



**Isn't it too early to drop out of school?
A study of girls' education in the Chepang
community of Nepal**

SVF-3901

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Spring 2013*

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Acknowledgements

I am sincerely thankful to all the people whose help and support has made this thesis possible. My work would have never been completed without the guidance and outstanding support of my supervisor, Vidar Vambheim, whose suggestions and encouragement were leading me along the writing process.

I am very grateful to the academic staff of the Center for Peace Studies at the University of Tromsø, Percy Oware, Lodve A. Svare and MPCT students for their valuable advice and support.

I owe acknowledgements to all the people in Nepal who helped me during my fieldwork there, especially to Ramesh Shrestha and Namuna Khadka, and to people who participated in the empirical data collection process. I do not mention their names due to confidentiality but I keep them with gratitude in my heart.

I want to thank David Newton and Lynnor for proofreading and comments.

Special thanks to my family, my dearest parents and brother for their encouragement, love and belief in me.

I am sincerely grateful to Kris Amundsen for his bright ideas, help and patience.

I am thankful to my friends whose support was so important for me.

You all gave me strength and courage to complete this work. Thank you!

Abstract

This thesis examines the problem of girls' illiteracy in one of the poorest and most disadvantaged indigenous communities of Nepal – the Chepang community. The problem of education in this community is very serious, since a significant portion of its members have never been to school and can neither read nor write. The vast majority of uneducated Chepangs are women.

The aim of the thesis is to find the factors that have the most influence on the Chepang girls' dropping out of school at a young age, to examine the impact of these obstacles, and to identify the most influential one/ones.

The research is based on data collected during my fieldwork in Nepal and is attempting to answer the research question: What are the main factors that hold the Chepang girls back from education? It has relied on qualitative interviews and observation as methods of data collection, and analyzed with the help of thick description as a theoretical framework.

The main findings of the thesis show that the most influential factor that holds the Chepang girls back from education and a reason for their dropping out of schools are the traditional settings of their community.

Key words: education, children, girls, boys, literacy, illiteracy, knowledge.

List of abbreviations

ADB – Asian Development Bank

AIDS – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

CMP - Chepang Mainstreaming Programme

DANIA – Danish Assistance for International Development

DEO – District education office

DFID – Department for International Development

DOE – Department of Education

EC – European Commission

ECD – Early Childhood Development

EFA - Education for All

HDI - Human Development Index

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection

MDGs – Millennium Development Goals

MOE – Ministry of Education

NCA - Nepal Chepang Association

NESP – National Education System Plan

NFDIN - National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities

NORAD – Norwegian Assistance for Development

PDP - Praja Development Program

PPCs – Pre-primary Classes

SLC – School Leaving Certificate

SMC - School Management Committee

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In modern life education is not only a human right but it is also one of the most necessary factors for complete development of a personality and for maintaining peaceful and stable relations between states. A country cannot reach full development without efficiently and effectively utilizing the abilities of all its people. The population of a country is the main resource for development and women comprise one half of this resource¹. This means that educating only the men is a completely wrong practice. Research conducted in a variety of countries and regions proves that female education is positively correlated with “increased economic productivity, more robust labor markets, higher earnings, and improved societal health and well-being”² in a country.

It is not only the society or a country in general that benefits from female education. Education of women is directly connected to their personal needs and their development as individuals that will be transmitted to their families. This can be proved by a number of examples given by UNESCO in its report (UNESCO 2010)³.

Thus, education plays an important role in giving women more control over their family size and family health (UNESCO 2010:14)⁴. Educated women make better lives not only for themselves but also for their children, giving them more opportunities to survive, to be educated and to live good lives. Educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more on each child. For example in Mali, women with secondary education or higher, have an average of 3 children while those with no education have an average of 7 children⁵. In Latin America, children whose mothers have some secondary schooling remain in school for two to three more years than children of mothers with less schooling (UNESCO 2010:14)⁶. Children of mothers with secondary education or higher are twice as likely to survive beyond age 5

¹ Jackson, L. W. (2009) *Educate the Women and You Change the World: Investing in the Education of Women is the Best Investment in a Country's Growth and Development*. Forum on Public Policy: p. 1. Retrieved from <http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/summer09/archivesummer09/jackson.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 14)

² Tembon, M. & Fort, L. (ed.) (2008) *Girls' Education in the 21st Century. Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth*. Washington DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank: p. xvii. Retrieved from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099080014368/DID_Girls_edu.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 14)

³ UNESCO (2011) *Education Counts towards the Millennium Development Goals*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001902/190214e.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 15)

⁴ Ibid.: p. 14

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.: p. 15

than those whose mothers have no education⁷. A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past age 5. Each extra year of a mother's schooling reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5% to 10% (UNESCO 2010:17)⁸. In sub-Saharan Africa an estimated 1.8 million children's lives could have been saved in 2008 if their mothers had at least a secondary education (UNESCO 2010:18)⁹. Children of educated mothers are more likely to be vaccinated and less likely to be stunted because of malnutrition¹⁰. There are disproportionately high numbers of unwanted pregnancies among young, unmarried girls, who often lack access to contraception. One-quarter to one-half of girls in developing countries become mothers before they are 18 (UNESCO 2010:20)¹¹. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to delay and space out pregnancies, and to seek health care and support (UNESCO 2010:19)¹². Women with post-primary education are 5 times more likely than illiterate women to be educated on the topic of HIV and AIDS¹³. For instance in Malawi, 27% of women with no education know that HIV transmission risks can be reduced by the mother taking drugs during pregnancy. For women with secondary education, the figure rises to 59% (UNESCO 2010:26)¹⁴.

According to the facts mentioned above, female education is important for them in particular and for the countries as a whole. It "has enormous economic and social benefits; it is one of the soundest investments any country can make"¹⁵.

1.1 Problem statement and starting point

Since the adoption of Education for All goals 52 million more children have been enrolled in primary school. Pre-primary programs have rapidly increased "by almost 25 per cent, benefiting 140 million more girls and boys. That is all good news. But other numbers underscore the importance of the task before us. Almost 70 million children are out of school. Twenty-eight million children live in countries where conflict has destroyed schools

⁷ Ibid.: p. 16

⁸ Ibid.: p. 17

⁹ Ibid.: p. 18

¹⁰ Ibid.: p. 19

¹¹ Ibid.: p. 20

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.: p. 25

¹⁴ Ibid.: p. 26

¹⁵ Herz, B. & Sperling, G. B. (2004) *What Works in Girls' Education. Evidence and Policies from the Developing World. USA*: Council on Foreign Relations: p. 21. Retrieved from http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/councilforaff_Girls_Education_full.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 15)

and communities. Millions of children leave school early without acquiring the knowledge and skills that are crucial for a decent livelihood. About 800 million adults lack basic literacy skills. Two thirds of them are women”¹⁶.

Reasons for the phenomenon of female illiteracy differ in different countries. I decided to study this problem in Nepal. It is one of UNICEF's 25 priority countries for female education¹⁷. Historically the school enrollment rate of girls in the country was below 70 percent and much lower than the school enrollment rate of boys, with a gender gap in primary education above 10 percent (Huebler, 2007)¹⁸.

With a lot of input from national and international organizations the situation is beginning to improve quite rapidly and the school enrollment in Nepal is constantly growing¹⁹. But this progress is not the same in all areas of the country. Therefore I concentrated not on the country as a whole but chose only one of the indigenous communities of Nepal – the Chepang community. The level of education among those people is extremely low and, in spite of equal enrollment to schools, female literacy rate is far behind the male one. This ratio is lower for the girls in the community because they drop out of school.

I became curious about the phenomenon of girls dropping out and decided to explore it. I assumed that if the literacy in the community was very low then the girls would drop out of school at a young age, thus, at a basic level. That is why I will try to find the obstacles to girls' education on this level. At the secondary level of education the challenges can differ.

1.2 Research questions and hypotheses

The aim of the thesis is to find the factors that have the most influence on the Chepang girls' dropping out of school at a young age, to examine the impact of these obstacles and to identify the most influential one/ones. Thus my research question is:

¹⁶ *Partnering with the Philanthropic Community to promote Education For All* (2011): p. 5. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/pdfs/11-29343_philreport.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 15)

¹⁷ *UNICEF – Girls' education campaign – 25 by 2005: accelerating progress in girls' education*. (n.d.) Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/education/campaign_acceleratingprogress.html (Accessed 2013, May 15)

¹⁸ Huebler, F. (2007, March 10) *International Education Statistics: Nepal: trends in primary education, 1980-2004*. Retrieved from <http://huebler.blogspot.no/2007/03/nepal-trends-in-primary-school.html> (Accessed 2012, August 30)

¹⁹ Budden, J., Collins, Z., Rahman, T. & Salinas, R. (2012) *Nepal Development Report 2012*: p. 31 Retrieved from http://pages.uoregon.edu/aweiss/intl422_522/F2012%20Nepal.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 12)

- What are the main factors that hold the Chepang girls back from education?

To answer this question it is important to understand obstacles to education for the Chepang children in general and then to analyze what can be considered as the most significant for the girls in the community.

During the preparation for my field work a few hypotheses concerning the most influential factors for the Chepang girls' dropping out of school have arisen on the basis of the published literature. The focus of the thesis is to test these hypotheses. They are as follows:

- Culture and traditions;
- Illiteracy of parents;
- Lack of and irregularity of teachers;
- Long walking distance from home to school;
- Insufficient school facilities and environment;
- Language problem;
- Poverty including poor structure, space and time for the child's education;
- Caste-based tradition.

For testing and analyzing these hypothetical obstacles to education I divided them into two groups: cultural and structural. Cultural challenges are those which are historically rooted in the community, inherent and built-in. Structural challenges are those which do not really depend on the Chepangs, but are, so to say, given to them by the country and its policy.

Thus, culture and traditions, illiteracy of parents, language problem and caste-based tradition I refer to as the cultural challenges and the other four – lack of and irregularity of teachers, long walking distance from home to school, insufficient school facilities and poverty – I refer to as the structural obstacles that hold the Chepangs back from education.

1.3 Relevance to peace studies

Education is the foundation for the all-round development of the individual. The relevance of education to peace is thoroughly explained in the Constitution of UNESCO by the purpose of the Organization, which is “to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for

justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world without distinction of race, sex, language or religion”²⁰.

As Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states: “...the education of the child shall be directed to...the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples...”²¹. This statement has become a rationale of peace education in UNICEF. The Organization claims that education in the context of peace refers to any process that “develops in children or adults the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values leading to behaviour change”²². Education is a fundamental human right for all adults and children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for the creation of a society based on the principles of justice and peace and promotes the understanding, peace and tolerance through education.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. In the next chapter I present the background information for the study, focusing on the main elements in the education of Nepal, its structure and development. I describe life, culture and education of the Chepang community and give general information about previous research on the Chepangs. Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 4 presents my methodology and fieldwork experience during the data collection in Nepal. Chapter 5 offers presentation of my data and its analysis. Concluding remarks are written in Chapter 6.

1.5 Summary

This chapter introduced my thesis to the reader. Here I explained the importance of female education for society as a whole and for women as individuals. I supported my explanation with the examples that prove the significance of being educated. I described the problem that

²⁰ UNESCO Constitution. Article 1. *Purposes and functions* (1945) Retrieved from http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (Accessed 2013, May 15)

²¹ Fountain, S. (1999) *Peace Education in UNICEF*. New York: UNICEF: p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/education/files/PeaceEducation.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 15)

²² *Ibid.*: p. 3.

would be examined in my thesis and explained my motivation for choosing this topic. I mentioned the relevance of the selected topic to peace studies and concluded the chapter with a short description of the structure of my thesis.

In the second chapter I present the background information of my study. I familiarize the reader with the Chepangs; give some general information about education in Nepal and in the chosen community. Further I present information about the chosen topic in previous research.

Chapter 2. Background information

This chapter presents background information for my study. First I provide a short description of education in Nepal in general during the last few decades and highlight its main achievements and problems. The main part of the chapter is devoted to the presentation of the Chepang community, its history, economic situation, traditions and life as a whole. I emphasise the section about education in the Chepang community and in the last part of this chapter I refer to previous research on this topic.

2.1 Education in Nepal

“Education plays an unprecedented role in building economically and socially stable societies”, says the Nepal Development Report 2012²³. This is the background to why Nepal is trying to develop its education sector. However, it was not always like this. Before 1951 school education in the country was not open to general public²⁴. After 1951 the country’s policy makers started working hard on the development of education.

The Ministry of Education was established in 1952²⁵. Two years later a National Education Commission was formed. Its task was to “review the education situation of the country and to suggest strategies and policies for overall development of education”²⁶. It is worth saying that at that time the literacy percentage was estimated at only about 2%²⁷. The next step was the initiation of a National Education System Plan (NESP) in 1971 with the aim of changing the school curriculum with the focus on vocational education. District education offices and supervision systems in all districts were developed. But it was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Nepal started developing gender focused education programs. However, the discussion of the development of educational programs for disadvantaged communities did not unfold until the late 1980s and early 1990s²⁸.

²³ Budden, J., Collins, Z., Rahman, T. & Salinas, R. (2012) *Nepal Development Report 2012*: p. 30. Retrieved from http://pages.uoregon.edu/aweiss/intl422_522/F2012%20Nepal.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 12)

²⁴ Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Nepal & UNESCO Office in Kathmandu, Nepal (2007) *Education for All. Mid decade Assessment. National Report*. Kathmandu: Lusha Press: p. 5

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

A new intense reform was met by education in 1998 when democracy was restored to the country²⁹. Then the first elected government formed a new National Education Commission for the development of education policies that would meet the aspirations of the population³⁰. Education became free for everybody up to secondary level³¹.

Nowadays schools in Nepal are of two types: community and institutional. Community schools are supported by government and institutional schools get support from parents and trustees as well as public institutions³².

School education in Nepal consists of primary, lower secondary, secondary and higher secondary education³³. Usually children go to school at the age of 5 and spend five years at primary education level. Lower secondary education starts when they are 10 and lasts for three years. Secondary school provides a further two years of education and concludes with the School Leaving Certificate (SLC). Besides, a preparation for primary education is offered in Early Childhood Development (ECD)/Pre-primary Classes (PPCs)³⁴.

Education in the country is financed by three sources: government funding, public resource mobilization and private sector investments. Thus, the Ministry of Finance allocates a budget to the Ministry of Education. Investments from private sector come in the form of development, management and operation of private schools where parents pay fees³⁵. For the last several decades donor funding has become a very important part of education financing in the country. This funding “mainly covers the development aspects that address issues such as equity in access, betterment of quality, ensuring inclusive environment, betterment of

²⁹ Budden, J., Collins, Z., Rahman, T. & Salinas, R. (2012) *Nepal Development Report 2012*: p. 30. Retrieved from http://pages.uoregon.edu/aweiss/intl422_522/F2012%20Nepal.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 12)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Department of Education (2012) *School Level Educational Statistics of Nepal. Consolidated Report 2011 (2068)*. Sanothimi, Bhaktapur, 2012 (Accessed 2013, May 12) [online]. – URL:

http://www.doe.gov.np/files/Files/Consolidated%20Report%202068%20%28%202011%29_1346397795.pdf p.6

³³ Department of Education (2012) *School Level Educational Statistics of Nepal. Consolidated Report*. Bhaktapur: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Department of Education: p. 6. Retrieved from http://www.doe.gov.np/files/Files/Consolidated%20Report%202068%20%28%202011%29_1346397795.pdf (Accessed 2013, April 2)

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Nepal & UNESCO Office in Kathmandu, Nepal (2007) *Education for All. Mid decade Assessment. National Report*. Kathmandu: Lusha Press: p. 12

management and institutional capacity building”³⁶. The main donors for education in Nepal nowadays are DANIA, NORAD, Finland, DFID, EC, The World Bank and ADB³⁷.

In recent years education in Nepal has made huge progress. Thus, the overall literacy rate (for population aged 5 years and above) has increased from 54.1 percent in 2001 to 65.9 percent in 2011³⁸. According to UNESCO’s 2012 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, “Nepal ranks number two out of eight countries that have made the greatest strides in women’s enrollment and literacy”³⁹ and currently stands at 93.7 percent enrollment while gender parity stands at 98 percent⁴⁰.

But in spite of this, gender parity still remains comparatively inadequate⁴¹. For example, overall male literacy rate is 75.1% compared to female literacy rate of 57.4%⁴². Besides, there is a big difference of literacy between different regions of Nepal. The highest literacy rate is reported in Kathmandu district (86.3 %) and the lowest in Rautahat (41.7%)⁴³. Rural literacy rates are consistently lower than urban ones (46% to 74%) and there are proportionately fewer literate females than males⁴⁴. 25 percent of the rural poor enter into the education cycle late and only about 66 percent of students make it to the final year of primary education⁴⁵. This means that over one-third of Nepali students do not move on to secondary education⁴⁶. The proportion of the country in higher education is among the lowest in South Asia⁴⁷.

³⁶ Ibid.: p. 13

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *National population and Housing Census 2011: National Report (2012) Kathmandu (1)*: National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics .Government of Nepal: p. 4. Retrieved from <http://cbs.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/National%20Report.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 12)

³⁹ Budden, J., Collins, Z., Rahman, T. & Salinas, R. (2012) *Nepal Development Report 2012*: p. 31. Retrieved from http://pages.uoregon.edu/aweiss/intl422_522/F2012%20Nepal.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 12)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.: p.30

⁴² *National population and Housing Census 2011: National Report (2012) Kathmandu (1)*: National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics .Government of Nepal: p. 4. Retrieved from <http://cbs.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/National%20Report.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 12)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Budden, J., Collins, Z., Rahman, T. & Salinas, R. (2012) *Nepal Development Report 2012*: p. 31. Retrieved from http://pages.uoregon.edu/aweiss/intl422_522/F2012%20Nepal.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 12)

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: pp.31-32

⁴⁷ Ibid.: p.32

2.2 Who are the Chepangs?

Nepal is a country of diversity with a multi-cultural, multi linguistic, multi religious and multi caste population. According to the national census 2001 in Nepal there are 103 social groups⁴⁸ based on caste, ethnicity, religion, and language. Even after the abolition of caste-based discrimination in 1963 there still exists a big difference and discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, place of origin and ethnicity between the social groups in the country⁴⁹.

The Chepangs are the indigenous people who live in the hilly villages in the central regions of Nepal (Dhading, Chitwan, Makwanpur and Gorkha)⁵⁰. The Chepang community is categorized by the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) as the second lowest highly marginalized community from the bottom list of 59 marginalized Indigenous Communities listed by the Foundation⁵¹. The Chepangs population is 52 237 people, that is 0.23 percent of the national population of Nepal, which was 26,494,504 (in 2011)⁵². Among them there are 25 552 women and 26 685 men⁵³.

There are many controversial myths about the origin of the Chepang people⁵⁴. They consider themselves as progeny of Lava (“Lohari” in Chepang language), the son of Lord Rama in the great Hindu epic Ramayana⁵⁵. Gurung (1995)⁵⁶ gives different explanations of the creation of the word “Chepang”. According to his explanation it is common to think that this name was formed with the help of two words in Chepang language: *Che* (dog) and *Pang* (arrow) or *Chyo* (on the top) and *bang* (rock or stone). It is reasonable to think that the origin of their name has roots exactly in these words, as the Chepangs hunted animals and birds with the help of dogs and arrows and a dog and an arrow are the symbols of the Chepang

⁴⁸ SNV Netherlands Development Organization & Nepal Chepang Association (2008) *Let the people lead. Lessons for working effectively with excluded groups. The Chepang community's Experience in Nepal*. Nepal: SVN&NCA: p. 2

⁴⁹ Ibid.: p. 3

⁵⁰ Krishna, Prasad Poudel () Resources and Society. A study in the context of Nepalese Mountains. Draft report (p. 5)

⁵¹ World Vision Advocacy Forum (WVAF) (2009) Supporting Marginalized Ethnic Chepang Community through Enhanced District Chepang Rights Forum (DCRF) Nepal Bafal, Kathmandu p. 2 (Accessed 2013, February 26) [online]. – URL: <http://www.wvafnepal.org/pdf/tfd.pdf>

⁵² Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) *National population and Housing Census 2011 (National Report). Volume 01, NPHC 2011*. Kathmandu, Nepal. (Accessed 2013, May 12) [online]. – URL: <http://cbs.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/National%20Report.pdf> P. 3

⁵³ Poudel, K. P. (n.d.) *Resources and Society. A study in the context of Nepalese Mountains. Draft report*: p. 5

⁵⁴ Ibid.: p. 7

⁵⁵ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: pp. 11-13

⁵⁶ Gurung, G. M. (1995) *Report from a Chepang village (Society, Culture and Ecology)*. Kathmandu: S. Gurung: pp. 6-10

community⁵⁷. Concerning the second assumption, there is a legend that they originated from the stone and their ancestors lived in caves⁵⁸.

There exists one more name widely used for the community. Chepangs are well-known by the name *Praja*, which means King's subjects. They got this name in 1977 after King Birendra visited the areas where the Chepangs lived⁵⁹. It is worth saying that after this visit the King started the "Praja Development Program (PDP)" for the improvement of the Chepangs' conditions⁶⁰.

The Chepang community has encountered cultural and caste discrimination, being called and treated as "third class" citizens⁶¹. They belong to the Non-Caste Janajati, Nepal's indigenous nationalities. All through Nepalese history the Janajatis have been excluded from the mainstream and their rich social, cultural and spiritual life has to a great extent been ignored.



Figure 2.1 The Nepal caste pyramid⁶²

⁵⁷ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: p. 14

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ SNV Netherlands Development Organization & Nepal Chepang Association (2008) *Let the people lead. Lessons for working effectively with excluded groups. The Chepang community's Experience in Nepal.* Nepal: SVN&NCA: p. 9

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.: p. 8

⁶² The World Bank & Department For International Development (DFID) (2006) *Unequal citizens: Gender, caste and ethnic exclusion in Nepal - Summary*: p. 6. Retrieved from <http://www->

Even now, after the introduction of the new Civil Code in 1993, which annulled the hierarchy defined in the Civil Code of 1854, the Chepangs are generally considered to be shy and easily dominated by other ethnic groups, who have been migrating from the mountains to the lowlands for the last 40–50 years⁶³. The Chepangs' lifestyle has changed from hunting and gathering to the nomadic land cultivation and shifted to sedentary farming⁶⁴.

Although Nepal is a caste-based society and, as in all societies of this type, clan is considered to be of great importance, Gurung⁶⁵ claims that the Chepangs originally did not have a clan system. He argues that a clan organization “reflects the level of economic activities”⁶⁶ and explains the absence of clans among the Chepangs by their poor involvement in economic activities⁶⁷. This system started to develop due to the Chepangs' interaction with other people from different castes though many of them still have not accepted change because of their very isolated lifestyle.

The Chepangs live in remote, mountainous areas on steep slopes that are not easily accessible⁶⁸. Their settlements are often geographically isolated owing to difficult topography. Furthermore, the isolation is increased due to the lack of physical infrastructures. Geographically their territory is surrounded by major highways of Nepal, but the roads joining the Chepang settlements to the highways are very few.

As indigenous people, the Chepangs have their own language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family and almost all of them (97.3%) communicate in it⁶⁹. But the researchers⁷⁰ have found that nowadays young generations of the Chepangs prefer speaking Nepali.

wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/12/05/000090341_20061205151859/Rendered/PDF/379660Nepal0GSEA0Summary0Report01PUBLIC1.pdf (Accessed 2013, March 13) p. 6

⁶³ Rijal, A. (2008) “Living knowledge of the healing plants: Ethno-phytotherapy in the Chepang communities from the Mid-Hills of Nepal”. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*: p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.ethnobiomed.com/content/pdf/1746-4269-4-23.pdf> (Accessed 2013, March 4)

⁶⁴ Piya L., Maharjan, K. L. & Joshi, N. P. (2012) *Vulnerability of rural households to climate change and extremes: Analysis of Chepang households in the Mid-Hills of Nepal*: pp. 3-4. Retrieved from http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/126191/2/Vulnerability%20of%20rural%20households%20to%20climate%20change%20and%20extremes_Analysis%20of%20Chepang%20Households%20in%20the%20Mid-Hills%20of%20Nepal.pdf

⁶⁵ Gurung, G. M. (1995) *Report from a Chepang village (Society, Culture and Ecology)*. Kathmandu: S. Gurung: p. 34

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: p. 7

⁶⁹ Ibid.: p. 15)

⁷⁰ Ibid.

A Chepang family is nuclear, that is it consists of a man, his wife and unmarried children, or extended to include parents, their sons and wives and unmarried children. Traditionally the families are patrilocal and patriarchal, and lineage develops through the male⁷¹. The sons get equal parts of their parents' property; however the property is not shared with unmarried daughters above 35⁷².

Theoretically women are equal to men nowadays, but practically there still exists a big difference between men and women in Nepal in general and in the Chepang community in particular. The activity, life and behavior of a wife is regulated and controlled by her husband because the females are considered incompetent to control the family activities and dealings⁷³, but the mother plays an important social role in raising the children.

The food culture in the community can be explained by the enormous dependence on natural resources, especially forests. Gurung⁷⁴ says that the Chepangs often do not have enough food to eat. Normally they eat the produce of their agricultural activities but that is only sufficient for 5-6 months⁷⁵. Due to their poverty the majority must collect wild food in the forests for the rest of the year. Although they have animals at homes, hunting and fishing are very popular in the community. It was noted by researchers⁷⁶ that "they divide their food equally among the family members even to the children" explaining that children eat less but they can finish their food later during the day when they are hungry. Gurung⁷⁷ explains this fact by the terms of justice and equality and says that it was observed only in rural areas among illiterate people, but not in the urban areas among the literates.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 18

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.: p. 20)

⁷⁴ Gurung, G. M. (1995) *Report from a Chepang village (Society, Culture and Ecology)*. Kathmandu: S. Gurung: p. 20

⁷⁵ Limbu, P. & Thapa, K. (2011) *Chepang Food Culture. Contribution to Wild Edible and Neglected Plant Species*. Pokhara: Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD): p. 9. Retrieved from <http://ebookbrowse.com/chepang-food-culture-final-22-march-2012-pdf-d341516362> (Accessed 2013, March 1)

⁷⁶ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: p. 34

⁷⁷ Gurung, G. M. (1995) *Report from a Chepang village (Society, Culture and Ecology)*. Kathmandu: S. Gurung: p. 21

Other research⁷⁸ showed that because of poverty and lack of food some Chepang adults eat just half a meal and provide the rest to their children, and, if the situation is critical, they eat only once every second day.

Though the Chepangs are economically poor, they have a rich and unique cultural tradition. They have integrated many beliefs and practices from other religions into their own unique system. They observe all the Hindu festivals besides their own tribal festivals and celebrations. Many rituals like birth, marriage and death are performed and a variety of deities are worshipped. The shaman, who is known as Pande, occupies a unique and important role in social activities of the Chepang society⁷⁹.

2.2.1 Education in the Chepang community

As a whole Chepangs don't care much about formal education. Very few of them are literate. It can be proven by data received during the interview at the Nepal Chepang Association and by data of United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office⁸⁰ and World Vision Advocacy Forum⁸¹ that until 2009 only 23 percent of the Chepangs were literate. Among them 127 Chepangs (27 females) had completed secondary education and received School Leaving Certificate. 21 of them (4 females) had completed higher secondary education, 4 men⁸² had obtained a degree of Bachelor, 2 people had obtained a Master's degree, and only 1 man⁸³ is a postgraduate student.

Female students begin school relatively late (Gurung 1995:29)⁸⁴. As was said by Krishna Prasad Poudel (2002:42)⁸⁵, Chepang children do not begin education at a "proper" age

⁷⁸ United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office (UN RCHCO) (2012) *Field Bulletin. Chepang's Struggle for Survival: Views from Makwanpur and Chitwan Districts*: p. 4. Retrieved from http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full%20Report_1021.pdf (Accessed 2013, March 4)

⁷⁹ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: pp. 27-29

⁸⁰ United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office (UN RCHCO) (2012) *Field Bulletin. Chepang's Struggle for Survival: Views from Makwanpur and Chitwan Districts*: p. 2. Retrieved from http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full%20Report_1021.pdf (Accessed 2013, March 4)

⁸¹ World Vision Advocacy Forum (WVAF) (n.d.) *Supporting Marginalized Ethnic Chepang Community through Enhanced District Chepang Rights Forum (DCRF)*: p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.wvafnepal.org/pdf/tfd.pdf> (Accessed 2013, February 26)

⁸² Interview in NCA 2011

⁸³ Interview in NCA 2011

⁸⁴ Gurung, G. M. (1995) *Report from a Chepang village (Society, Culture and Ecology)*. Kathmandu: S. Gurung: p. 29

⁸⁵ Poudel, K. P. (n.d.) *Resources and Society. A study in the context of Nepalese Mountains. Draft report*: p. 42

because of long walking distance to school. Many Chepong parents do not want to send their daughters to school. Most of the girls have to take care of their young brothers and sisters and also have to support their parents. Besides, very often girls drop out of school to get married, because early marriages are traditional in their community. According to Gurung (1995)⁸⁶, language is one of the main obstacles for Chepong children at school. Nepali (the language of education) is not the language of their community, and very often teachers do not know the local language. Students attend school regularly, but homework is given due importance neither by teachers nor by parents (Gurung 1995:30)⁸⁷.

Education of Chepong youth is affected by various social, economic and demographic factors that have a great direct and indirect influence. In my thesis I discuss these issues and try to find possible ways out of this problem.

2.3 Topic in earlier research

The first scholar who brought the Chepongs to light was Brian Houghton Hodgson⁸⁸, a British civil servant who was living and working in British India and Nepal. He describes them in 1848⁸⁹ as people who live “entirely upon wild fruits and the produce of chase”⁹⁰. More than 100 years after Hodgson, Bista mentioned the Chepong community in his book⁹¹. Since then many anthropological studies took place in the Chepong community. Piya, Maharjan and Joshi mention the researchers in their work⁹². They say that the next people who were studying this community were Rai, 1985; Neis, 1989; Gurung, 1994, 1995; Gribnau et al., 1997; FORWARD, 2001 and Bhattarai, 2004. Their research mostly dealt with the livelihood of the Chepongs.

⁸⁶ Gurung, G. M. (1995) *Report from a Chepong village (Society, Culture and Ecology)*. Kathmandu: S. Gurung: p. 31

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepongs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: p. 14

⁸⁹ Piya, L., Maharjan, K. L. & Joshi, N. P. (2011) “Forest and Food Security of Indigenous People: A Case of Chepongs in Nepal”. *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, 17(1), 113-135: p. 114. Retrieved from http://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/metadb/up/kiyo/AN10482914/JIDC_17-1_113.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 13)

⁹⁰ Hodgson, B. H. (1874) *Essays on the Languages, Literature, and Religion of Nepal and Tibet: Together With Further Papers on the Geography, Ethnology, and Commerce of Those Countries* (2) (pp. 45-54): p. 45. London: Trübner & CO. Retrieved from <http://archive.org/stream/essaysonlanguage00hodg#page/n11/mode/2up> (Accessed 2013, February 26)

⁹¹ Piya, L., Maharjan, K. L. & Joshi, N. P. (2011) “Forest and Food Security of Indigenous People: A Case of Chepongs in Nepal”. *Journal of International Development and Cooperation*, 17(1), 113-135: p. 115. Retrieved from http://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/metadb/up/kiyo/AN10482914/JIDC_17-1_113.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 13)

⁹² Ibid.

I did not find any researcher who studied education in the Chepang community. There exist papers on education published nationally and internationally, but none of them is devoted only to the Chepangs. When it comes to education, all of them examine education of the indigenous groups of Nepal and include the Chepangs. The researchers who have studied the Chepangs do not highlight education as a main aspect, but write about it along with the other aspects of community life.

2.4 Summary

The aim of this chapter is to present the background to my study. Thus, in the first part I described the main aspects of education in Nepal in general. Then I presented the community from a historical, cultural and economic point of view. I described the livelihood of the Chepangs, their position in the caste system of the country, population, myths about their origin, their way of life, language and position in society. A separate section is devoted to education in the chosen community. I concluded this chapter by mentioning the researchers who worked on the topic of the Chepang community.

In the next chapter I present the theoretical and conceptual framework of my study and discuss the notion of “thick description” as the theory that lead me through my research.

Chapter 3. Theoretical and conceptual orientation

In this chapter I start by defining the main concepts of my study such as education, gender, indigenous peoples and culture. Then I concentrate on presentation of thick description as the main method that lead me through all the research and helped me to analyze and demonstrate my data in a rich way.

3.1 Main concepts

Understanding the main concepts helps to see the complexity of the studied phenomena and to understand the main problems of any research. Thus, before I start presenting a theory used in my work, I define the main concepts that are vital in my research.

3.1.1 Defining the concept of education

The word “education” is so often used in day-to-day communication that there is a wide variety of definitions⁹³. Hoëm and Darnell in their book “Taken to Extremes”⁹⁴ take the definition from the literature that best suits their study about the education of indigenous peoples in the North. They agree with Lawrence A. Cremin that education is a “deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities”⁹⁵.

They argue that the process of education exists in every aspect of life as a whole, of a society and of the individual. It affects them in a fundamental way⁹⁶ anticipating continuity and change, conformity and originality, and submission and freedom⁹⁷.

Spindler and Spindler, as it is mentioned by Hoëm and Darnell in their book, state that education is a cultural process. Besides, it is an instrument for survival and instrument for adaptation and change. If a researcher wants to understand education, he or she must study it

⁹³ See, for example, Kumar, S. & Ahmad, S. (n.d.) *Meaning, Aims and Process of Education*. Retrieved from <http://sol.du.ac.in/Courses/UG/StudyMaterial/16/Part1/ED/English/SM-1.pdf> (Accessed 2013, April 26)

⁹⁴ Darnell, F. & Hoëm A. (1996) *Taken to Extremes: Education in the Far North*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: p. 10

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*: p. 256

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: p. 264

within the culture of which it is an integral part and which it serves. It enables the individual to understand the meaning of the relationship between schools and communities, education and social systems, education and cultural settings that are current in modern educational discussions⁹⁸.

3.1.2 Defining the concepts of gender and gender equality

Gender refers to the social differences and relations between men and women which are inherited, learned, vary widely among societies and cultures, and change over time⁹⁹.

It happens quite often that the term "*gender*" is identified with the term "sex". But these terms cannot be reduced to one. Thus, sex is the biological difference between men and women, determined at birth¹⁰⁰. Some roles do not change: women give birth and breastfeed children. Men cannot do so. However, both men and women can care for children¹⁰¹.

Gender refers to social differences and social relations between a man and a woman, a boy and a girl, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes¹⁰². These differences are shaped by social, cultural, economic, and political conditions, as well as by expectations and obligations within society.

The concept of gender has much broader social and cultural aspects than the notion of sex. The criteria that distinguish "gender" from "sex" can include such aspects as class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age. Moreover, the comprehensiveness of the concept includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviors of both women

⁹⁸ Ibid.: pp. 257-258

⁹⁹ *Gender Equality and Equity. A summary review of UNESCO's accomplishments since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995)* (2000): p. 6. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121145e.pdf> (Accessed 2013, April 28)

¹⁰⁰ Section 5.10 Women, Gender, and DDR (2006). In *Integrated Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (pp. 1-40): p. 25. Retrieved from http://pksoi.army.mil/doctrine_concepts/documents/UN%20Guidelines/IDDRS.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 21)

¹⁰¹ *SGTM 6C: Gender and Peacekeeping* (n.d.): p.7 Retrieved from http://www.un.org/en/pseataaskforce/docs/unicef_training_module_gender_and_peacekeeping.pdf (2011, March 13)

¹⁰² Section 5.10 Women, Gender, and DDR (2006). In *Integrated Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (pp. 1-40): p. 23. Retrieved from http://pksoi.army.mil/doctrine_concepts/documents/UN%20Guidelines/IDDRS.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 21)

and men (femininity and masculinity)¹⁰³. “The concept of gender is vital, because, when it is applied to social analysis, it reveals how women's subordination (or men's domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined, nor is it fixed forever”¹⁰⁴.

As it is said in the summary review of UNESCO's accomplishments since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), *gender equality* means that “all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behavior, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally”¹⁰⁵.

Research on gender education is rapidly growing. This is due, first of all to the increasing involvement of international organizations in gender education policy making¹⁰⁶. Attempts to improve gender education have become even more radical since the establishment of United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Promotion of gender equality is stated as one of those goals¹⁰⁷. Thus, the question of gender equality in education is becoming more and more important. According to UNESCO (Bangkok)¹⁰⁸, achieving gender equality in education will not only meet the basic needs of children but will also equip every boy and girl “with the life skills and attitudes they will need to achieve their full potential within and outside of the education system” and will give them an opportunity to realize their human rights.

The discussions in this thesis relate mainly to gender and gender-roles, as defined above.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Gender Equality and Equity. A summary review of UNESCO's accomplishments since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995)* (2000): p. 5. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121145e.pdf> (Accessed 2013, April 28)

¹⁰⁶ Arnot, M. & Fennell, S. (2008) “(Re)visiting education and development agenda. Contemporary gender research”. In Fennell, S. & Arnot, M. (Eds.) *Gender Education and Equality in a Global Context. Conceptual frameworks and policy perspectives*. Routledge: p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.: pp. 2-3

¹⁰⁸ *UNESCO Office in Bangkok: Gender Equality in Education* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/gender/what-is-gender-equality/> (Accessed 2013, April 28)

3.1.3 Defining the concept of indigenous peoples

The United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples adopted four principles to be taken into account to define indigenous peoples:

- (a) Priority in time;
- (b) The voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness;
- (c) Self-identification as well as recognition by other groups, or by State authorities;
- (d) An experience of subjugation, marginalization, dispossession, exclusion or discrimination¹⁰⁹.

The International Labour Organization defines indigenous peoples in Article 1.1 of its Convention 169 as:

- (a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;
- (b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions.¹¹⁰

Darnell and Hoëm use the concept “indigenous” as similar to “native”. They say that both of these terms are widely used in literature for identification of an indigenous minority

¹⁰⁹ Minde, H., Eide, A. & Åhrén, M. (2007) *The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. What made it possible? The work and process beyond the final adoption*. Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino: Resource Centre for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino 2007: p. 63. Retrieved from http://www.galdu.org/govat/doc/galdu_4_07_eng_web.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 16)

¹¹⁰ International Labour Organisation (1989) *C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention*, (No. 169). Article 1.1. Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_ILO_CODE:C169#A1 (Accessed 2013, May 16)

population. Thus, I use the term “indigenous” in accordance with their definition, which means “an original inhabitant of a place as opposed to invader, explorer or colonist”¹¹¹.

3.1.4 Defining the concept of culture

The concept of *culture* is very broad. Some researchers (like Hofstede, for instance) define different levels and give different explanations of what it is. Deriving from numerous definitions it is possible to understand that culture is seen as something common and inherited by the society.

Darnell and Hoëm say that culture is a mechanism of group survival and agree with Bullivant that it consists of public awareness. Thus it forms “the basis for understanding and mastery for a single individual, a society or a nation”¹¹².

According to Darnell and Hoëm, if the indigenous groups want to survive, they must transmit their cultures from generation to generation¹¹³. And they come back to this point saying that in this kind of society the elders represent living history which is their cultural heritage. And the obligation of younger generations is to maintain their traditions and history, which taken together comprise their cultural treasure¹¹⁴.

3.2 Thick description as a method for exploring and analyzing

“Thick description” is a term from anthropology and ethnography developed by Geertz who borrowed this notion from Gilbert Ryle¹¹⁵. It is used for description in research reports which, according to Geertz, analyze the multiple levels of meaning in any environment¹¹⁶. Thick description helps to give a deep picture of social settings that “can form the basis for the creation of general statement about a culture and its significance in people’s social lives”¹¹⁷.

¹¹¹ Darnell, F. & Hoëm A. (1996) *Taken to Extremes: Education in the Far North*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press: p. 13

¹¹² Ibid.: p. 10

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.: p. 268

¹¹⁵ Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books: p. 6.

¹¹⁶ Silverman, D. (2010) *Doing Qualitative research* (3rd ed.). SAGE: p. 439

¹¹⁷ Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*. (4th ed.) Oxford University Press: p. 717

There exist two kinds of description: thin description and thick description. The difference between them lies in a “stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures”¹¹⁸: thin description does no more than report events and facts; thick description, in contrast, goes deeper, explores and analyses the cultural meaning of behavior, gives the context of experience, states the intentions and meanings that determine experience, and reveals the experience as a process, states Holliday on the basis of Denzin’s idea¹¹⁹.

Thick description is often produced by qualitative researchers because they are encouraged to produce rich accounts of a culture¹²⁰. One of the particular distinguishing features of this type of research is when it is impossible to interpret most of the events in a simple way. That is to say, thick description encourages representing complexity and so is more thorough than a simple appraisal¹²¹. Lincoln and Guba argue that thick description provides others with data for making judgments and decisions about the possible transferability of findings across cultures¹²².

Howe and Moses discuss the problem of privacy and confidentiality in thick description. They argue that thick description requires “a level of detail that cannot be obtained if privacy, confidentiality and anonymity are required”¹²³. They say that if a researcher wants to keep his research objective and confidential, it will lose the very richness that he intended to demonstrate and so will become “thin”¹²⁴.

Thus, if researchers want their descriptions to be “thick”, they have to include not only detailed observational data but data “on meanings, participants’ interpretation of situations and unobserved factors”¹²⁵. Thick description enables the researcher to generate a richness of perception during reflection and exploration of data. This can also be achieved in small groups¹²⁶.

Although, according to Holliday, it is neither the size of the study nor the quantity of data that necessarily makes the difference. He gives the example of Pierson’s study and shows that

¹¹⁸ Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books: p. 7

¹¹⁹ Holliday, A. (2007) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications: pp.74-75

¹²⁰ Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*. (4th ed.) Oxford University Press: p. 392

¹²¹ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. (7th ed.). Routledge: p. 17

¹²² Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*. (4th ed.). Oxford University Press: p. 392

¹²³ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. (7th ed.). Routledge: p. 93

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: p. 220

¹²⁶ Holliday, A. (2007) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications: p.76

thick description is still possible with small studies. It is also possible even with single data sources¹²⁷. But it can be fully achieved after the interconnections are fully articulated in the written study¹²⁸.

Thick description aims to reveal the “collective representations”¹²⁹, or the connections between people, beliefs, images, traditions and customs that operate within small social settings. Thus, there is certainly no reason why reference to literature should be restricted to the ‘discussion of issues’. Holliday states that it is a source of evidence which in many ways behaves like data¹³⁰.

The reader will be able to understand clearly a description only if the researcher collects the right data. Thus, as Holliday quotes Geertz, “the researcher must delve into the depth of the culture which give significance to these acts in which a “stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsal of parodies are produced, perceived and interpreted, and without which they would not ... in fact exist”¹³¹

By staying in a location for some period of time researchers are able to study people, personalities, resources and roles, how they behave, what they do, and how events change over time. They can catch the dynamic of the situation and understand its context. This exposure will help them to produce a better and “thicker” description.

Morrison, cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, says that “by being immersed in a particular context over time not only will the silent features of the situation emerge and present themselves but a more holistic view will be gathered of the interrelationships of factors”¹³². Such immersion facilitates the generation of thick description, particularly of social processes and interaction which lends itself to accurate explanation and interpretation of events rather than relying on the researcher’s own inferences. The data received from participant observation are “strong on reality”. Thus, thick description data describe not only events in context, but participants’ intentions and strategies¹³³.

¹²⁷ Ibid.: p. 85

¹²⁸ Ibid.: p. 101

¹²⁹ Ibid.: p. 75

¹³⁰ Ibid.: p. 102

¹³¹ Ibid.: p. 75

¹³² Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. (7th ed.). Routledge: p. 466

¹³³ Ibid.: p. 540

Geertz equates thick description with ethnography¹³⁴. Doing ethnographic research for him is like trying to read “foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior”¹³⁵. He says that the ethnographer “inscribes” social discourse and writes it down. In so doing, he “turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted”¹³⁶.

Using thick description in my presentation and analysis is the best way to portray “what it is like” to be in a particular community, to catch close-up reality and observe participants’ life experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for his surroundings¹³⁷.

3.3 Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the conceptual and theoretical framework of the thesis. I started with the definition of the main concepts used in the research. First, in order to understand the complexity of the process of getting knowledge, I introduced the concept of education. Since I concentrate on education of girls, I explained concepts of gender and gender education. Gender inequality is huge in education. Thus, I also examined the notion of gender equality. My study is not applied to a global context. I examine education within one indigenous group. That is why I presented the explanation of ‘indigenous’. I also examined the concept of culture in the first part of this chapter.

Many of my suggested definitions coincide with ones given by Darnell and Hoëm in their research where they studied education and obstacles to education among the indigenous communities in the North. Geographically my study has nothing in common with theirs. But theoretically it confirms that most, if not all, indigenous communities have similar problems in accessing knowledge which is why I have found their presentation of conceptual framework to be significant for my research.

¹³⁴ Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books: pp. 10-11

¹³⁵ Ibid.: p. 10

¹³⁶ Ibid.: p. 19

¹³⁷ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. (7th ed.). Routledge: p. 290

Further I explained the notion of thick description suggested by Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist whose theory of thick description has implications not only in anthropology but in a range of other social sciences.

I use thick description in my data presentation and analysis, since it is the best way to show the complexity of my study and helps the reader to understand the environment in the chosen community. Thus, I have a rich, developed source of living in the community, observing the life style of its people, their behavior and interaction. I shared food and water with them, played with the children and talked with the adults, observed their homes and fields. I visited schools, talked to teachers and students, was present in the classrooms during lessons and spent time with them during breaks. I saw the physical conditions of schools and observed the methods of teaching and child-rearing in the community. I intend to present this data as an illustration of their lives, and allow the reader to experience and understand the community in that context. So now I introduce my methodology and real life experiences.

Chapter 4. Fieldwork and Methodology

In this chapter I present the methodology of my thesis and my fieldwork experience. I define the study area and my informants, describe how and why I chose those people for my research. Next, I write about my field experience, describe my data collection and discuss the research process. I explain my choice of methodology and discuss why it was the best for my research. I continue by describing the advantages and challenges I met during the data collection. The last section of the chapter is devoted to the discussion of ethical issues which arose during my field research.

4.1 Study area

Nepal is divided into 75 districts. The Chepangs live in four districts – Dhading, Chitwan, Makwanpur and Gorkha – which are situated in the central region of the country¹³⁸. The main data collection was held in the Dhading district which borders the Kathmandu valley where the capital is. Before going to the villages, I collected data in Kathmandu. This was done to enable better understanding of the local environment and to obtain in-depth knowledge about education in Nepal in general, and in the Chepang community in particular. I had interviews with the Ministry of Education, UNESCO and a non-governmental organization – the Nepal Chepang Association.

Dhading is one of the most underdeveloped districts in Nepal. It ranks 41st in the Human Development Index (HDI) among all districts of the country¹³⁹. The population there is 380,369 with a growth rate of 1.97% and an average family size of 5.4¹⁴⁰.

The district has only 43% adult literacy rate where female literacy rate is considerably lower (33.81%) compared to the male (53.69%)¹⁴¹. The development of the chosen district is very poor, the roads are dreadful, and in many places there is no electricity. Statistics show that only 39% of the population has access to clean drinking water and only a small percentage has sanitary toilets¹⁴². Over 35% of the district's population inhabits marginalized ethnic

¹³⁸ Poudel, K. P. (n.d.) *Resources and Society. A study in the context of Nepalese Mountains. Draft report*: p. 5

¹³⁹ *About Dhading | Shanti Nepal* (2010). Retrieved from http://www.shantinepal.org.np/content/?content_id=62 (Accessed 2012, December 25)

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

communities. According to the statistics, their socio-economic conditions lie far behind the average population of the district. The Chepangs comprise 3% of the district’s population.



Fig.4.1. Map of districts in Nepal, highlighting Dhading¹⁴³

Dhading was chosen for my research because it is one of the regions where the largest number of deprived Chepangs live¹⁴⁴. The most disadvantaged of the Chepangs and the lowest in terms of economic and social status compared with other poor people in Nepal, live in the remote southern villages of the district¹⁴⁵. That is why I chose two schools and villages in the southern part of the Dhading region for my data collection. The Chepangs are in the lowest educational stratum there¹⁴⁶. Very few students in this region have passed the Government School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴³ Worldjournos.com. *Nepal at a Glance (n.d)*. Retrieved from <http://worldjournos.com/detail.php?id=26&lnk=news&detail=> (Accessed 201, May 31)

¹⁴⁴ Medical Mercy Canada (MMC) (2012) *A profile of the Chepang people of Nepal*. Retrieved from <http://www.medicalmercycanada.org/nepal.html#.UNnAOeTZY6W> (Accessed 2012, December 25)

¹⁴⁵ Medical Mercy Canada (MMC) (2012) *A profile of the Chepang people of Nepal*. Retrieved from <http://www.medicalmercycanada.org/nepal.html#.UNnAOeTZY6W> (Accessed 2012, December 25)

¹⁴⁶ Medical Mercy Canada (MMC) (2012) *A profile of the Chepang people of Nepal*. Retrieved from <http://www.medicalmercycanada.org/nepal.html#.UNnAOeTZY6W> (Accessed 2012, December 25)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

4.2 Informants

4.2.1 Selection of informants and gaining access

Data collection in my field was conducted according to a deductive pattern – from general to concrete. It was done in several stages. First I collected general information about education and its different aspects in the country; I learned about attempts for improvement of education in Nepal by organizations at the national and international level. Then I started gathering information about the Chepang community and its education. Finally, I immersed myself into the collection of data in the chosen community.

Since the main focus of my thesis is education, I first decided to collect general data on the education system in the country and to understand how it is administrated and managed, who is responsible for what, how education is planned, implemented and monitored. The aim of that data collection was to reach people who are familiar with the issues in the country's system of education. In Nepal the Ministry of Education is responsible for planning and managing education at all levels¹⁴⁸. Thus, contacting that Ministry of Education was the first step in my selection of informants.

It is not only that Ministry that is trying to implement adequate education for its people. We live in a world where the international community is working on improving educational levels. One of the main organizations that deals with the problems of education worldwide is UNESCO. This organization maintains an Office in Nepal. Its particular mission is “building peace, alleviating poverty, and fostering sustainable development and intercultural dialogue in Nepal through education, science, culture, communication and information”¹⁴⁹. The work of the UNESCO Office in Nepal is focused on gender equality and literacy¹⁵⁰; in the field of primary education there is a particular focus on disadvantaged groups¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁸ UNESCO & IBE (2011) *World Data on Education*. (7th ed.): p. 3. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002113/211309e.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 6)

¹⁴⁹ Mission Statement / UNESCO (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/kathmandu/about-this-office/mission-statement/> (Accessed 2013, May 7)

¹⁵⁰ Mission Statement / UNESCO (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/kathmandu/about-this-office/mission-statement/> (Accessed 2013, May 7)

¹⁵¹ *Strengthening Nepal's education system* / UNESCO. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/kathmandu/education/strengthening-nepals-education-system/> (Accessed 2013, May 7)

Therefore because I wanted to know what has been done by the international community to improve education in Nepal, I contacted the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu as a second step in my data collection.

For a better understanding of history, traditions, everyday life and life in general in the Chepang community, I contacted representatives of non-governmental organizations such as the Nepal Chepang Association. This is the non-governmental Indigenous Peoples Organization of Chepang peoples and it deals with the problems and needs of the marginalized Chepang community¹⁵². The organization was established in 1988 by Chepang youth for initiating “a social transformation process within their community”¹⁵³. The organization aims to improve the current situation in the community through collaboration with various other organizations and by the introduction of projects that can help to raise their living standards¹⁵⁴. I interviewed an individual who works in the Organization and is a representative of the Chepang community.

When I was planning my fieldwork I contacted the Ministry of Education in Nepal, a representative of the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu and a representative of Nepal Chepang Association via e-mail and they agreed to be interviewed.

The next step was to interview the representative of the District Education Office in Dhading. According to the report “World Data on Education”¹⁵⁵, District Education Offices implement district-level policies in education according to the instructions of the Ministry of Education. They “provide professional support to school administrators, teachers, and students; recruit and transfer teachers; prepare statistical reports; establish new schools and strengthen existing ones; organize training seminars and extracurricular activities; and conduct district-level examinations”¹⁵⁶.

I contacted a representative of the District Education Office in Dhading when I arrived in Nepal, because I could find neither an e-mail address nor a phone number to reach the organization in advance of my visit. In fact I was only able to find the address of the District

¹⁵² *Nepal Chepang Association* (n.d). Retrieved from <http://www.ncachepang.org.np/> (Accessed 2013, May 7)

¹⁵³ *Projects – Rights, Democracy and Inclusion Fund (RDIF)* (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://esp-nepal.org.np/rdif/projects/project.php?projectid=216> (Accessed 2012, December 25)

¹⁵⁴ Nepal Chepang Association, Interview. September 2011

¹⁵⁵ UNESCO & IBE (2011) *World Data on Education*. (7th ed.). Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002113/211309e.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 6)

¹⁵⁶ UNESCO & IBE (2011) *World Data on Education*. (7th ed.): p. 4. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002113/211309e.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 6)

Education Office, so after completing my interviews in Kathmandu, I went to the District Education Office in Dhading. After some delay I managed to contact the individual whom I needed to see and was able to arrange a meeting with him.

My visit to the District Education Office in Dhading allowed me to interview a person who is directly involved in primary education in the region. After listening to my ideas and goals, he helped me to select particular schools where the number of Chepang students is the largest.

After processing the results of previous data gathering I was ready to study the community at first hand. I went to two schools, chosen with the help of the District Education Office and interviewed teachers and children.

It was difficult to obtain access to the schools since there is no telephone or internet connection in the villages. The only solution was for me to select the schools and simply go to the relevant villages. I spent 2 weeks observing the community and was able to talk to different people at different times, when they were available.

The final stage of the study was data collection in the villages where the chosen schools are situated. There I was able to talk to the parents of children whom I had interviewed at schools. I was also able to communicate informally with the children. Thus, I interviewed the same children twice: at homes and at schools. It was important that I could ask the same children the same question in different situations and cross-check their answers so as to verify my conclusions in case of mismatched answers.

4.2.2 Number of informants

My plan was to gather in-depth information. Usually the data in qualitative research of case studies is rich and detailed, as this type of research focuses on quite a small number of people¹⁵⁷. On the other hand, as Onwuegbuzie and Leech say, the researcher has to understand that the sample size should be large enough to produce rich and full data: neither

¹⁵⁷ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. (7th ed.). Routledge: p. 539

too large because that can cause data overload and create generalization, nor too small because that will not provide sufficiently reliable data¹⁵⁸.

In total I conducted 47 interviews as part of my data collection.

Table 4.1 Interviews with parents and representatives of organizations in Nepal

Parents	12
UNESCO	2
Ministry of Education	1
District Educational Office (Dhading)	1
Nepal Chepang Association	1

Table 4.2 Interviews with teachers and students at schools in Nepal

	School №1	School №2
Teachers	6	5
Students (boys)	2	4
Students (girls)	7	6

A more thorough description of my informants can be found in the Appendices A, B and C.

4.3 Field experience

I conducted my fieldwork in September 2011 including 3 weeks research in Nepal. I spent 1 week in Kathmandu and 2 weeks in two villages in Dhading region. All of my respondents were open and were happy to talk to me. I did not meet people who refused to share information with me or refused to answer my questions. During my stay in Dhading, I visited schools and villages every day but spent only a few nights in a village with a family that kindly hosted me and my translator. I decided to return to the hotel because I was worried

¹⁵⁸ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. (7th ed.). Routledge: pp. 161-162

about our security. As Mertus¹⁵⁹ says, “care of self is integrally related to care for others”. In spite of the fact that we were not in a conflict or dangerous area, due to my concerns for hygiene and health issues I followed the idea of Bøås, Jenninhs and Shaw¹⁶⁰, when they say that if a researcher feels uncomfortable in some situation in the field, he or she should leave. Thus, I decided that it would be better for us to go back to the hotel and return the next morning.

In all I was able to achieve the aim of my fieldwork and to get in-depth data. For example, the representative of the Ministry of Education agreed to an interview which helped me to obtain general information about the status of education in the country, to understand its historical, social, cultural, economic and political background, and to become more familiar with the National Education System of Nepal. He gave me details about education in different regions and different population groups in the country. I also collected information about the Chepang community in particular and was able to understand more clearly the educational problems of the community. I also received information about actions that have been implemented for improvement of the educational status of indigenous and marginalized communities in the country, such as the Chepang community. The member of Ministry of Education also familiarized me with projects that are to be implemented for such improvement.

I talked to 2 people at the UNESCO Office who are responsible for its education section. These interviews allowed me to obtain information about the current activities and projects of UNESCO in the country, mainly about the project "Education for all" and how the main goals set in Paris (UNESCO Headquarters) are implemented into life in Nepal.

The representative of the Nepal Chepang Association gave me detailed information about the Chepangs, explained what their life was like many years ago, and what it is like now. He also shared his own experience of being a Chepang and told me his memories about his own schooling.

Conversations with the teachers gave me opportunity to learn the basic problems that arise in the educational process at schools. I was told about the number of children in school, the

¹⁵⁹ Mertus, J. A. (2009) *Maintenance of personal security: ethical and operational issues*. In Sriram, C. L., King, J. C., Mertus, J. A., Martin-Ortega, O. & Herman, J. (Eds.) *Surviving Field Research. Working in violent and difficult situations* (pp. 165-177). Routledge: p. 166

¹⁶⁰ Bøås, M., Jenninhs, K. & Shaw, T. (2006) “Dealing with Conflict and Emergency Situations”. In Desai, V. & Potter, R. (Eds.) *Doing Development Research*. (pp.70-79) London: Sage Publications: p. 76

number of children who have left school, the level of attendance, students' achievements and overall learning process.

At first the children were shy and ill at ease with me but when they got to know me better they started talking freely. They told about their willingness or reluctance to go to school, the household duties that they have to perform along with their education, the existence or absence of a proper place to study at home and the attitude of their parents to their education.

The same process emerged with parents: at first they were shy and were afraid to tell me anything that I might use against them. But after we spent more time together they started to trust me and become open to my questions. I learned their opinions about the importance of education for their children. It was interesting to learn about household tasks of children, place at home where children can study, the reasons for non-attendance of classes.

Towards the end of my fieldwork it was possible to identify certain themes, outlines and patterns that stood out. I was satisfied that I had collected sufficient data to enable me to close the process of interviews.

4.4 Choice of methodology

My field research was aimed at gathering qualitative information by focusing on the comprehension of life in a Chepang community both as a whole and from an individual's point of view¹⁶¹. It involved ethnographic methodology – interviewing and observation. These methods were the best way to create thick description for analyzing and presenting my data¹⁶².

As was said by Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research is “born out of concern to understand the ‘other’.”¹⁶³ It suited me perfectly, as I went to the chosen place for in-depth study and to understand the customs, habits, way of life and culture of a completely different society¹⁶⁴. It

¹⁶¹ Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications: p. 10

¹⁶² Radsh, C. (2009) “From cell phones to coffee: Issues of access in Egypt and Lebanon”. In Sriram, C. L., King, J. C., Mertus, J. A., Martin-Ortega, O. & Herman, J. (Eds.) *Surviving Field Research. Working in violent and difficult situations*. (pp. 91-108) Routledge: p. 92

¹⁶³ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2003) *The landscape of Qualitative research. Theories and issues*. Second Edition. Sage Publications, Inc. p 2

¹⁶⁴ Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2003) *The landscape of Qualitative research. Theories and issues*. Second Edition. Sage Publications, Inc. p 1

gave me the opportunity for observation in the natural setting and to interpret phenomena “in terms of the meanings people bring to them”¹⁶⁵.

I decided that interviews would be the most appropriate procedure for my particular study in order to discover information from different sources. This research method “involves gathering of data through direct verbal conversation between individuals”¹⁶⁶. It was particularly relevant for my research because a great number of parents are still illiterate and, even if not, were too busy with household chores to be able to allow time for a written survey. Children also found it less stressful and were more inclined to give straightforward answers to questions asked orally.

As Byrne Bridget says, qualitative interviewing “when done well is able to achieve a level of depth and complexity”¹⁶⁷.

I chose a semi-structured type of interview. According to Bryman¹⁶⁸, a semi-structured interview involves a list of questions concerning the topics to be covered. This includes interview guides, but at the same time the interviewees have flexibility in answering questions. The questions in semi-structured interviews are open-ended and this allows gaining richer information¹⁶⁹.

The purpose of the interview can be divided into three integral parts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison)¹⁷⁰. First, it can serve as a means to obtain information that relates directly to the investigation. Second, it can be used to test hypotheses or to develop new hypotheses. Third, it can be used in conjunction with other research methods to confirm their significance or to increase the motivation of the respondents¹⁷¹. In my research I used all of these parts. Thus, interviews conducted in Kathmandu and Dhading served for obtaining the information related to the investigated topic. Interviews in the villages with teachers, parents and children were used for testing hypotheses set before going into the field. I also found it useful to combine these methods of interviewing with one more research method – observation.

¹⁶⁵ Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003) *The Landscape of Qualitative Research. Theories and Issues*. (2nd ed.). Sage Publications: pp. 3-5

¹⁶⁶ Cohen L., Manion L. & Morrison K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*. (5th ed.). Routledge: p. 269

¹⁶⁷ Byrne, B. (2004) ‘Qualitative Interviewing’ in Seale, C. (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture*. SAGE Publications: p. 182

¹⁶⁸ Bryman, A. (2001) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press: p. 314

¹⁶⁹ Miller, R. L. & Brewer, J. D. (2003) *The A-Z of Social Research*. Sage Publications: p. 167

¹⁷⁰ Cohen L., Manion L. & Morrison K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*. (5th ed.). Routledge

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: p. 267

I had only one opportunity to go to Nepal for field research. This increased the importance of obtaining as many details and personal attitudes of respondents in my single visit. As I spent some time in the chosen community, I was able to observe people's life styles and behavior, conditions at schools and homes. I decided to use observation as an additional method for my data collection process. According to Dana Lynn Driscoll¹⁷², this method is widely used within ethnographic research in sociology and anthropology and gives the researcher the opportunity to interact with participants and become part of their community.

The aim of observation is to gain a close contact with a group of individuals and their lives through intensive involvement with people in their natural environment. This method helps to “to gather live data from live situations”¹⁷³. Besides, as Silverman says, “the observational method has often been the most chosen method to understand another culture or sub-culture”¹⁷⁴.

The combination of two methods – interviews and observation – gave me the opportunity to hear what people say and at the same time to see their nonverbal behavior, their gestures and facial expressions. Thus, I could check whether what people say they do differs or coincides with what they really do¹⁷⁵.

4.5 Research process: interviews

While conducting interviews I was trying to create the conditions and circumstances under which my respondents could express their own opinions in their own words¹⁷⁶. The interviews would start according to the same pattern: first I would say a traditional Nepalese greeting, introduce myself, tell my name and where I am from, describe what I study, what I am writing about, what I am interested in in this particular field and why.

Interviews were conducted in accordance with a specific plan. Thus, before data collection I prepared a detailed interview guide that included lists of questions presented in logical

¹⁷² Driscoll, D. L. (2011) “Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews”. *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, 2, 153-174: pp. 160-161. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces2/driscoll-introduction-to-primary-research.pdf> (Accessed 2013, January 3)

¹⁷³ Cohen L., Manion L. & Morrison K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*. (5th ed.). Routledge: p. 305

¹⁷⁴ Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications: p. 111

¹⁷⁵ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. (7th ed.). Routledge: p. 456

¹⁷⁶ Miller, R. L. & Brewer, J. D. (2003) *The A-Z of Social Research*. Sage Publications: p. 166

sequence and in a certain order. For different informants (representatives of the organizations, teachers, parents, and children) I created separate lists of questions. When I was preparing my interview guide I marked the main and secondary questions with the aim of staying within time limits in case I needed to drop some questions.

Some interviews were more official, time for them was strictly limited and they took place in public offices. Some did not have such strict time limits, took place at homes and were non-official. All of them were conducted individually and were of different duration, from 15 minutes with children up to 1.5 hours with representatives from the Ministry of Education and the District Education Office.

At the introduction stage I explained to the respondents the purpose and objective of the interview. I assured respondents about the confidentiality of their answers, saying that I would not use their names or any other personal information. After some general questions I proceeded with the prepared list of question, thus trying to keep the conversation focused on the topic.

When I was interviewing I was worried that children would be shy and would not talk to me, because I was a stranger and an adult. My interviews with them also started with the traditional Nepalese greeting. It helped me to become to some extent closer to children and show them my respect. Then I would ask a child's name and say my name. Some children feel more comfortable when pictures or toys are used during the conversation with adults¹⁷⁷. That is why I told them where I am from and showed them some pictures of Ukraine and Norway. It made them more open and friendly with me. They answered my questions and after some time most of them were talking freely, willingly sharing their wishes and dreams with me telling, for example, what professions they want to master when they become grown-ups.

During the interviews I encouraged my informants, both children and adults, to stop or interrupt me if they found it difficult to understand the question, wanted to avoid some topic or expand on it.

¹⁷⁷ Brenner, M. E. (2006) "Interviewing in educational Research". In Green, J. L., Camilli, G. & Elmore, P. B. (Eds.) *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (pp. 357-370): p. 365. Retrieved from <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/projects/oralhistory/2006MEBrennerInterviewInEducResearchOCR.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 10) p. 365

All of the informants said that they would feel comfortable with a recorder and allowed me to record our dialogues. Recording gave me the chance to focus on conversation with an interviewee. Besides I was making short notes about details and context, body language and effects that might not be apparent on the audio record¹⁷⁸.

My emotional preparation was of great importance as each interview was to some extent stressful. I had to keep in mind that different people can react to questions in different ways. That is why before the interview process I learned a lot about local conditions in Nepal, culture and perceptions. I was trying to find as much information as possible about the chosen community because I was sure that understanding their features and attitudes would help me to avoid misconceptions due to cultural differences, and allowed the formulation of questions in the most appropriate way.

Besides, I wanted people to take me seriously. That is why I took into account such points as the importance of dress code, make up, gestures and way of speaking. I always came to the interviews on time, was polite and tolerant. All these things helped to create a positive impression of me and my research topic.

4.6 Research process: observation

Observation was conducted in the Chepang community. I observed their everyday life that I was trying to understand¹⁷⁹. It was impossible to stay aloof because my research was conducted in two small villages where everybody knows each other and information about a new person in the village spreads very quickly. So, I was aware that people from the villages would know that they were being observed, and the nature of their actions would probably be artificially changed because of their desire to show me the things they wanted me to see. I had to accept that my presence would influence the participants' behavior but, as Silverman says, I could not predict how or to what extent¹⁸⁰.

On the other hand, I could not control the process. That is why it took quite a long time to conduct the research. Since I could not communicate with people in the field directly without my interpreter, I was mostly watching the phenomena I studied. But I should say here that it is

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Miller, R. L. & Brewer, J. D. (2003) *The A-Z of Social Research*. Sage Publications: p. 213

¹⁸⁰ Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications: p. 29

exactly watching that makes the core of observation¹⁸¹. Thus, I had the perfect opportunity to see real life in the community: people's living conditions, the ratio of work to rest, people's homes, facilities for children education at home, relationships between family members, how parents influence the children's preparation for their classes. Observation at schools allowed me to see their facilities, the way of conducting lessons and using different teaching methods, and the behavior of children and teachers during the lessons and breaks.

It was critical to keep records of my observation. I knew that visual data would be lost soon if it was not recorded. Thus, I immediately wrote a brief note concerning my observations and produced more comprehensive filed notes at the end of the day.

The ethical concern of being unbiased was very important. I was aware of the difference between observation (recording exactly what I saw) and interpretation (making assumptions and judgments about what I saw)¹⁸². That's why I tried to "focus first on only the events that are directly observable"¹⁸³.

4.7 Advantages and challenges during data collection

The process of accessing data on the chosen topic had its advantages and challenges. I discuss them in this section of my thesis.

4.7.1 Reaching my informants

Arranging meetings and interviews in advance became a difficult issue. It was easy to get in touch with informants in the organizations whose offices are situated in the cities, with access to the Internet and telephone. But in the villages, it was impossible to contact the informants in advance. Besides, I had difficulties in selecting the schools for research by myself, because the data about the number of Chepang students at schools are not published on the internet,

¹⁸¹ Miller, R. L. & Brewer, J. D. (2003) *The A-Z of Social Research*. Sage Publications: p. 213

¹⁸² Dana Lynn Driscoll (2011) Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews pp. 160-161 (Accessed 2013, January 3) [online]. – URL:

<http://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces2/driscoll--introduction-to-primary-research.pdf>

¹⁸³ Driscoll, D. L. (2011) "Introduction to Primary Research: Observations, Surveys, and Interviews". *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, 2, 153-174: pp. 160-161. Retrieved from <http://wac.colostate.edu/books/writingspaces2/driscoll--introduction-to-primary-research.pdf> (Accessed 2013, January 3)

and it is impossible to contact the schools directly because of lack of information about them on the internet. So I asked the District Education office in Dhading for help in making the correct choice of schools. But even after the schools were selected, the only way to progress my research there was by going to the villages where the schools are situated and looking for informants directly in the field.

On the other hand, that can be considered as a positive feature. Nobody in the villages knew that I was planning my visit to the schools so they could not prepare for my visit, which enabled me to see the situation in its natural conditions.

4.7.2 Language

Language is very important tool in any research. As is mentioned in the book “*Doing Cross-Cultural Research*”, for maximizing the quality of data, it is important to interview participants in their language¹⁸⁴. Language was the main challenge during my field research. All of my respondents could speak Nepali but I do not understand the language at all. The representatives of the Ministry of Education, UNESCO, District Education Office and Nepal Chepang Association speak English and our conversations were conducted accordingly. But English is neither their native language nor mine. Therefore we agreed at the beginning of the interviews that if we did not understand each other, we would not hesitate to ask what one of us wanted to say so we did not have any major problems in communication.

Interviewing a Chepang respondent was very difficult. People in the Chepang community do not speak English. Even the teachers of English do not speak the language that enabled them to talk to me freely. On the one hand it was very difficult because some information could have been lost which might have had a negative impact on the adequacy of my research. One cannot deny that accurate translation is crucial for credibility of findings¹⁸⁵. Hence, all my interviews in the community were conducted through an interpreter. My translator was fluent in both Nepali and English and was able to translate everything in a complete and meaningful way. Besides, we discussed interviews after they were finished, went through the records and

¹⁸⁴ Irvine, F., Roberts, G. & Bradbury-Jones, C. (2008) “The Researcher as Insider Versus the Researcher as Outsider: Enhancing Rigour Through Language and Cultural Sensitivity”. In Liamputtong, P. (Ed.) *Doing Cross-Cultural Research* (pp. 35-48) Springer Science + Business Media B.V: p. 42

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.: p. 41

she added some information which was omitted during the translation. Therefore I believe that my data is complete and nothing was lost in the process of translation.

4.7.3 Being the outsider

It was my first visit to Nepal and everything I know about its culture was read in books and articles. I came to a country completely new for me. It took me some time to get used to the environment but I became familiar with the processes, systems and traditions that characterize the settings which helped me to develop some understanding of social and cultural norms.

My informants in the villages did not know at the beginning how to react to my presence. It is not often that somebody comes to their villages and schools and starts asking questions, least of all a foreigner. They did not know what to expect from me. Thus, it was examination both ways: I was observing them and they were observing me. I did not feel very comfortable at first as I was trying to prove by my behavior that I was not planning to abuse them or do something bad to them. However, in time the people in the community understood that I would not do them any harm and their reaction became more positive and friendly.

On the other hand, as Gerrish suggests, the position of researcher as the outsider is not always a challenge. He says that in the situation when the researcher is the insider “it can be difficult to differentiate between the role of researcher and the position of insider”¹⁸⁶. In this case the received data may be very familiar to a researcher, and the objectivity of it may be lost¹⁸⁷. As everything was very new for me, I made notes immediately, which really helped to make my data rich and deep.

4.7.4 Gender, age and research position

According to Silverman, “gender of fieldworkers themselves was seen to play a crucial factor in observational research”¹⁸⁸. He argues that informants respond in different ways to male and female researchers although everything depends on the topic of the research. As Silverman claims the gender of the researcher can be both a challenge and an advantage. For example, in

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.: p. 37

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications: p. 264

rural communities women can agree to talk to women more easily than to men¹⁸⁹. As my research focused on women and girls, my gender may have been an advantage. I noticed that it was easier for me to interview girls and their mothers because we were of the same sex. On the contrary, talking to boys was not as easy. It was more difficult to make them feel safe and talk openly. But my previous work with children made inestimable contribution to my data collection. It helped me to understand the children's behavior, motivations and desires easier and faster.

According to Silverman, referring to McKeganey and Bloor, age may also be important in fieldwork¹⁹⁰. I also encountered this problem. As Marry Brenner says, children feel that adults have more power in society which can be a challenge when interviewing the young¹⁹¹. I tried to defuse this power difference by interacting with children in a friendly way and using non-formal terminology during our conversations¹⁹².

However, when I was talking to older people, especially to policymakers, at the beginning some of them perceived me as a child. But I had prepared well for the interviews, and felt that these perceptions disappeared during our conversations.

Sometimes it was difficult to stimulate a respondent to produce more information especially when talking with parents who themselves have never studied and could neither read nor write. I noticed that they felt a big gap between us and often were ashamed of their illiteracy. However, due to my preparation I managed to smooth the rough edges in the interview process.

4.8 Ethical considerations

As Judy Hemming says, the researcher must exemplify the following conditions during the data collection: “respect for persons, maximization of possible benefits and minimization

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Brenner, M. E. (2006) “Interviewing in educational Research”. In Green, J. L., Camilli, G. & Elmore, P. B. (Eds.) *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (pp. 357-370): pp. 365. Retrieved from <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/projects/oralhistory/2006MEBrennerInterviewInEducResearchOCR.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 10)

¹⁹² Ibid.

possible harms, and protection of justice regarding who benefits from the research”¹⁹³. As my fieldwork consisted of direct communication with people the issue of ethics was very important.

Before I started an interview, as I have already mentioned, I told the participants that all data about them would be confidential. I explained to them what I was investigating and said that they could refuse to take part in my research or withdraw once the research began¹⁹⁴. It never happened that someone refused to continue the conversation.

When I started interviewing children, I first asked permission of responsible adults to talk to them. When I was at schools those adults were the teachers. During the interviews at home I asked parents if I was allowed to talk to their children. I was never refused a conversation but always checked in advance as part of ethical considerations especially because young children are not competent to make such a decision by themselves¹⁹⁵. I also assured adults that information about children would stay confidential.

I agree with the comment of Fine and Sandstrom that the age of children should not be a reason for not explaining to them the purpose of the interview. So I told them as much as possible about my topic in simple language¹⁹⁶.

I always asked permission to record the interviews. Moreover, I assured my informants that all recorded data were going to be deleted after the submission of my thesis. Reflecting on the interviews now, I feel confident that I was not abusing my informants by making them talk to me.

I knew that the repercussions could be considerable when transcribing observed information¹⁹⁷. That is why I did my best not to “take sides”, to accept observed data as it was, without adding or rejecting some ingredients and remembering that I had obligations to participants as well as to the community¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹³ Hemming, J. (2009) Exceeding scholarly responsibility: IRBs and political constraints. In Sriram, C. L., King, J. C., Mertus, J. A., Martin-Ortega, O. & Herman, J. (Eds.) *Surviving Field Research: Working in violent and difficult situations* (pp. 21-38) Routledge: p. 25.

¹⁹⁴ Cohen L., Manion L. & Morrison K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*. (5th ed.). Routledge: p. 51

¹⁹⁵ Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications: p. 258

¹⁹⁶ Cohen L., Manion L. & Morrison K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*. (5th ed.). Routledge: p. 53

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.: p. 315

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.: p. 316

4.9 Summary

This chapter is dedicated to the description of my fieldwork and methodology. First, I presented my study area and explained why it was chosen for my research. Then I gave details of my informants and described how and why they were chosen. Then I described my field experience and explained the choice of methodology used. In the next sections of the chapter I discussed the process of data collection with the help of interviews and observations. I went on to assess the advantages and challenges I met during the process of data collection. I explained what difficulties I had in gaining data and how I managed to combat them. The section on ethical consideration during the field research concluded this chapter.

In the next chapter I move on to data presentation and analysis. It will be focused on the testing of the hypotheses in the context of the theory chosen and empirical data gathered during the data collection process.

Chapter 5. Data presentation and analysis

This chapter is devoted to the presentation and analysis of my field data. I start with a short summary of my informants. Then I test my various hypotheses. These were formulated in accordance with the literature that I read before going into field research which explores life in Nepal in general and the Chepang community in particular. I test them on the basis of my collected data and try to determine whether they can be considered as obstacles to education for the Chepangs.

Both boys and girls have limited access to education. After I determine what can be considered as obstacles, I evaluate which are the most likely reasons why girls drop out of school.

5.1 Obstacles to education for Chepang children

Both boys and girls start schooling at the same age: the paradox is that girls drop out of school at an early age. This is the main reason why they are generally uneducated. In this chapter I explain why this happens and what makes girls leave school.

Before going into the field work I read a lot about Nepal in general and about the Chepang community in particular. On the basis of that literature I formulated the hypotheses on what can be considered as obstacles to education for the Chepang children and divided those problems into two groups. They are as follows:

Cultural:

- Culture and traditions;
- Illiteracy of parents;
- Language problem;
- Caste-based tradition.

Structural:

- Lack of and irregularity of teachers;
- Long walking distance from home to school;
- Insufficient school facilities and environment;
- Poverty, including poor structure, space and time for the child's education.

These factors are strongly intertwined and interdependent on each other. They hold good for both boys and girls. First, I discuss them, test if they can be proven as obstacles to education and then try to find out what can be considered to be the most significant which restrains *girls* in particular from being educated.

5.2 Cultural obstacles to education. Testing the hypotheses

5.2.1 Culture and traditions

The Chepang community has a rich history of traditions and customs. Their beliefs, norms and values are deeply rooted in the community's everyday life. Rituals are vitally important for the Chepangs. Thus, they perform such ceremonies as name giving to a just born baby, first giving food to the child, they believe in supernatural forces and Hindu Gods, worship ancestors and celebrate various festivals¹⁹⁹. They are proud of their traditions and protect them. On the other hand they do not notice the signs of inequality that are born out of their beliefs. Thus, the Hindu religion and culture consist of male dominated philosophy and determine the position of women in society. It is common ground that when women are young they should "serve their fathers, brothers and other male members of the family²⁰⁰"; they should get married as early as possible and after marriage "they should serve their husbands, fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law and other senior male and female members of the family. When they grow older they should follow the advice of their sons²⁰¹".

¹⁹⁹ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: pp. 23-33

²⁰⁰ UNESCO (2005) *Gender Responsive Non-Formal Education in Nepal: A Case Study*. Kathmandu: UNESCO:

p.7

²⁰¹ Ibid.

In cultural traditions of the Chepangs marriage has a very significant place. There are two types of marriages in their community: 1) the formal or arranged marriages (settled through negotiations between parents or eldest of the family and other relatives²⁰²) and 2) informal marriages (resulting from a boy's and girl's feelings, meetings and dating²⁰³). Divorce, levirate, surrogate and widow remarriages are very common practices. Besides, premarital relations are tolerated though they are not encouraged²⁰⁴.

Although the official age for marriage in Nepal is 18 with parental consent and 20 without consent²⁰⁵ (for both sexes), child marriage practice is still very popular among the Chepangs. There are different data about the age when their marriages take place²⁰⁶, but according to the information received during my interview with the member of the Nepal Chepang Association, most Chepangs marry when children are still at basic school level. After the wedding ceremony both bridegroom and bride are considered to be grown-ups, mature and responsible for themselves and their families. The obligatory tradition of the culture is that a wife must go to her husband's house after marriage. According to different sources²⁰⁷, this is one of the reasons why parents prefer to educate their sons instead of their daughters. Thus, traditionally, a son will stay in the family and will take care of parents when they get old while daughters will get married and will leave their parents' house. So parents are reluctant to invest in their daughters' education. This would lead to making an investment in someone else's family instead of in their own. Parents do not want to admit that they prioritize educating their sons rather than their daughters. Besides, they send both sons and daughters to school at primary level. So, it seems wrong to suggest that is only because of family priorities that girls tend to be uneducated.

Nevertheless, child marriages have a great impact on girls' school attendance. After marriage they are very unlikely to go to school because of lack of time to study and with different priorities in life, set by new families, husbands and traditions of the community in general.

In one interview a 19 years old Chepang girl²⁰⁸ shared her experience of being married:

²⁰² Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: p. 24

²⁰³ Ibid.: p. 25

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ ICRW & Plan Asia Regional Office (2013) *Asia Child Marriage Initiative: Summary of Research in Bangladesh, India and Nepal* Retrieved from <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/PLAN%20ASIA%20Child%20Marriage-3%20Country%20Study.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 21)

²⁰⁶ See, for example, Gurung, G. M. (1995), Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009), ICRW & Plan Asia Regional Office (2013)

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Adult#5

I got married at the age of 15. My life is just a routine and every day is the same. I live with my husband and his father. We have two children. One child is 2 years old and the other is just born. Every day I start work at 5 o'clock in the morning with cooking, feeding cattle, washing clothes and cleaning the house.

The interviewee has never been to school because she had to help her parents about the house and then she got married. The same girl adds:

I cannot read or write. I have never been to school. I wanted to study, but I could not do so because my parents are poor and we had to work to provide something to eat. Now I live at my husband's house. The school is just few minutes' walk from our house, but I cannot go to school because I have to take care of my husband and our children. He is working and I am at home with the children.

Besides, in the traditions of the Chepangs, going to school when the girl is married and has children is shameful for her.

Another married Chepang girl²⁰⁹ says:

I would like to study. And I did not want to quit after marriage. But I became pregnant and everything finished completely. Nobody was listening to me. My family required me to stay at home.

Child marriage is a part of deeply rooted tradition. Some parents believe that if their daughters do not get married at a very young age, they will not be able to find husbands later. During a conversation with parents I asked one of the mothers²¹⁰:

Why do you want your daughter to get married at early age?

And she responded:

Because we are poor and many boys from our village and neighboring villages go to Kathmandu or to India and try to find jobs and earn some money there. I do not want my daughter to stay unmarried.

Parents also explain why they want their sons to get married young. One of the interviewed mothers²¹¹ states:

Yes, I want my son to get married. He will bring his wife to our home and she will help me in the house and in the field. Marriage will prevent my child from smoking and drinking alcohol. He will have to take care of his wife, be responsible for family duties and will not have time for these vices.

²⁰⁹ Adult#7

²¹⁰ Adult#2

²¹¹ Adult#9

The interview with the teachers confirmed that after marriage both boys and girls are responsible for their families, they have to work to meet their basic needs. Both of them stop going to school. Usually girls get married at a younger age than boys. So, as a result, they drop out from school earlier and are less educated.

Traditionally daughters are helpers to mothers in the kitchen and in the field, they spend most of their time with household work and so do not have time to study. Some girls realize that they are behind their classmates in studies and it is one more reason why they lose motivation to go to school. A 10 years old Chepang girl²¹² says:

I have time to study in the evening, after I finish my work. But sometimes I am tired so I just go to bed and sleep.

As was said before, the Chepangs live in remote villages in the mountains. And this geographical location causes one more problem for them – lack of drinking water. Usually it is the women's task to fetch drinking water from mountain springs. Often the spring is far from the house and it takes a long time to complete this task.

The representative of the Nepal Chepang Association says:

Work at homes is divided between boys and girls. Women and girls usually look after the cattle, goats and cows. They collect grass, clean, cook and bring water to the houses. Due to extreme poverty and "hand-to-mouth" living, the boys and men have to go to the jungle to get food. They also go fishing.

He adds that it is mostly girls who spend more time working in the home than studying. They acknowledge that work and helping mothers is their duty as daughters in particular and women in general, and they subconsciously realize their place as keepers of the homes and families. Besides, daughters help their mothers to take care of younger brothers and sisters. Parents are not able to work and to take care of small children. That's why it is often the responsibility of older children. And if there are daughters among the older children in the families, it is their task.

The representative of the Nepal Chepang Association confirms that home duties are a reason for dropping out of school. He says:

[...] girls work in the house and in the field, take care of younger siblings. They drop out of school because of home duties. Both boys and girls, but mostly girls who drop out at an earlier age than boys.

²¹² Child#5

Normally in Nepal children go to school when they are 5-6 years old. As the representative of the Ministry of Education says, it is the normal age to start schooling²¹³. But during the school visit I saw some children in the classes who were younger than 6. The teachers said that those children were students as well. They started schooling at the age of 4 or almost 5, because their parents were working and children were at home with older sisters. The older ones wanted to study, so they started to come to school with younger siblings. As a result younger ones started to attend school sometimes before the age of 5²¹⁴.

On the other hand, teachers also said that there is a completely different explanation. Very often older children stay at home with younger ones and do not go to school. When the younger ones reach school age, they start to go to school together. While children are at basic level, they go to the school which is in their village and the students there are mostly the Chepangs. But when it is time for them to go to a secondary school, they have to go to another village, because there is not a secondary school in every village. When they start secondary level, their classmates are not only Chepangs, but also children from other communities, who started primary education at the age of 5-6. And the Chepangs start to see the age difference. Sometimes it happens that classmates make jokes of them and laugh at them. It reduces the Chepangs' motivation to come to school again. The representative of the Nepal Chepang Association commented on this situation as follows:

The Chepangs are frustrated because they are 15-16 years old in grade 6. And the other children are 12. They do not feel comfortable and so drop out from school.

It is very clear from the above description that the traditions that are so deeply rooted in the Chepangs' culture have a great negative impact on the Chepang children in their willingness to attend school. It influences both boys and girls. But, first and foremost it concerns the girls. Thus, I found two negative reasons in the culture that give girls fewer opportunities to get educated compared to boys. They are the following: 1) because of work at home; 2) because of early marriages. I discuss these issues again later in my thesis.

5.2.2 Illiteracy of parents

Illiteracy of parents is one more barrier to education for the Chepang children. It is obvious that parents are the first teachers of their children. Thus active motivation and stimulation of the

²¹³ Ministry of Education

²¹⁴ Interview with teachers

children towards gaining knowledge has to come from the family first of all. In the Chepang community mothers spend much more time with their children than fathers (because fathers mostly work in the fields or in the cities). Accordingly, it is mothers who have to instill in their offsprings' heads understanding of the importance of education and, in their hearts, love and striving for knowledge. With the Chepangs it is very difficult to achieve the desired result as mothers (and very often fathers as well) themselves are not educated, do not give priority to education, and do not advocate its importance and necessity.

The representative from the Nepal Chepang Association confirms my assumption in his interview by saying:

Illiteracy of parents has a huge impact on children's education. Most of the Chepang parents are uneducated. They do not understand the importance of education so do not encourage their children to study. First, they do not know how to do it. Second, they do not see the point why their children need to be educated. Even if they send their children to school they drop out soon because they do not get any encouragement from families. To tell the truth, in some extent it is even better for parents if a child does not want to go to school. They prefer to leave a child at home which means that they will have more workers in the fields or around the house.

During the observation of the Chepang community, I found out that the mothers are indifferent to their children's education. There are neither educational discussions nor conversations that highlight the importance of education which would encourage the younger generation to study, whether between the parents and children or between the parents themselves. Their conversations evolve around such topics as farming, working, entertainment, fishing, and the events of the day, which mean that they do not push their children to strive for education. These topics are the most interesting for all members of the families, nobody is excluded. Work is given priority. Going to school and developing knowledge play a secondary role.

In the interviews, all the mothers said that the children work in the fields, and help about the house. One of the interviewed mothers²¹⁵ says:

My children help at home. Of course, we do not have a choice. We have cattle so they collect grass for them. They bring water to the house. It is not a long way, only 2 minutes' walk.

Our family owns a field and all family members work there. When it's time to collect harvest we all go to the field. But work in the fields and vacations from school usually do not coincide. They coincide for the rice gathering, but not for corn, for example.

²¹⁵ Adult#10

The teachers confirm that parents are illiterate, and that this is a reason why they do not understand the importance of educating their children. A school headmaster²¹⁶ says:

It is a big problem that parents are not educated. They do not see the importance of education. They think that it cannot help them to get more food; it just takes time. If they are able to survive without being educated, and if their neighbors are uneducated, and the neighbors of neighbors are uneducated, and everyone can live without knowledge of how to read and write, their children can live without education too.

Farming is the mainstay in Chepang families. Most of the time when students could be doing homework, the parents make them work in the fields or around the house, in the kitchen or with cattle, which results in incomplete homework assignments and a lack of exam preparation.

Thus, in many families nobody encourages children to do homework, to prepare for the next day at school. And nobody suggests that they should go to school.

Home conditions presuppose not only psychological guidance of the child, but also creating a place where the child can study comfortably. Some households don't even have a table where a youngster can sit down to do homework.

Moreover, during the interviewing process I realized that some the mothers don't understand fully (or at all) what a "comfortable place to study" means. 9 interviewees replied that there is such a place but it is "wherever" – in the street, in the yard etc. One of them²¹⁷ answers my question:

Do children have a place to study at home?

Yes, they do.

Where is it?

(She does not answer)

Is it in the house?

They can study wherever they want. If they want to study in the house they can do it there. For example my son likes to read in the yard, under that big tree. I do not mind if he feels comfortable there, he can study there.

²¹⁶ Teacher#1

²¹⁷ Adult#2

Only one of the interviewees²¹⁸ said that there is no such place at home for children to do homework.

No, the children do not have a place. The house is small and they do not have a separate room. And there is only one table in the house. We cook and eat at this table, and they also have to study at the same table. Besides, there is no electricity in the house. So, they can study only in the day time. Studying after sunset is impossible because it gets dark very soon.

The teachers confirm all these comments:

The Chepangs do not have a place to study at home. They are poor, their houses are small and do not have appropriate physical conditions such as a separate room for children and electricity. Of course, they get homework at school. Sometimes it is reading, sometimes it is writing, sometimes both reading and writing. It is a paradox that Chepang children almost never do it but the children from other communities studying together with the Chepangs do²¹⁹.

Even children at primary school understand that their homes are not properly equipped for studying. One boy²²⁰ says:

We get homework at school. I try to do it. Usually when I come back from school I help my parents with some work at home and only afterwards I have time to get ready for school. That is why I have to study outside the house, because it gets dark in the house faster than outside. We do not have electricity in the house. It is a big problem.

The girl²²¹ from the same school says:

No, I do not have a place to study at home. I do not have a table, so I have to study on the floor or outside the house.

Nine of the interviewed mothers have never attended school; seven of them can neither read nor write. Two of them have no idea whether their children get homework at school. One of the mothers²²² does not know what the word “homework” means. I asked:

Do your children get homework at school?

(She does not answer).

Do they study at home when they come back from school?

(She does not answer).

²¹⁸ Adult#6

²¹⁹ Teacher#2

²²⁰ Child#1

²²¹ Child#3

²²² Adult#2

Do they read or write something when they come back from school?

Yes, they read something. But I do not know what it is.

At the beginning I thought that it was some kind of resistance either in answering my question or in accepting education as a good and showing this acceptance. (It was the same women who had difficulties in answering the question about a comfortable place for studying at home). And only when my interpreter and I explained to her what exactly I was asking and what the meaning of the word “homework” is, she responded.

This is a sad story. But elsewhere I noticed parents’ positive attitude to their children’s education. This suggests that Chepang adults are beginning to understand the importance of education for their children. For example, a Chepang woman²²³, who is the mother of four children, states:

Yes, I want my children to study. If they have some education, they will be able to read and write, will be clever, will be able to get a better job and nobody will be able to deceive them.

This 19 year old mother²²⁴ says:

I have two children. They are young and do not go to school yet. But I want them to start getting education when they are 6 years old. They will go to school. I have never studied and I am illiterate. My life is not good. That is why I want my children to have a brighter future.

Another interviewee²²⁵ is 29. She came to meet me with her husband. She says:

I am a mother of 5 children. My oldest daughter is 14 years old. And my youngest child is 5. He is still at home because he is too young to go to school. But the other children study. And my husband and I want them to be educated.

Her attitude is supported by her husband²²⁶ who adds:

It is true. We want them to go to school. For example, I can read and write. But my life is not very good. I hope my children will have a better future.

These interviews indicate that parents begin to understand the relationship between gaining a quality education and the amount of future opportunities their children will have. This is

²²³ Adult#9

²²⁴ Adult#5

²²⁵ Adult#4

²²⁶ Adult#11

evidence that they understand the long-term importance of education. This is the first step which can lead to the positive solving of the issue of the children's education.

In spite of the fact that some parents are beginning to understand the importance of education, I conclude that parents' attitude toward education is critical to the child's success in school. Illiteracy of parents still has a huge impact on their attitude towards the education of their children and so it is clear that parental illiteracy is one of the obstacles to children's education, applicable equally to both boys and girls. It and cannot be considered as a difficulty only for girls.

5.2.3 Language problem

The official language of Nepal is Nepali. The Chepangs have their own language but they also understand Nepali. The Constitution of Nepal states that every indigenous community has the right to get at least basic primary education in its mother-tongue²²⁷. However, the Chepangs' language is not taught because it is not written and does not have an alphabet or script. Chepang children therefore face many difficulties connected with their language in the process of getting education. Their mother tongue is used for communication at home but when they go to school the language of instruction is Nepali, which is different and some children do not understand it. It makes following the instructions and understanding the subjects difficult and unpleasant. All teaching materials and lessons are in Nepali, and in the process of getting education the students' knowledge and experience learned within their families and others in their community are of no value. Besides, the teachers do not understand the Chepang language, which makes the school lives of Chepang students even more difficult.

The language problem as one of the obstacles to education was emphasized during my conversation with the representative of the Nepal Chepang Association. He says:

We have a language problem. Teachers and children speak different languages. The Chepangs speak their mother tongue and teachers speak Nepali. They do not understand each other. It causes considerable difficulty in the educational process.

It is not surprising that Chepang children do not feel motivated to attend school regularly, lose their desire to study and to come to school at all.

²²⁷ UNESCO (2008) Building UNESCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) Nepal 2008-2013. Kathmandu: UNESCO: p. 34

Nevertheless, during my research at schools I did not meet children who did not understand Nepali. Sometimes it was difficult for children to answer my questions, but that was because they did not understand the question, not because of the language. When my interpreter or a teacher rephrased the question, there were no difficulties for children to answer it. My interpreter spoke Nepali with the children and they could answer all my questions. It can be explained that in spite of the Chepang language there is a preference towards Nepali especially among the young²²⁸. Indeed the member of the Nepal Chepang Association states that the language barrier is now reducing:

The Chepangs want to learn Nepali. The situation is improving now.

Among 19 interviewed Chepang students 7 said that their favorite subject at school was Nepali. A 6 years old girl²²⁹ from the first class says:

My favorite subject at school is Nepali. I like it and I like to speak this language. It is interesting.

During the interviews with parents all of them said that they want their children to understand and speak Nepali because it will give them more opportunities in life to get better jobs and better lives.

A 29 years old mother²³⁰ of 5 children says:

It is important to know the language. If my children speak Nepali they will be able to get better jobs. And this will create a brighter future. If they want, they can go to the city. I want them to go.

2001 Census identified 92 languages in Nepal. A lot of them are still preliterate, undescribed or poorly described²³¹. Chepang language is one of them²³². It lacks a written system and it is not an

²²⁸ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: p. 15

²²⁹ Child#4

²³⁰ Adult#4

²³¹ Regmi, R. D. (2012) *Multilingual Education in Nepal: Policy and Practice* Retrieved from <http://tribhuvan-university.edu.np/tubulletin/index.php/bulletin/article/view/16/17> (Accessed 2013, March 20)

²³² Academic works usually consider language as a central feature of culture. For example, Crats Williams, who is a folklorist, define language as “culture expressing itself in sound”. (Birgit Brock-Utne Language and culture p. 25 in *Culture and Language in Education: Tools for development* (2009) edited by Ingse Skattum. Norad pp. 24-37) Thus, one can see a direct connection between language and culture. That is why I put language in the category of “culture”.

In the context of my thesis language problems appear due to a relatively stable relations between the Chepangs and the larger society and state, which are both represented by the Nepalese language. In my analysis language is discussed as both cultural and structural problem. Thus, up to now it was discussed as a cultural aspect. Next, I will discuss language from the structural point of view. I will do it due to the reason that, as I explained above, many Chepang children prefer to learn Nepali. So, if they drop out of school, it is not only because of cultural aspects of language.

easy task to propose one which fully and systematically represents the phonology of the language²³³.

The Chepang Mainstreaming Programme (CMP)²³⁴, which was implemented in 2004-2007, was unique. It was the first programme in Nepal in terms of its focus area and working modality²³⁵. It was aimed at improving the Chepang community's life in different fields to preserve and develop their language, culture, history and skills²³⁶. Thus, the Nepal Chepang Association (NCA) started to produce a new curriculum and text books for Chepang children. This project should be included as part of government policy and given due priority. In addition NCA with the help of local people started to produce some books in the Chepang language, along with a Chepang dictionary and grammatical information. This work is an ongoing process²³⁷ and it still needs government approval.

If we have a script for the Chepang language, it will be possible to include it in the curriculum and children will learn it, says the member of the Nepal Chepang Association.

Theoretically it is a possibility to include the Chepang language to the curriculum. There are two ways for using the mother tongue: as a language of instruction and as a subject. The local language may also be used culturally and to support traditional skills, values and norms of the Chepang community²³⁸.

According to the report²³⁹, published by the Department of Education in 2011, the Ministry of Education has already started to include the Chepang language as a transitional support at primary school level. Although it is used orally, it makes the process of learning easier for the young Chepangs. In the 2011/12 study year there were 115 classes where the Chepang language was used.

Thus, practice shows that it is possible to include the Chepang language in the curriculum even now, without a script, as a support language, especially in classes where only the Chepangs

²³³ Regmi, R. D. (2012) *Multilingual Education in Nepal: Policy and Practice*: p. 146 Retrieved from <http://tribhuvan-university.edu.np/tubulletin/index.php/bulletin/article/view/16/17> (Accessed 2013, March 20)

²³⁴ Nepal Chepang Association (n.d) *Chepang Mainstreaming Programme Final Progress report (2004-2007)*. Retrieved from http://www.ncachepang.org.np/final_report.pdf (Accessed 2013, March 20)

²³⁵ Ibid.: p. 25

²³⁶ Ibid.: p. 16

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Regmi, R. D. (2012) *Multilingual Education in Nepal: Policy and Practice* Retrieved from <http://tribhuvan-university.edu.np/tubulletin/index.php/bulletin/article/view/16/17> (Accessed 2013, March 20)

²³⁹ Department of Education (2012) *School Level Educational Statistics of Nepal. Consolidated Report*. Bhaktapur: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.doe.gov.np/files/Files/Consolidated%20Report%202068%20%28%202011%29_1346397795.pdf (Accessed 2013, April 2): p. 79

study. Nowadays most schools and classes are multiethnic, where the Chepang children sit classes together with representatives of many other indigenous groups. Consequently, if the Chepang language is used as a transitional support language, schools will face new problems because the other students will feel discriminated against.

The interviewed teacher²⁴⁰ says:

[...] classes are multilingual. It is not only the Chepangs or Darai or Gurung in the same class. We have different children from different ethnic groups in one class. How can we split one class into many groups? It is impossible. We do not have enough teachers.

If we suggest that one teacher should use several languages in the classroom it would be impossible to complete the course.

As it is English is becoming more and more popular in education. In both schools which were chosen for my research the School Management Committee (SMC)²⁴¹ has decided to include additional classes in English in the curriculum as an optional subject. The SMC has done this because of the great importance of English in the modern world. The students and their parents are quite happy with this because they feel more confident in their hopes of getting good jobs and better lives. Consequently neither parents nor children demand the inclusion of the Chepang language in the curriculum. They just demand Chepang teachers or teachers who can speak the Chepang language and who can explain to the students what they do not understand in Nepali. The representative of NCA says:

We have 20 Chepang teachers in Dhading. Besides, in the framework of the Chepang Mainstreaming Programme 53 teachers have had special training in teaching the Chepang language. But that is not enough. We need more Chepang teachers. This will be helpful for students because the teachers will be able to explain to them what they do not understand in Nepali.

In conclusion it is clear that language is a significant problem for Chepang students. However, this problem is the same for both boys and girls and so cannot be highlighted as a reason why Chepang girls are held back from education more than Chepang boys.

²⁴⁰ Teacher#8

²⁴¹ FHD, RIDA & Abu-Duhou, I. (2009) Improving Local Service Delivery for the MDGs in Asia: Education Sector in Nepal. Retrieved from <http://www.ridanepal.org/downloaded/NPL-EducationSector.pdf> (Accessed 2013, March 20): pp. 21-22

5.2.4 Caste based tradition

Inequalities between peoples in Nepal are closely linked to the Hindu caste system. Although caste-based discrimination was officially banned in 1963²⁴², it still exists in society. As was mentioned before, the Chepangs are an indigenous people and in the caste pyramid they belong to Janajatis, who are ranked between the highest and lowest castes²⁴³.

Based on the National census 2001, the researchers from the World Bank and Department for International Development combined all social groups of Nepal into 10 major categories. They include the Chepangs as Janajatis and on the basis of geographic regions they refer to them as Janajatis (Hill).

²⁴² The World Bank & Department For International Development (DFID) (2006) *Unequal citizens: Gender, caste and ethnic exclusion in Nepal - Summary*. Retrieved from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2006/12/05/000090341_20061205151859/Rendored/PDF/379660Nepal0GSEA0Summary0Report01PUBLIC1.pdf (Accessed 2013, March 13): p. 6

²⁴³ Ibid.

Table 5.1 Caste and ethnic groups in Nepal²⁴⁴

Share of population	Simplified group	2001 census group
Hindu caste groups (57.5%)	1. Brahmans and Chhetris (Hill)	Brahman, Chhetri, Thakuri, Sanyasi
	2. Brahmans and Chhetris (Tarai)	Kayashta, Rajput, Baniya, Marwadi, Jaine, Nurang, Bengali
	3. Tarai Middle Castes	Yadev, Teli, Kalwar, Sudi, Sonar, Lohar, Koiri, Kurmi, Kanu, Haluwai, Hajam/Thakur, Bahde, Rajbhar, Kewat, Mallal, Numhar, Kahar, Lodha, Bing/Banda, Bhediyar, Mali, Kamar Dhunia
	4. Dalits (Hill)	Kami, Damai, Sarki, Gaine, Badi
	5. Dalits (Tarai)	Chamar, Musahar, Tatma, Bantar, Dhusadadh/Paswan, Khatway, Dom, Chidimar, Dhobi, Halkhour, Unidentified Dalit
Janajatis (37.2%)	6. Newar	All Newari Castes
	7. Janajatis (Hill)	Magar, Tamang, Rai, Gurung, Limbu, Sherpa, Bhote, Walung, Buansi, Hyolmo, Gharti/Bhujel, Kumal, Sunuwar, Baramu, Pahari, Adivasi Janajati, Yakkha, Shantal, Jirel, Darai, Dura, Majhi, Dunuwar, Thami, Lepcha, Chepang, Bote, Raji, Hayu, Raute, Kasunda
	8. Janajatis (Tarai)	Tharu, Dhanuk, Rajbanshi, Tajpuriya, Gangai, Dhimal, Meche, Kisan, Munda, Santhal/Satar/Dhangad/Jhangad, Koche, Pattarkatta/Kusbadiya
Muslims (4.3%)	9. Muslims	Muslims, Churoute
Others (1%)	10. Others	

²⁴⁴ Ibid.: p. 17

My fieldwork attempted to examine how the caste system influences the Chepangs in accessing education. According to Huebler²⁴⁵, school enrollment of Janajatis (Hill) is quite good in comparison with the other groups. One can see in the tables below that both in primary and secondary school attendance Janajatis (Hill) are in fourth place showing 81.4% school attendance at primary level and 28.9% at secondary level.

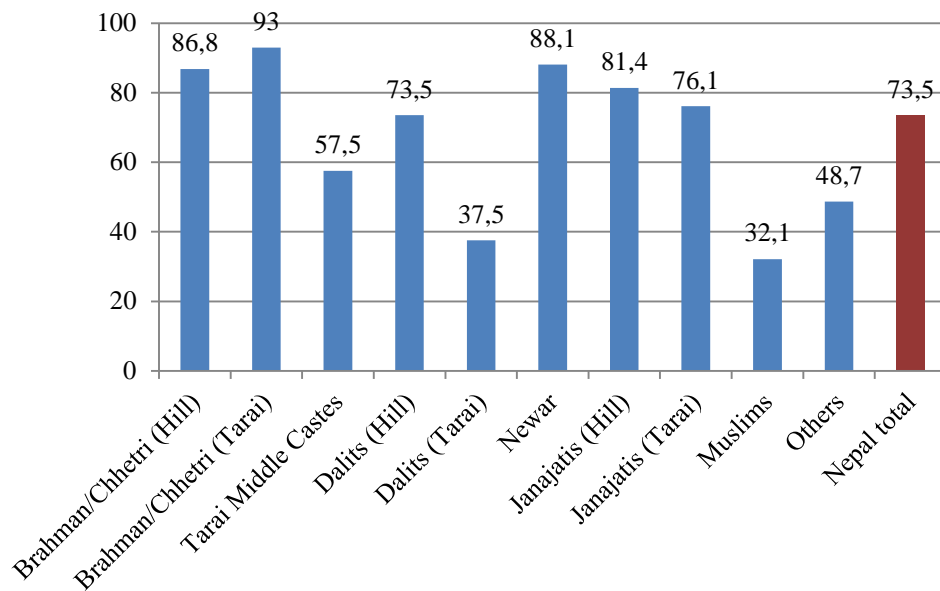


Figure 5.1 Primary school net attendance rate (%)²⁴⁶

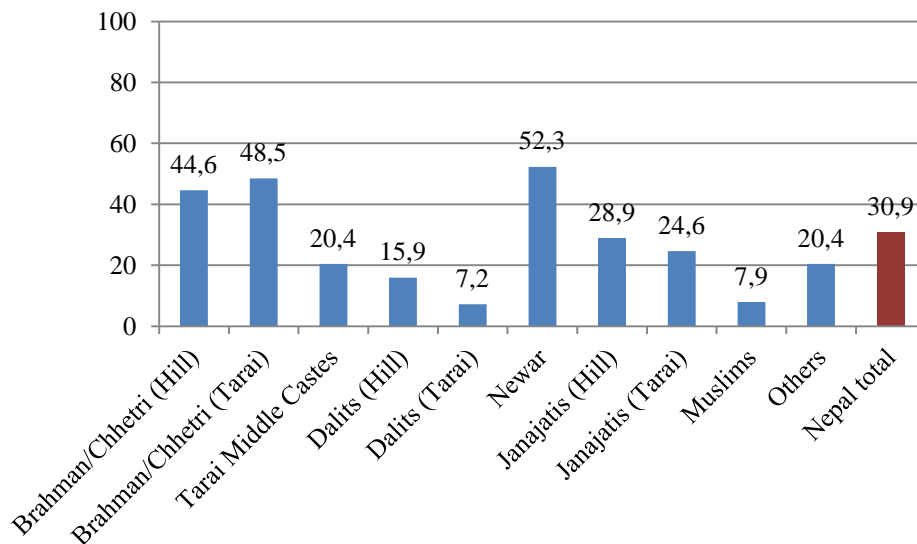


Figure 5.2 Secondary school net attendance rate (%)²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Huebler, F. (2007 May 28) *International Education Statistics: Caste, ethnicity, and school attendance in Nepal*. Retrieved from <http://huebler.blogspot.no/2007/05/caste-ethnicity-and-school-attendance.html> (Accessed 2013, March 13)

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

If we take into account that total percentage of school attendance in Nepal at primary level is 73,5% and 30,9% at the secondary level, these findings mean that the caste system does not adversely influence the school attendance of the Chepangs.

Also the literacy rate of indigenous groups in Nepal is good (compared to the national average).

Table 5.2 Literacy rate and Education by Caste/Ethnicity²⁴⁸

Caste/ethnicity	Literacy rate (above 6 years)
Nepal	53.7
Brahman/Chetri	67.5
Terai	41.7
Dalit	33.8
Ethnic groups	53.6
Religious groups	34.5

Thus, on the basis of these numbers the caste system should not be taken into account as one of the obstacles of the Chepangs' education.

5.3 Structural obstacles to education. Testing the hypotheses

5.3.1 Lack of and irregularity of teachers

Another aspect of my fieldwork relates to the teaching profession. In an interview with a representative of the Ministry of Education I asked:

Are there enough teachers in the country?

And he responded:

Yes and no. If we talk about urban and highly populated areas, places where private schools are, then yes. Schools have enough teachers. But in the remote territories there are not enough of them.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Bhattachan, K. B., Sunar, T. B. & Bhattachan (Gauchan), Y. K. (2009) *Caste Based Discrimination in Nepal*: p. 29. Retrieved from http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/New_files/Nepal/Caste-based_Discrimination_in_Nepal.pdf (Accessed 2013, March 25)

The Chepangs are one of those communities who live in remote areas and face the problem of lack of teachers. Even though the Ministry of Education tries to recruit teachers, or invites volunteers, schools are not adequately staffed. He also adds:

Besides, there is a strong interconnection between the geographical position of a school and the irregularity of teachers. The more remote a school is the greater the likelihood of teachers' absence. It is because of people's lack of awareness. In urban areas, where people know the rules and laws, the teachers always come to school. In the remote areas, where people do not know the regulations, the teachers may be absent.

On the other hand, when people are more aware, they demand better facilities for their schools and so the economic situation improves. It is obvious that most teachers want to work at schools with better facilities. That's why awareness of people and quality of facilities affect teachers' attendance.

The same point was confirmed by the representative of the District Education Office in Dhading. He says:

There are 649 schools in our district. Some of them are in remote areas and we cannot control them as well as those that are closer. Teachers are frequently absent.

But now the situation is getting better. The reason for this is the active work of the School Management Committees (SMC). They consist of parents whose children are registered students and go to school. And these parents start complaining if the schools are closed or if the teachers do not show up.

And he then refers to the Chepang Mainstreaming Programme²⁴⁹. Due to the impact of the School Management Committees (SMC) the attendance of teachers in general has increased from 62% in 2004 to 92% in 2007. He gives as an example, described in the Final Progress Report of the above mentioned Programme²⁵⁰:

It happened that a school in one of the villages in Dhading did not open for some time. Children went to that school and come back because it was closed. The parents became very involved. The SMC reported to the DEO about the absence of the teachers. They also organized a meeting with the teachers and demanded an explanation of why they did not come to work.

This is only one of several similar cases. Parents do complain when the teachers do not come to school and we try to solve this problem.

This means that even if only small organizations work together towards a common goal, they are able to solve it.

²⁴⁹ Nepal Chepang Association (n.d) *Chepang Mainstreaming Programme Final Progress report (2004-2007)*: p. 29. Retrieved from http://www.ncachepang.org.np/final_report.pdf (Accessed 2013, March 20)

²⁵⁰ Ibid.: p. 13

My conclusion is that the irregular attendance of teachers is a problem for indigenous communities in general and for the Chepang community in particular. This problem affects both boys and girls and so it is not one of the difficulties which concerns only girls.

5.3.2 Long walking distance from home to school

One more problem for the Chepang children is long walking distance to school. “*The Chepangs live very far away from schools*”, - the member of the Nepal Chepang Association says. In most villages there is only one primary school, but in remote and rural areas it is frequently none. It may be one school for a few villages and children have to walk a long way to get there. As was stated by the Janjati and Dalit Study Center, 29.6% primary school students have to walk half an hour, 24.8% up to one hour and 25.1% students have to walk one to two hours to reach their school. And the walk to a secondary school may be even longer²⁵¹.

The interviewed teacher²⁵² states:

Some children are lucky because they live close to school. But many children have to walk a long way, for few hours. The classes start at 10 am and often children are not able to eat in the morning. Sometimes they do not have time and sometimes they do not have food. So, when they arrive to school they are tired and hungry. [...] The classes finish at 4 pm. And when they come back home, they are exhausted and cannot do their homework.

And then he adds:

It happens that children, especially very young ones, simply forget that they are going to school and find more interesting occupations on the way to school. They can play, swim in the river or relax in the shadows.

Sometimes the way to school may be dangerous and difficult. A Nepal Chepang Association's member shares his experience of going to school:

We had to cross the river on the way to school. There was a rope tied over water and we used it to cross. We fastened ourselves to the rope and pulled ourselves until we reached the other side. We did it one by one. Of course, it was difficult and dangerous. It took time and strength. I was a boy but there were also girls who had to take the same way to school and to do the same. It is obvious that our parents were worried about us.

He showed me a magazine with a picture of a boy who was crossing the river with the help of a rope and said:

²⁵¹ Janjati and Dalit Study Center (2009) *The Chepangs: Question for Survival (Society, Culture and Economy)* Kathmandu: pp. 36-37

²⁵² Teacher#2

This is what I was doing on my way to school. The way to gain knowledge by going to school is difficult for the Chepangs.

Then he adds:

Some children still do it. There are frequently no bridges over the river. Even if there are it takes so much time to walk to them that children would only reach their schools in the evening. I am sorry for them. I know how terrible this way is. I walked this way every day. Every day! For 10 years.

Climate and weather play their part on the way to school. In the further conversation the same person explains:

It is also about the weather. You know, in Nepal we have rainy seasons. And walking during the rain is not one of the best pleasures in the world. Even if it rains at night and stops raining in the morning, it is difficult to get to school because, as you have seen and experienced, the roads are poor, and the schools are on the slopes of the mountains. Children have to climb wet and slippery slopes.

In my sample there are children who have to walk long distances to school. I used only primary schools for my research, so it was not so far for the children to walk as to secondary schools (because as mentioned above there are more primary schools in the region than secondary schools). But still some children have to walk for about an hour to get to school.

I talked to a boy²⁵³ who lives far from school. He is 12 years old and every day he walks for about one hour to get to school. He is a regular student and does not miss classes. “*Just sometimes*”, says he smiling.

[...] because I have 4 brothers. They are older, I am the youngest so there is not so much for me to do at home. They do everything. I just have to help them to collect grass, then I sometimes miss classes. But it is not often. I like to study. I want to become a teacher when I grow up.

And when I ask him if the school is far from home he says:

Yes, quite a long way. One hour. And the school is on the top of the mountain. It is easier when I go home. If I run I can reach my house in 20 minutes.

Some parents see one more problem connected with a long way to school – rapes or assaults. This problem is relevant for both boys and girls. When I was talking to the father²⁵⁴ whose 2 daughters are about to start secondary education, he said:

²⁵³ Child#12

²⁵⁴ Adult#12

I am simply afraid. Anything can happen when my daughters walk to school. It is jungle everywhere. They do not know people around. They are young and weak. They can easily be raped.

Do you want your daughters to be educated?

Yes, I do. But if I have to choose between their security and education, I choose security. When they stay at home they are safe and my wife and I are not worried.

What about the boys? - I asked.

I do not have sons. But you know we live in a world where this problem concerns both our sons and daughters. I think it is more likely to happen with a girl but as far as I know parents worry equally about all children.

The teachers told me that there is no transportation to schools. And it is impossible to provide any due to the bad infrastructure. The headmaster²⁵⁵ states:

Cars or buses cannot reach our villages. We live on steep slopes. We do not have roads, only paths. Only walking is possible.

According to the Nepal Chepang Association, one of the possible ways to solve this problem is to build hostels for children. In some places this work has already started. The representative of this organization says:

There are private schools for Chepang children, supported by NCA. Education is free for them and there is also a hostel for them. But these schools are only in Kathmandu. We also have two hostels – in Dhading and Chitwang. But they are not sufficient for all children.

It is clear that long walking distance to schools is a serious obstacle for education. This is a problem which is relevant almost equally to boys and girls. If we talk about the secondary education, the risk of being raped is clearly much more of a negative factor for girls. My research concentrated on basic education so the risk of rape is not a particular factor because primary schools are comparatively closer to the homes than secondary schools.

5.3.3 Inadequate school facilities and school environment

The quality of school facilities has a strong influence on students' learning and desire to come to school. School facilities, especially drinking water and basic sanitation, are key elements in one

²⁵⁵ Teacher#7

of the Millennium Development Goals, and there is a target of 90% to be reached by the end of 2015. The international community is working hard to achieve this aim.

But I could see from the schools chosen for my research that appropriate facilities are not available for everyone. Students still suffer from insufficient water supply, sanitation and hand washing facilities. The school buildings are of low quality, the classes are dirty and dark, without electricity and ventilation. The furniture in the classroom is insufficient and the windows are without shutters.

The representative of the District Education Office in Dhading says:

Even basic facilities, such as clean water, separate toilets and electricity are missing in some schools. Ministry of Education is responsible for schools. They are working on it, building new schools and repairing old ones. For example, in old schools they replace leaky roofs and fix toilets. But everything takes time.

Apart from time shortage of funds is also a big problem. I discussed the issue of financing at the Ministry of Education. Their representative says:

You know, here are three regions in Nepal: the Mountain Region, the Hill Region and the Terai Region. [The Chepangs belong to the Hill Region]. The Ministry of Education tries to share money in a correct way and give appropriate support to all schools. The most difficult situation at schools is in the Mountain Region. But the number of students is higher in the Terai Region. So we try to distribute money in proportion to schools based on school population and physical conditions.

Here in Nepal we have different categories of schools. MOE has developed a school accreditation system. There are several indicators and based on them we categorize schools in 4 categories: A, B, C and D where A is the best grade and D is the worst. Physical facilities of school are one of the indicators.

During the interview at the District Education Office I got to know that there are no schools with A-grade in Dhading region. One of the schools chosen for my research is classified as a B-school and the other has grade C but it is moving to B. This positive movement indicates the improvement in the current situation and appropriate work by the state and other organizations responsible for the physical equipment of schools (such as the Ministry of Education).

On the other hand, this work is not sufficient since another problem is the lack of books and studying materials. They are provided by government but often the number of books is insufficient to meet the number of students attending school.

The representative of the Ministry of Education says:

Almost 50% of schools have text books. We provide books every year. But the children do not give them back. We tell schools that they should collect books from previous students and give them to the incoming ones. But that does not always that it happens. If our message reaches the schools on time, if the teachers transfer this message to the students, then it works. If not, children keep books at homes or just throw them away.

It is clear that the system is not yet established properly. Doubtless, it should be a school responsibility to collect the books and then give them to incoming students. The school should not wait for the instruction of the Ministry of Education to ask students to return books to the library. Doing this properly can help reduce expenses of the national education budget and create the opportunity to use the funds saved for other purposes in schools.

During my further conversation at the Ministry of Education I was told that education is free in the country. But that is more theory than fact. In practice schools ask parents to pay for exams. The person from the Ministry of Education explains it in our interview:

Do parents have to pay something for education?

No. Basic education, from grade 1 to 8, is free in principle, but some schools ask for extra financial support from parents and charge them (for exams). That happens because our government cannot provide financial support to schools in full. So when a school needs some more resources parents are asked to pay for exams. According to the law schools are not entitled to do it.

Are there some exceptions when children do not have to pay for exams?

I have not seen such cases.

I asked a similar question at the District Education Office about the obligation to pay for exams and got approximately the same answer:

Education is free. But the schools ask parents to make donations. These are not obligatory.

The same was confirmed by school teachers. When I asked about fees, one headmaster²⁵⁶ responded:

Education is free. Students pay only for exams, that is 3 times per year. The price depends on the grade. Children in the 1st grade pay 5 rupees every time, in the 2nd grade – 10 rupees, in the 3rd grade – 15 rupees, in the 4th grade – 20 rupees and in the 5th grade they have to pay 25 rupees. But not everyone pays. Some parents refuse to pay. However, we allow all our students to take the exams.

²⁵⁶ Teacher#1

The teachers add that it is not only the Chepangs who are asked to pay. Other students are also all asked. They say that they understand the Chepangs' and other indigenous groups' poverty and so agree to allow everybody to sit exams no matter if the child has paid or not. This issue therefore should not be considered as one of the reasons why children drop out of school.

During a further conversation the teachers told me about the financial support provided by the Ministry of Education to marginalized students. As was mentioned before, the Chepang community is one of the most marginalized indigenous groups in the country and so does receive this support. The teacher²⁵⁷ says:

Every year the government gives 500 Nepalese rupees to every Chepang child for going to school. It is kind of a scholarship, provided by MOE to marginalized students. But there are many cases when children come to school only once a year to get that money and rarely show up at classes after it.

This money is distributed once a year, usually on Education Day. It is given to the registered students from marginalized communities. The teachers say that they cannot use sanctions and not give money to a child even if he or she does not come to school regularly because that would be breaking the law. The only recourse for the school is to make home visits. The teachers say that if a child does not come to school for some time they go the student's house, talk to him or her, talk to parents and adults of the family trying to convince them to send the child back to school.

One teacher²⁵⁸ said:

If a child misses classes we make a home visit and try to find out the reasons for absence. There is no punishment for school irregularity. All we can do and what we do is to talk to the child and to the parents, trying to explain to them the importance of education and trying to convince the child to return to school and to persuade the parents accordingly.

The teachers say that they try to make the environment at schools student-friendly. Thus, for example, they do not make children wear school uniform. Even if it is obligatory but a child does not have one, or it is dirty, or destroyed, he or she can wear regular clothes at school. The government provides free lunch for the students. So children do not have to sit hungry during classes. That is confirmed by the headmaster's²⁵⁹ words:

²⁵⁷ Teacher#2

²⁵⁸ Teacher#6

²⁵⁹ Teacher#1

A school uniform is obligatory. It is provided by the Ministry of Education, so parents do not have to buy it. But even if children do not have a school uniform, they are allowed to come to school. It has never happened and will never happen that we kick somebody out from school because of wearing regular clothes instead of a school uniform.

[...]

Children are given free lunch at school. It is usually beaten rice and curry.

[...]

We really try to create a positive environment at school equally for each child no matter the gender, age or community where they come from. We just want them to study, to gain knowledge. Probably they do not realize it yet (as with many young children all over the world) but no doubt it will help them in their future life.

This information suggests that school facilities and the environment have a great impact on school attendance. But at the primary level it is the same for boys and girls and so it cannot be argued that the impact varies between the one or the other.

5.3.4 Poverty, including poor structure, space and time for the child's education

Due to extreme poverty many Chepang children do not go to school. This was one of the other hypotheses I tested during my field research. The Chepangs' income is derived from cultivation and taking resources from the forest. They use these resources to provide for their hand-to-mouth existence and they are insufficient for a whole year. Water supply continues to be a problem. Because they live in the mountains their land is not suitable for efficient farming and anyway they lack the relevant skills.

When I was interviewing the representative of the Nepal Chepang Association he described the current state of the Chepang community:

Our community lives from hand-to-mouth. We have no food, no clothes, no water and extreme poverty. Very often children have to support their families by finding food. They have to work and help their parents. They work at home. They do not have enough food so some children go fishing or hunting or go to the jungle to look for food.

According to the same interview, more than 62% of the Chepangs are landless. Moreover, not all of them are allowed to own land because they do not have citizenship certificates required for land ownership. According to the interview, about 85% of the Chepangs do not have citizenship certificates.

I tried to find out why these people who are known to be one of the earliest inhabitants of Nepal²⁶⁰ are not considered to be citizens now. I found the answer in the report²⁶¹ published by NCA in 2009. The authors state that the majority of the Chepangs do not have their citizenship certificates because of “absence of access to education, proper knowledge and value of citizenship paper”²⁶². In the report the authors describe the importance of this certificate, saying that if a person does not have it he or she is not allowed to vote at the elections, cannot obtain a landholding certificate and does not have the right to access different public services and facilities (such as electricity).

I found one more interesting observation in this report. The researchers say that if the Chepang parents do not have citizenship certificates their children will not be enrolled in school²⁶³. One can see that in this situation the Chepang children are in some kind of a vicious circle: they cannot be accepted in school because their parents do not have the papers that show their citizenship and if they do not study they will not know the importance of these papers and will not see any need to get them.

This fact is a huge obstacle to education but it was not revealed during my data collection. All teachers said that all children are allowed to study and so I did not use this information as part of my research.

The huge number of uneducated Chepangs causes many other problems in the community, for instance health problems, child mortality, unwanted pregnancies. The person representing the Nepal Chepang Association says:

There is a health problem in the community. They do not know how to protect themselves from different diseases. They do not know anything about contraception and so there are many unplanned pregnancies. That is why Chepang families are usually large. They cannot provide enough food for themselves working at home. It is one of the reasons why some family members, usually fathers and older sons, have to go to the cities and to work there. Moreover, some of them go to work in India and support their families from there. When a father leaves home the wife and children have more work to do. The sons become bread winners; they have to provide food for their families and to protect them. These duties limit the time available for education.

²⁶⁰ World Vision Advocacy Forum (WVAF) (n.d.) *Supporting Marginalized Ethnic Chepang Community through Enhanced District Chepang Rights Forum (DCRF)*: p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.wvafnepal.org/pdf/tfd.pdf> (Accessed 2013, February 26)

²⁶¹ Nepal Chepang Association (2009) *Preventing Statelessness by Raising Awareness on Citizenship Rights and Facilitating the Process of Obtaining Citizenship Certificates. Sub-project Report (01 August – December 2008)*: p. 3. Retrieved from http://www.ncachepang.org.np/Citizenship_Report_final_2.pdf

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

I also spoke about poverty and school attendance to the representative from the Ministry of Education. He confirmed that these two dimensions are strongly interconnected:

School attendance is related to the level of income. If the family is poor and children are at least 6 years old, they can contribute somehow and help their parents. That is why children from poor families so often miss classes. They do not go to school but work at home. This particularly concerns the Chepang community. They are enrolled in school but when they get older they drop out and start to work.

As one can see, poverty has a huge impact on the Chepangs' irregularity at schools. It influences both boys and girls and is a very serious problem.

5.4 Summary

This chapter is devoted to the presentation and analysis of data collected during my field research in Nepal. Before going into the field I formulated eight hypotheses concerning the obstacles to education for Chepang children. I presented those hypotheses and tested them.

I came to conclusion that all of them are interconnected and interdependent. Almost all of them (except for the caste based traditions) definitely hold back the young Chepangs from education. But there are only two factors at the basic level of education which are more relevant to girls than to boys. They are culture and tradition.

Where culture and tradition are concerned among the Chepangs two points are relevant to girls' behavior. The first is the division of labour in household duties that requires the girls to stay at home and the second is early marriages which inhibit or prevent the girls continuing with their education.

Chapter 6. Findings and concluding remarks

This chapter is focused on the main obstacles that hold back Chepang girls from education. According to my findings, summarized above, this challenge is hidden in the culture and traditions of the Chepangs. In this the chapter I discuss my principal findings and present concluding remarks and comments on my thesis.

6.1 Main findings of the research

My thesis is aimed at discovering the key issues that make Chepang girls drop out of school. Before my fieldwork I set out eight hypotheses relating to the obstacles to education and the reasons for dropping out of school. These hypotheses were tested as part of the thesis. The findings are shown in the table below.

Table 6.1 Reasons for dropping out of schools at the basic level of education and their influence on girls and boys in the Chepang community

Reasons for dropping out of schools at the basic level of education		Influence:	
		Girls	Boys
Cultural	Culture and traditions	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes, but less than for girls</i>
	Illiteracy of parents	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	Language problem	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	Caste-based tradition	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>
Structural	Lack and irregularity of teachers	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	Long walking distance from home to school	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	Insufficient school facilities and environment	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
	Poverty, including poor arterial structures, space and time for the child's education	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>

This table summarises my findings. The research based on information collected during my fieldwork shows that one of the hypotheses is not confirmed but the influence of the other seven is clear. Six of them influence equally boys and girls, and only one of the suggested hypotheses showed evidence more influential for the girls than for the boys. That hypothesis relates to cultural challenges and is hidden in the traditional settings of the Chepangs. It can be analysed in

two ways: 1) girls drop out of school because they are needed to work at home; 2) girls drop out of school because they get married very young.

6.2 Cultural background as a reason for Chepang girls' dropping out of school

Focusing on the first of the above two aspects, Save the Children (Sweden) states, in Nepal girls aged 10-14 “work twice as many hours as boys in the same age group. ... In the public education system these social and cultural practices lead to poor enrolment and high dropout rates for girls compared to boys”²⁶⁴.

Traditionally girls are expected to help their families with household chores²⁶⁵. Many of them are kept at home during the harvest season and during other festivals when there is need for their help. Besides, many girls do not attend classes on regular schooldays²⁶⁶ because they have to perform other household duties such as cutting grass for animals, cooking food, cleaning and taking care of younger siblings. Work at home is clearly an impeding factor and a negative influence on attendance at school²⁶⁷.

Work at home is very much interconnected with poverty. Usually, the poorer the family, the more work the girls have to do and the greater the possibility of their dropping out of school. The government of Nepal has already begun work to provide assistance for Chepang students and families. Thus, every student in that community receives school uniforms and free food at school; this immediately reduces the expense from the family budget. Moreover, the government annually gives a certain amount of money to each Chepang student just for coming to school. The government provides textbooks every year so students do not need to buy them. In some schools there are playgrounds organized for children under school age. Therefore, students can bring their younger brothers and sisters to school with them. The young ones will be looked after while the older children study.

So arrangements are being made to improve to some extent the difficult living conditions of Chepang community, and to remove economic obstacles to their education. There are few reasons to regard these obstacles as more impactful for girls than boys.

²⁶⁴ *Children's situation in Nepal* | Save the Children's Resource Centre (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/start/countries/nepal> (Accessed 2013, May 25)

²⁶⁵ De Groot, A. (2007) *Deprived Children and Education in Nepal. International Research on Working Children*: p. 37. Retrieved from http://www.crin.org/docs/Nepal_Education.pdf (Accessed 2013, May 25)

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: p. 35

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: p. 36

What about the second aspect of tradition – early marriages? In Nepal marriage is allowed at age 18 with parental consent and at age 20 without consent. Under the age of 18 is considered as a child marriage and the punishment for this is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine of up to 10,000 rupees (approximately €87). In spite of this legislation, large numbers of girls continue to be married below the age of 18²⁶⁸.

The International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) published their report²⁶⁹ at the beginning of this year, where the problem of child marriages influence on girls' education in Nepal is discussed. Although they did not study this problem in the Chepang community in particular but rather in the country in general, their research illustrates that girl child marriage is most prevalent among illiterate indigenous peoples²⁷⁰.

Moreover, the report states that the problem of girl child marriage is rooted in the traditional role of girls and their household duties²⁷¹. The study also shows the connection between the consequences of early marriages and other factors, most of which prove to be the obstacles to education suggested in this thesis.

Thus, girls from poor families are more likely to get married at a young age. First, because they are excluded from attending schools due to the limited financial resources of their families. There is also a clear relationship between education and delaying marriage. Women with more years of education get married older; parents with more years of schooling arrange for their children to marry later²⁷². The number of years of a girl's schooling is also a function of the ease of access to schools, the facilities and atmosphere there²⁷³.

The report describes the campaign against girl-children marriages describing them as a form of gender-based violence²⁷⁴ and proposes initiatives aimed at preventing child marriage²⁷⁵.

The campaign's aim is "to build the capacity and commitment of children, their families and communities to eliminate child marriage through: building awareness about its negative effects;

²⁶⁸ ICRW & Plan Asia Regional Office (2013) *Asia Child Marriage Initiative: Summary of Research in Bangladesh, India and Nepal*: p. 13. Retrieved from <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/PLAN%20ASIA%20Child%20Marriage-3%20Country%20Study.pdf> (Accessed 2013, May 21)

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.: p. 13

²⁷¹ Ibid.: p. 17

²⁷² Ibid.: p.19

²⁷³ Ibid.: p.20

²⁷⁴ Ibid.: p.7

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

mobilising child and youth clubs and protection groups; using peer and community pressure; and providing life skills education”²⁷⁶.

It is planned to achieve this objective with the help of six strategies²⁷⁷:

1. Children’s organizations
2. Partnering with government and civil society
3. Engaging with community leaders
4. Raising awareness about child marriage as a violation of child rights
5. Facilitating secondary education
6. Employing girls in paid work outside the house.

After about a decade since the campaign started, its results were examined²⁷⁸ and appeared to be positive and promising. Thus, for instance, the concept of “early marriage” changed from the age bracket of 11-12 to 15-17 and aspirations and new possibilities for women started rising²⁷⁹.

Afterword

The importance of education is taken for granted. As it was discussed at the very beginning of this thesis, education is a basis for economy and development of the country and it is crucial for each individual. My case examines education on the community level, which is, so to say, in between the level of individual and country. I assume that the importance of education on the two above mentioned levels can be transmitted to the community level as well.

A lot has already been done for the Chepangs and by them. A lot still has to be done. The situation is beginning to change for the better. The understanding that education is vitally important for everyone, that it is a key for improving living conditions and achieving a positive future, is beginning to emerge in the minds of the Chepangs. The issue of education in the Chepang community is being discussed more and more frequently both nationally and internationally. The main point now is to ensure that this trend continues and to evaluate what imbalances girls’ increased access to education may create in the Chepang community’s traditional way of life.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.: p.14

²⁷⁷ Ibid.: pp.26-27

²⁷⁸ Ibid.: p.14

²⁷⁹ Ibid.: p.28

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Appendices

Appendix A. Presentation of my informants. Children

	Informant ID	Gender	Age	Grade	Occupation of parents	Number of siblings		Walking distance to school
						Sisters	Brothers	
School 1	Child #1	Male	10	4	Farmer	2	1	10 min
	Child #2	Male	12	5	Farmer	4	-	10 min
	Child #3	Female	6	2	Farmer	3	1	15 min
	Child #4	Female	6	1	Father works in India. Mother – N/A. She lives with her aunt	1	1	N/A
	Child #5	Female	10	4	Farmer	-	1	30 min
	Child #6	Female	9	9	Farmer	-	2	7 min
	Child #7	Female	4	1	Farmer	2	3	5 min
	Child #8	Female	9	3	N/A. She lives with her aunt	-	-	5 min
	Child #9	Female	7	2	Farmer	2	1	5 min
School 2	Child #10	Male	10	3	Farmer	1	2	15 min
	Child #11	Male	10	5	Farmer	1	2	30 min
	Child #12	Male	12	4	Farmer	-	4	1 hour
	Child #13	Male	9	4	Shop/market	-	3	30 min
	Child #14	Female	10	3	Farmer	-	1	30 min
	Child #15	Female	11	5	Farmer	-	2	5 min
	Child #16	Female	11	5	Farmer	1	1	30 min
	Child #17	Female	10	5	Farmer	-	3	30 min
	Child #18	Female	10	5	Farmer	N/A	N/A	30 min
	Child #19	Female	11	5	Farmer	1	2	10 min

Appendix B. Presentation of my informants. Parents

Informant ID	Gender	Age	Number of children	Occupation	Level of education
Adult #1	Female	45	5	Farmer	Illiterate
Adult #2	Female	Does not know	2	Farmer	Illiterate
Adult #3	Female	Does not know	3	Farmer	Illiterate
Adult #4	Female	29	5	Farmer	Can read and write (a little)
Adult #5	Female	19	2	Farmer	Illiterate
Adult #6	Female	-	6	Farmer	Illiterate
Adult #7	Female	18	1	Farmer	Can read and write
Adult #8	Female	30	1	Shop owner	Lower secondary education
Adult #9	Female	Does not know	4	Farmer	Illiterate
Adult #10	Female	Does not know	3	Farmer	Illiterate
Adult #11	Male	34	5	Farmer	Can read and write
Adult #12	Male	42	2	Farmer	Can read and write

Appendix C. Presentation of my informants. Teachers

	Informant ID	Gender	Position	Work experience	Qualification
School 1	Teacher #1	Male	Headmaster	18 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #2	Female	Vice headmaster	7 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #3	Female	Teacher	5 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #4	Female	Teacher	4 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #5	Female	Teacher	4 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #6	Male	Teacher	1 year	Qualified teacher
School 2	Teacher #7	Female	Headmaster	14 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #8	Male	Vice headmaster	30 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #9	Female	Teacher	2 years	Qualified teacher
	Teacher #10	Female	Teacher	2 years	Obtained SLC
	Teacher #11	Male	Teacher	1,5 year	Obtained SLC

Appendix D. Interview guide. Children

1. General information: name, age, class.
2. Do you have brothers or sisters? How many? How old they are? Do they go to school?
3. What is your favourite subject at school?
4. What languages do you learn at school?
5. Do the teachers give you some homework? What kind of tasks? Do you do it?
6. Do you have enough time to do it?
7. Do you have a place at home for doing it?
8. Do your parents help you to do it if you do not understand something?
9. Do they check if you do your homework?
10. What is your parents' occupation?
11. Do you help your parents at home? How? What do you do?
12. Do you have to stay at home with your younger brothers or sisters?
13. Is school far from your home?
14. Do you sometimes miss classes? How often? Why?
15. Do you want to go to school? Why?

Appendix E. Interview guide. Parents

1. General information: name, age, occupation.
2. How many children do you have? How many sons/daughters? How old are they? Do all of them go school?
3. Is a school far from home?
4. Do your children help at home? What do they do?
5. Do they sometimes miss classes? Why?
6. Does the time of work in the fields coincide with school vacations?
7. Do your children get homework at school? Do they do it?
8. Do they have time to do it?
9. Do they have place at home to do it?
10. Do you help them if they do not understand something?
11. Does government or some other organizations help your family (your community)? How? Do they give some money/food/books/school uniform?
12. Did you go to school? / Can you read and write?
13. Do you want your children to go to school? Why?
14. What do you think about marriage? When is the best time for your children to get married?

Appendix F. Interview guide. Teachers

1. General information: name, age, position.
2. How long have you been working as a teacher?
3. How many teachers work at school?
4. How many of them are qualified teachers?
5. How many women teachers?
6. How many children are registered students at school? Boys/girls?
7. How many children of school age are in the village? Boys/girls?
8. How many children are in the village in total? Boys/girls?
9. What is the maximum and minimum amount of children in one classroom?
10. What is a language of education?
11. What subjects do children have at school?
12. How many days per week do children have classes?
13. At what time do classes begin/finish?
14. Do they get some homework? What tasks?
15. Is there any transportation for children who live far from school?
16. Do children get food at school?
17. Can a child bring younger siblings to school?
18. Conditions at home: do children have place to study? Do parents help their children with studies?
19. Is it obligatory to wear school uniform?
20. Is education free?
21. Do children have to buy books/pens/school uniform?
22. Do schools/parents/children get some help? From whom? What kind of help? How often?
23. Is absence of children registered?
24. Do teachers do something if a child does not come to school for few days? What?
25. Are the meetings of parents held? How often?
26. Do teachers encourage parents to send their children to school? How?
27. How many children drop out of school before they can read and write? Boys/girls.

Appendix G. Interview guide. Ministry of Education, District Education Office, UNESCO

List of suggested topics:

1. Teachers: qualified/volunteers.
2. Schools: financing/books/food/school uniform/
3. Education: payment for education/financing of education/
4. Regions of the country: schools attendance in the regions/level of illiteracy in the regions
5. Caste-based tradition: influence on education.
6. International assistance
7. Level of education: opportunities for population/men/women.
8. Projects/programs/ideas for improvement of education.
9. The Chepang community: level of education/support.
10. Will it be possible to achieve the MDGs concerning education by 2015?

Appendix I. Interview guide. Nepal Chepang Association

1. Name, age, position.
2. Questions about the Nepal Chepang Association:
 - 1) What does it do? Where? How?
 - 2) What is the aim of NCA?
 - 3) Explanation about NCA: financing, establishment, positive/negative moments in work.
3. Questions about the Chepang community:
 - 1) History.
 - 2) Traditions.
 - 3) Life in general.
 - 4) Economic situation.
 - 5) Caste.
 - 6) Religion.
 - 7) Education.
4. Personal questions:
 1. How many years did you go to school? Where?
 2. Are you familiar with education of the Chepangs now? Is it the same as it was during his schooling?
 3. Did you want to go to school?
 4. Was there any difference in education between boys and girls?
 5. Did you miss classes? Why?
 6. What work did he do at home?
 7. Are there some changes in the situation with education of the Chepangs?

