded labourers are integrating themselves into the broader currents of modernity, as it unfolds slightly differently in different states. A picture of how modernity and masculinity interact on both sides of the border would provide an interesting perspective on the implications of different state formations for these interactions.

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