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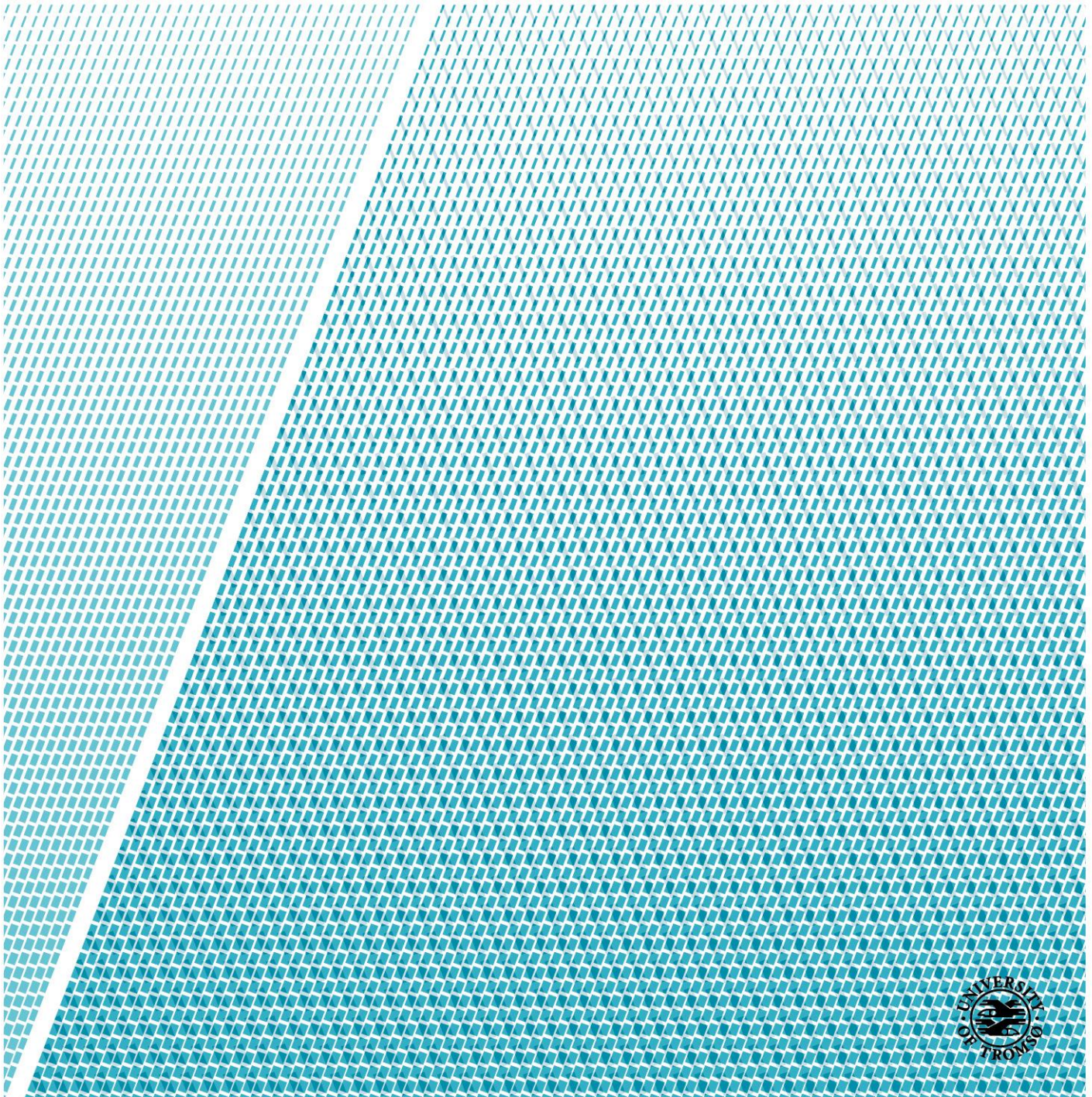
Centre for Sami Studies
Faculty of Humanities, Social Science and Education

**Impacts of Urbanization and Development Activities on Sustainable
Development and Resource Management of the Majhi People of
Nepal**

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Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies

May 2018



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Abstract

This study deals with how the Majhi people who are dependent on rivers for livelihood are affected by the rapid growth of urbanization and development activities. Due to the urbanization and development activities, they not only lost their traditional occupations like boating and fishing in the rivers but also are forced to be displaced from the traditional territory.

The thesis is based on qualitative field research conducted in Dolalghat, an emerging city of Kavrepalchwok district of Nepal in 2016. Overall, it talks about their traditional occupation like boating and fishing which was their way of resource management. Moreover, it presents the ecological, social and cultural impacts on Majhi community, their present livelihood strategies, the attitude of young generation towards traditional occupation and finally about the expectation and aspiration of the Majhi people.

The findings show that instead of being benefited by the so-called indicators of prosperity; urbanization and development activities, the Majhi peoples' life is becoming economically harder day by day. Before the urbanization and development took place in their native area, they had subsistence livelihood strategies. They did not have hand to mouth problem. They could easily survive utilizing the local natural resources. But along with the growth of urbanization and development activities, they lost their traditional occupation for livelihood and their native territory and natural resources are also intervened by the outsiders. The Majhi people are still in a transitional stage of adopting new strategies for livelihood. They neither have a good education and economic background nor have some new skills.

Keywords: Majhi people, traditional occupation, urbanization, development activities, sustainability, traditional ecological knowledge, resource management

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Focus of the Study

This project aims to study the impacts of urbanization and development activities on the traditional occupation of one of the highly marginalized indigenous groups in Nepal, the Majhi peoples. Due to the rapid urbanization and development activities, the indigenous peoples' traditional way of life is disturbed and they are challenged to continuing their traditional occupation, culture, and rituals. Fishing and boating are the main traditional occupations of the Majhi peoples which are directly related and depended on rivers.

This study mainly focuses on how these people are affected by the rapid expansion of urbanization and development activities. How these people are coping their livelihood at present stage and what their expectations are from the government. Though urbanization and development activities are considered the symbols of prosperity and modernity, the Majhi peoples have been affected in several ways. Thus, the present study seeks to shed light on their realities.

1.2 Background of the Study

Nepal is a multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic country with more than 120 different ethnic groups and languages. Among them, there are 59 indigenous groups with their own languages, traditions, and cultures. According to the 2011 Census, indigenous peoples (known as indigenous nationalities – *Adivasi Janajati*), comprise 37% of the total population of Nepal and are in the majority in 27 of the 75 districts (CBS¹, 2011). Nepal has identified and recognized 59 nationalities through the enactment of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act, 2002. According to the Act, "indigenous refers to those ethnic groups or communities who have their own mother tongue, traditional customs, different cultural identities, different social structures and written or oral history" (NEFIN², 2009). The taskforce constituted by the Government of Nepal in 1996 under the convenorship of Santa Bahadur Gurung suggested the following characteristics to be an indigenous group of Nepal (Onta, 2006: 312):

- *who have a separate collective cultural identity;*
- *who have their own traditional language, religion, customs, and culture;*

¹ Central Bureau of Statistics

² Nepal Foundation of Development of Indigenous Nationalities

- *whose traditional social structure is based on equality;*
- *who are traditionally located in particular geographic regions;*
- *who have their own written or oral history;*
- *who have a 'we-feeling' within their communities*
- *who do not have an influential role in the modern politics and state government of Nepal*
- *who are indigenous people of Nepal and*
- *who call themselves Janajati (Onta, 2006: 312)*

Indigenous peoples in Nepal have been experiencing systematic discrimination and marginalization socially, culturally, politically and economically for centuries (Nilsson and Stidsen, 2014). They have been suppressed and exploited culturally, politically and economically by the Hindu upper caste rulers for centuries after the forceful incorporation of small states of indigenous and ethnic groups into the Unified Nepal in the eighteenth century (Tamang, 2006). Bhattachan (2002) argues that there are several historical markers that contributed to dominate and marginalize the indigenous people. According to him, the restructuring of the caste system in the fourteenth century by the king *Jayasthiti Malla* was the first historical marker for Hinduization of indigenous people and creating the hierarchy between castes. Second, he points out the conspiratorial attack over indigenous Magar king in Gorkha in the seventeenth century by the Hindu king, which he sees as the beginning of the downfall of independence of indigenous nationalities. Third, the territorial unification of small states into the unitary kingdom by the king Prithvi Narayan Shah in the eighteenth century was the main factor of indigenous peoples' exploitation. From this point, the indigenous nationalities not only lost their traditional state but also language, culture, religion and their indigenous knowledge. Fourth, the country code of the nineteenth century by Janga Bahadur Rana (first Rana Prime minister of Nepal). Finally, the thirty years of *Panchayat*³ system which promoted Hinduization and caste based society (Bhattachan, 2002).

Bhattachan (2003) claims that the ethnic minority and indigenous communities have not experienced the true democracy since 1769 (after the unification of modern Nepal) to 2006. He defines democracy as:

³ The political system of Nepal during 1960-1990

A political process in which people are fully sovereign and diverse groups of people cooperate among themselves in a participatory way for their common good. Thus, democracy means the elimination of hegemony or domination of caste, language, religion, culture, sex, region and class. Also, it is not a melting pot and over-centralization of power and authority. On the contrary, it is a respect towards pluralism or diversity and decentralization or devolution of power and authority through ethnic autonomy and right to self-determination (Bhattachan, 2003:2).

Though the indigenous and ethnic groups of Nepal involved in each and every movement for social reform and democracy, the solid concept of indigeneity and identity politics emerged during the time period of ten years long Maoist revolution started in the 1990s (Paudel, 2016: 549). The peoples' movement of 2006 was a great victory for all the indigenous and ethnic minority of Nepal in the sense that the 240-years long Hindu monarchy was abolished and the country was declared a secular state. Though the indigenous peoples' aspiration of having autonomy state was not addressed by the new constitution, it has restructured the country into three level of the federal state. Toffin (2009) observes indigenous movement as "a response to the country's strained unification in the nineteenth century and to the complex set of discrimination and inequalities resulting from this situation" (Toffi, 2009: 28). After the unification of small autonomous states, the indigenous nationalities consider themselves victims of social and economic discrimination (ibid.). It is the fact that the indigenous movement is the most influential social movement of Nepal after the pro-1990s era (Onta, 2006: 1). After the restoration of democracy in 1990, the then constitution had partly addressed the issues of indigenous nationalities. The constitution of 1990 had recognized Nepal as the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual country for the first time. It also recognized the cultural and educational right to all the communities residing in Nepal (ibid.).

Indigenous peoples in Nepal predominately inhabit rural areas and are primarily engaged in subsistence agriculture. Traditional occupations continue to be practiced by many indigenous nationalities in Nepal. Despite the overall predominance of subsistence agriculture, there is also a wide variety of the 59 indigenous peoples in terms of modes of production and occupations. According to NEFIN (2009), the umbrella organization of indigenous people of Nepal, the indigenous groups are categorized into five different categories on the basis of their social and economic status. Out of 59 officially defined indigenous groups, 10 indigenous nationalities are defined as endangered groups, 12 as

highly marginalized groups, 20 as marginalized groups, 15 as disadvantaged groups and 2 as advantaged groups. The Majhi peoples are categorized under 'highly marginalized group' (NEFIN, 2009). The Majhi people have a high density on the bank of the rivers where fishes 'were' easily available. The total population of this community is 83,727 which is 0.32 % of total population of the country (CBS, 2011). Though the traditional occupation of this community is fishing and ferrying people and goods, due to the rapid urbanization, development activities and restriction imposed by the government, they are deprived of their traditional job which ultimately effects on livelihood and socio-economic status. They live in the bank of rivers and spent their almost time in the rivers. They used to collect fishes and sell in the market to earn some money. Another job ferrying people is almost outdated as there are many bridges built over the rivers. As urbanization is expanding near the river areas, the traditional way of resource management of the Majhi people is disturbed. With the increasing population, the rivers are being polluted and the effects of chemicals from factory and industries, the fishes are disappearing from the river. Similarly, the use of electricity shocks in fishing causes negative effects on the reproduction of fishes. For the development and construction activities, the rivers are the good source for sand and gravel. The extraction of sand and gravel from the rivers directly disturb the natural habitat of fishes. Similarly, the constructions of development projects like roads, bridges hydro power etc. also effect on the habitat of the indigenous people. These activities not only disturbing their resource management but also native territories are threatened. The indigenous peoples are the victims of natural disasters such as landslides and flood, which forces them leave their territory and occupation.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The Majhi people are one of the highly-marginalized groups dependent on the rivers for their livelihood. Because of rapid urbanization and development activities their traditional occupation is at risk. This project aims to study how the Majhi people who are dependent on their traditional job are affected by the urbanization and development. Though the urbanization and development activities are perceived positively and might improve the life of people, but in case of the Majhi people they are further marginalizing. Instead of being facilitated from the developments and urbanization, they are feeling heavy pressure which threatened their natural resources, territories, culture and customary ways of life. Similarly, the study also tries to find out how this community with limited resources has managed the sustainability.

1.4 Research Questions

The main goal of this project is to present a ground reality of the Majhi people of Nepal who are deprived of the minimum rights which are guaranteed by the national and international laws and treaties. They are the victims of urbanization and development activities. Because of urbanization and development activities, there is an adverse impact on sustainability and resource management in the Majhi community of Nepal. The urbanization and development activities not only affect the traditional occupations of the Majhi people, but also might have long-term ecological problems. So, for sustainability too, the rivers should be free from any disturbance from external forces and the government should guarantee the Majhi people to continue their traditional occupation with their way of resource management.

This research aims to find out the answer of following questions which are related to the livelihood, resource management, and sustainability of the Majhi peoples.

- a. How did the Majhi people manage resources in the past?
- b. How do urbanization and development activities impact on their traditional occupation?
- c. What are their new adaption strategies?
- d. What are the attitudes of the young Majhi generation towards the traditional occupation of their community?

1.5 The Significance of the Study

Indigenous issues are emerging in the context of Nepal as well. Many politicians, policy makers, indigenous activists, NGOs/INGOs and researchers contributed a lot for the rights of indigenous peoples. Despite the fact, very few have written and talked about the issues of the Majhi peoples. We can find very few books, articles and research paper written about this highly-marginalized people. Moreover, research done specifically focusing on impacts of urbanity and development on any indigenous group is hard to find. In this sense, this study can be a milestone to understand how the indigenous peoples are affected by the development projects and rapid expansion of urbanization in general. In the developing countries like Nepal, many ethnic and indigenous groups are still in marginalized and their voices are not heard by the authority. As this study is about the people who have no access to the mainstream of nation, will help to bring their voices to

the academic arena. Similarly, this thesis deals with the devastating effects of ecological problem due to the unplanned developments and urbanizations which is the main problem of all the indigenous people of the world. The traditional occupations of indigenous people are disappearing day by day and the young generation is also not so interested to continue. In this sense, this research will be helpful to make policy about this community.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

This study has its own limitations. Though the topic covers a vast area, the study mainly focuses on Dolalghat of Kavrepalchowk district of Nepal. Due to the rapid urbanization near the rivers area and the development activities, the Majhi community who have been living near the rivers are directly or indirectly affected. This study mainly highlights on how the Majhi people of Dolalghat are socially, economically and ecologically affected and how their life is changed after their traditional occupations are declined.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Overall the thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter one is all about the introduction of research which includes the statement of the problem, research questions, and significance of the study. Chapter two gives the detail background information of the Majhi people which includes origin and history of the Majhi peoples, social structure, traditional occupation and culture, festivals and rituals etc. Similarly, methodological procedures i.e., nature and sources of data, tools, and techniques of data collection, challenges of data collection and ethical consideration are highlighted in chapter three. In chapter four theoretical and conceptual framework is presented. The details analysis and presentation is included in chapter five. In this chapter, the research questions are discussed analyzed in detail. Finally, the last chapter is the conclusion of the thesis in overall.

Chapter 2: Historical, Social and Cultural Background of the Majhi People

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the historical, social and cultural background information of the Majhi people in detail. It mainly focuses on the Majhi peoples' origin and history, their tradition and culture and social structure.

2.2 Origin and History

As there is no comprehensive anthropological study of the Majhi people yet, it is difficult to get the clear fact about the origin and history of this group (GhartiMagar and Majhi, 2011:6). There are many stories about the origin of the Majhi people. Dan Bahadur Majhi (2006) refers the story narrated by Ankhle Majhi from Darjeeling of India about the origin of the Majhi. According to Aankhe Majhi after the creation of the earth by the Hindu God Mahadeva, he is traveling to mountain, hill, plain, rivers, forest with his wife Parvati. When his wife Parvati asked him how to cross the rivers to reach other parts, and suggested him to create something for crossing rivers, God Mahadeva immediately created Majhi from his body's dirt. So, the Majhi believe that they were the first creation of God among human being (Majhi, 2006: 7).

The Comprehensive Nepali Dictionary (2005) defines Majhi in two ways: first, a group of people who have fishing and boating as their traditional occupation and second, Majhi means the middle or center. Different studies have different views about the origin of these people. According to the senior anthropologist, Dor Bahadur Bista (2007) the Majhi who have been living in the hilly region are of the same family of *Bote* and *Kusahar* living in Inner Tarai are the native people. While some connect Majhi with *Tharu*, *Danuwar*, *Darai*, and *Kumal*.

There are many myths related to the origin of the Majhi people though they are not scientifically proved. Some believed that Majhi came from India around two thousand years ago, through Mithila and inner Tarai (*Bhitri Madhesh*) and settled in the hilly region. As they were settled in middle Hilly region they were called Majhi (Kandel, 1998). Similarly, Dan Bahadur Majhi (2006) believes the Majhi people have been living near *SaptaKoshi* river in the Hilly region and inner Terai for two thousand years. According to Majhi (2006), elder Majhi people claimed that even Majhi ruled in a village called *Rajgaau* around 700 years ago by Mandare (name of Majhi king).

2.3 Language and Population

The Majhi people have their own language called Majhi language which has no its own script. According to the latest census, though the Majhi people live in 68 districts out of 75 districts of Nepal; only the people of 43 district can speak their language (CBS, 2011). As there are no any documents, journals, books, videos, music and radio programs in Majhi language, it is difficult to protect it for a long time (GhartiMagar and Majhi, 2011: 21). Recently the Majhi dictionary was published by Dan Bahadur Majhi with the purpose of protecting it from disappearing.

According to the latest census, the total population of this community is 83,727 which is 0.32 % of total population of the country and only the 30% of its population can speak Majhi language. The Majhi activists do not believe in this official record. They claim that the total population of the Majhi people must be over 1,000,000. Dan Bahadur Majhi claims that the Majhi of Terai region do not want to be recognized by Majhi as it is taken as untouchable caste. Instead, they write *Kusuwar*, *Mukhiya*, *Chaudhari*, and *Bahardar*. Similarly, some so-called educated and wealthy Majhi of the eastern part of Nepal write *Rayamajhi* instead of Majhi to refer themselves as superior caste (Majhi, 2006: 18).

2.3.1 Majhi or Bote?

Majhi and Bote are two similar indigenous groups of Nepal and both groups have the similar traditional occupation; boating and fishing. People often confuse about these two groups. Majhi (2006) argues that due to lack of research on these groups, it is not certain whether these two groups are similar or different. Both Majhi and Bote share similar language and culture. Only the funeral process is different. Some Majhi also writes Bote as their last name. When the two different census reports are compared it is clearly seen that Majhi and Bote are overlapping each other. The population of certain place which was reported as Majhi in the previous census is reported as Bote in latest census (ibid.). Govinda Lal Majhi also claims that Majhi and Bote might be from the same origin. The same group of people of eastern part calls themselves as Majhi and the group of people from western part call themselves as Bote (Interview, 2016).

2.4 Cultural Practice and Tradition

2.4.1 Religion

Though more than 50% of Majhi people have recorded their religion as Hindu in the latest census, the educated and young scholars and leaders claim Nature as their religion (Majhi, 2006: 110). Majhi argues that as the Majhi people do not follow rituals of Hindu religion and there is no any social hierarchy like in Hindu in their community, it is the proof of their non-Hinduism. Majhi people are naturally a nature lover. For them religion is to help others, worshipping goddess and gods, deity and nature. He also claims that it is the influence of Hinduism and the policy of the state to promote one religion that many Majhi are confused about their original religion (ibid.). They also believe in supernatural powers and superstitions.

2.4.2 Worshipping

The Majhi people worship different deities and nature. They sacrifice different animals and birds like he- goats, he-buffalos, pigs, chickens, ducks etc.; and offer local alcohol, flowers, red paste and money (Gharti Magar and Majhi, 2011: 40).

Kulpuja:

Kulpuja is Majhis' main worshipping. They worship two Gods named *Gharni* and *Bhimsen*. They believe these two are their ancestral Gods. It is worshipped by the eldest woman of a family in the evening or in the morning in the absence of light (ibid.).

Ladipuja (Koshipuja):

Among the different worshipping and festivals, *Ladipuja* or *Koshipuja* is special in the sense that Majhi people have started to celebrate it as their national festival⁴. Majhi people celebrate *Ladipuja* or *Koshipuja* by gathering in the bank of the rivers and taking the name of different rivers (Majhi, 2006: 90). As it is a communal worshipping, they invite their relatives as well as other people from the village. It is worshipped either on Tuesday or Saturday by the Majhi priest. They start to plan for three days worshipping from one month ago.

⁴ Majhi Development organization declared Lodipuja as their national festival on 10 February 2009 and started to celebrate it on the same day all over the nation.

Apart from these, Majhi people worship *Sansari puja* which is celebrated on Saturday with the belief of that there will not be any diseases, the village will be protected and the rainfall will be in time (Ghartimagar and Majhi, 2011: 47). Similarly, they also worship *Baishakhepurne/ wayu puja* in which they worship air as a symbol of dead one. Other worshippings are *Aaitabare puja*, *Gothpuja*, and *Bhumepuja*.

2.4.3 Festivals

Majhi people celebrate *Kulpuja* and *Ladipuja* as a festival too, which are their origin culture. Apart from these they also celebrate festivals celebrated by Hindu people. They celebrate *Saunesankranti*⁵, *Dashain*⁶, *Tihar*⁷, *Maghesankranti*⁸ and *Chaite Dashain*. According to Dan Bahadur Majhi, it is the influence of Hindu religion that Majhi people are celebrating these festivals. In Nepal, around 80 % of total population is Hindu and the state also promoted Hinduism in the past (Majhi, 2006: 52).

2.5 Life Passage, Rites and Rituals

The Majhi people also have their own life passage rites and ritual from birth to death. Majhi people perform different stages such as birth, naming, rice feeding, marriage, and death.

2.5.1 Birth Ceremony

The Majhi people have very interesting assumptions related to birth rites. Pregnant women are not allowed to participate in worship. They believe that if pregnant women do this, the god will be angry. Moreover, pregnant women are not allowed to walk outside the home in the night time. The Majhi people make a prediction of son or daughter by observing the activities of pregnant women. If the pregnant woman is active, she will give birth to a son while if she is passive and weak she will give birth to a daughter. Similarly, if the pregnant woman sees the dream of eating a banana, she will give birth to a son and if she sees the dream of eating pumpkin then she will give birth to a daughter (GhartiMagar and Majhi, 2011:55).

⁵ First day of Nepali month which falls in the middle of July.

⁶ The biggest festival of Nepal and Hindu people

⁷ Second biggest festival of Nepal

⁸ First day of Nepali month falls on the middle of January

The Majhi community still believes that pregnant woman should give birth to her child inside the home instead of going to the hospital. If it is more difficult they take the help of midwife of their community and pray to god for good. Even though the trend of going hospital is increasing nowadays (ibid.). After delivering the baby, the mother and baby are bathed in warm water and they are kept in one corner of the house. Another interesting thing is that they sacrifice (offer) cock if the son is born and a hen is sacrificed if the daughter is born at the main door to the house (ibid.).

2.5.2 Naming

Naming is a ritual for giving a name to the newborn baby. In Majhi community it is performed on the odd day of the birthday like third, fifth, seventh etc. Majhi people give the name based on days' name, months name, place name, color name, and God name. It is believed that after the naming ceremony, the mother becomes free to do everything and she is now considered sacred.

2.5.3 Rice feeding

Starting to feed rice and grain except mother milk to a baby for the first time is Rice feeding ritual. Rice feeding ritual is performed for a son at six months and for a daughter at five months. It is believed that after five or six months, mother milk is not sufficient and some extra food is needed for a baby. For this ritual, all the relatives and neighbors invited and baby is blessed.

2.4.4 Chhewar (Hair Cutting)

Hair cutting of a baby boy for the first time is *Chhewar* ritual. For the ritual, maternal uncle of the baby is necessary. The baby boy is put in the shed of cow and tie with a rope of cow and his maternal uncle cut his hair and put it on a plate made up of leaves. Then the hair is thrown in the nearby river. If there is no river nearby, it can be put in a tree that produces white liquid like milk. The maternal uncle has to offer some gifts and ornaments to the boy.

2.4.5 Marriage

Majhi people take marriage as one of the very important customs of their life. There were many examples of child marriage in the past. Even today they have the practice of

marriage at the early age of sixteen and seventeen (Ghartimagar and Majhi, 2011: 58). It is strictly prohibited to marry in same blood in this community.

As mentioned by Majhi (2006), there have been different types of marriages existed in this community such as *Magi Bibaha* (Arrange Marriage), Love marriage, *Chori Bibaha* (Elopement), *Jari Bibaha*, *Bidhwa Bibaha* (widow marriage), Inter caste marriage and *Jabarjasti Bibaha* (Marriage by Force).

For *Magi Bibaha* (Arrange marriage), two *lami* (mediators for marriage who know both sides very well) are sent to girl's house in the first Wednesday of *Mangsir*⁹ with local alcohol and some fish as a gift. The girl family accepts the gift only if they are ready to marry their daughter. *Chori Bibaha* is a type of marriage in which the family of girl is not given any information or they do not have consent in their daughter's marriage and the boy's family make the girl elope with consent. Sometimes, it happens with the consent of both family too. Majhi (2006) writes, there are two reasons behind this marriage: first, due to poverty who do not have enough money for arrange marriage which is expensive, second when the marriage is against their culture; if it is seen to be obstructed by their same blood case or same breastfeeding case. Both *Magi Bibaha* and *Chori Bibaha* are socially approved in Majhi community (ibid.).

Similarly, if one marries other's wife it is called *Jari*¹⁰ *Bibaha*. The person has to pay some money as a compensation to wife's ex-husband family as decided by both sides family and other people of the community. *Bidhawa Bibaha* (Widow marriage) is also socially accepted in Majhi community. The widow woman can marry a male who is not in her blood relation defined by Majhi culture with the family consent or by her own decision. There is a social practice of marrying elder brother's wife after his death by his younger brother if their age gap is suitable for marriage and only if they are agreed. If the brother marries his elder brother's wife before his death, it is a serious crime and the brother does not get any right of inheritance and he is expelled from the village. Majhi people believe that this marriage helps to maintain family unity and the children of brother get well care. But the young generation is not interested in this type of marriage (Majhi, 2006: 36).

⁹ a Nepali calendar month falls on mid of November to mid of December.

¹⁰ *Jari* means a kind of fine which is to be paid by the person to his wife's ex-husband family

Likewise, if the Majhi boy marries a girl from another community or caste, it is called inter-caste marriage. The girl should not be from the so-called lower castes which are considered untouchable according to Hindu culture to get approved by the family and community. Another type of marriage is marriage by force. In this type of marriage, the boy marries the girl by force without her consent. The boy takes the help of his friends to kidnap (?) the girl. Before marrying forcefully, the boy attempts to marry by taking the permission of her parents, if it fails then he tries to take the consent of the girl and finally if it fails then he adopts this method. The boy tries to capture the girl from the local market, festivals, ceremonies, and work. This type of marriage is no more in practice in the Majhi community as it increases more conflict and tension within a community (ibid.).

2.5 Social Structure

2.5.1 *Majhesaba*

The Majhi people enjoy living in a communal way. They share each and everything with their community people. They are very cooperative and helpful to each other. They do almost everything in a group such as working on the farm, fishing in the river, social works etc. They have the feeling of 'we' instead of 'I' (Majhi, 2006: 24). The Majhi people had their own traditional organization called *Majhesaba*. This organization does not exist now, instead of it, Majhi people formed another modern organization called Majhi Development Forum (*Majhi Utthan Sangh*) in 1993.

The main function of *Majhesaba* was to organize the cultural, religious, social programs and making rules, regulations, and policies to run different programs. *Majhesaba* had played a pivotal role to maintain unity in the society, to continue traditional cultures and rituals (Majhi, 2015: 92). The other functions of *Majhesaba* were to resolve the conflicts and give justice, to protect the forests, to maintain the street, canal, water sources, to restrict the cattle graze in forest, to make aware the public, announcing for social works, to make pay the fine who did mistakes etc. (ibid.). There are six main people leading in *Majhesaba*. *Majhe* (Chairperson), main person of *Majhesaba*, *Gaurung* (vice chairperson): assistance of *Majhe*, *Adaae* (treasurer): person who keeps financial record, *Dalali* (Secretary) who looks economic part, similarly *Jethabuda* (member) is the assistance of all the members *Majhesaba* and finally, *Tahaluwa* (protector) who observes and manages a different kind of cultural and ritual ceremony (ibid.). The nominating process for the members was also interesting. Instead of nominating candidates by members, the members

had to accept the peoples' choice. They could not deny the public choice. According to Majhi (2015) in the process of forming the Majhesaba the first right to choose was to children and youth, the second right was to disable people, third to elder people, fourth to female, the fifth right was to male and finally the last right to choose was to formers members of Majhesaba. The tenure of one committee was for three years but if the committee could not perform well, they could change it every year too. This system of choosing the members by the choice of common people existed till the unification of modern Nepal. The then king Prithvi Narayan Shah gave the title to the members. Instead of choosing the members from the common people, the portfolio was handed to their sons and grandson. The son of Majhe became new Majhe after his father. Ultimately, this organization changed into an autocratic organization and failed. The effect of that hierarchy is seen still in some places of Majhi community (Majhi, 2015: 94).

The Majhesaba had its own source of revenue too.

Dhunge Pathi: The Majhi people collected certain crops and money from other people for making them cross the river. People from the other communities used to pay annually the crops and money to the Majhi for their convenience. *The Dhunge Pathi* (annual fee for crossing the river) was decided according to the members of a family and the land they had to another side of the river.

Khardari: The people from other communities had to pay a certain annual fee for using the *kipat* land of Majhi people for certain purposes like grazing cattle, collecting firewood and collecting grass. If the people from other communities did not pay *Khardari*, they were not allowed to live and use the *kipat* land of Majhi people.

Buntho: The people from other communities who were living in Majhi peoples *kipat* area had to pay a certain fee on the occasion of their daughters' marriage ceremony. They had to compulsorily pay the fee for the continuing residing in the *kipat* land.

Fine: People had to pay the fine if they did wrong deeds which were not acceptable in the Majhi community. The Majhesaba declared the amount of fine.

Dharma Bhakari (Collecting Crops): Majhi people collected a certain amount of crops in the time of harvesting season and store it in one place which is called *Dharma Bhakari*. People collected crops according to their production. One who had more production had to

collect more crops. People used to take the crops when they were in need of it and paid it later.

The Majhesaba used to collect and store all the money and crops from the different sources. The Majhe informed the public about the income and expenditure in *Koshi Puja*. They used to organize communal party from that income (Majhi, 2015: 97).

2.5.2 Customs and Customary Laws

The Majhi people are bounded by the culture and tradition. They have their own typical customs and customary laws which are being practiced for a long time. These customs and customary laws are the main guiding forces of Majhi community. Every individual Majhi takes as a responsibility to follow these rules and cultures. These customs and customary laws which are not in written form are transmitted from one generation to another generation through practice (Majhi, 2015: 98). These customs and customary laws are mainly related to their main festivals such as *Koshi Puja*, *Laddi Puja*, marriage ceremony and funeral ceremony. Some of the customs and customary laws of Majhi community mentioned by Dan Bahadur Majhi (2015) are as follows:

The Majhi are not allowed to marry in other castes. If they marry from other castes, they have to do the specific ritual to make sacred. The young brother is not allowed to marry a sister in law (the elder's brother wife). If he marries then he is supposed to exile from the community and his face should not be seen by other people. But he can marry the sister in law after the death of his elder brother. The male Majhi are not allowed to touch young brother's wife, wife's elder sister and mother in law of son. One cannot marry wife's elder sister too. If the uninvited guest attends in Koshi Puja, he/she has to pay a certain fine. Similarly, if anyone does any work out of authority in Koshi Puja, then he/she will be liable for a penalty (Majhi, 2015: 98).

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach

3.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights methodological considerations and my fieldwork experience. It starts with the background of the study area. It introduces the study area and the reason behind choosing this area for the fieldwork. Then, it describes in detail about the methods, tools, and techniques used for collecting data. Finally, it presents my role as the researcher, ethics, and challenges in the later part.

3.2 Study Area

The Majhi people live in 68 different districts out of 75 districts of Nepal. As they have very scattered inhabitants, it became a challenge to choose a specific area of study for the field work. The dense population of Majhi people is in the central part of Nepal and the Dolalghat is the gateway for these places. Dolalgaht, one of the Village Development Committees of Kavrepalanchok district, situated in central part of Nepal, was the main site for the study. It is around 150 km away from Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. The Araniko highway goes through Dolalghat which connects different districts of the central part of Nepal and the border of China.

Dolalghat is a very famous place for fish. Many people from the capital city Kathmandu and nearby visit this place for different kinds of fish items. This place lies in the bank of two rivers Indravati and Sunkoshi. It is also very famous for picnic and excursions. Before the construction of Araniko highway in the 1960s, people had to walk through Dolalghat to go to Kathmandu and there were no bridges over the rivers. According to the elder Majhi, people used to stay one night in Dolalghat while going to Kathmandu and returning from the Kathmandu. It was like a hub in the past. The Majhi people were the only medium to make people cross these two big rivers.

As Nepal is a place of different castes and ethnic groups, we can see the reflection in Dolalghat too. People of different ethnic groups such as *Brahamins*, *Chhetries*, *Newars*, Tamang, Majhi are living for a long time. According to the latest census, the total population of Majhi people in Nepal is 83,727 and the total population of the Majhi people in Kavrepalanchowk is 2,764 (CBS, 2012).

There are some reasons behind the selection of this place as my study area. First, it is one of the major areas of the Majhi people where significant of Majhi people are living for a long time. Second, it is also a growing city of central part of Nepal and connecting point for different places where Majhi people have a dense population. Third, Dolalghat lies in the bank of two rivers in which the Majhi people depended for their livelihood in the past. Similarly, it has easy access to reach from the capital city. Finally, I have not found any research conducted on impacts of urbanization and development activities in their livelihood focusing in this place.

3.3 Gaining Access to Informants

Gaining access to fieldwork is really a challenging job which involves some combination of strategic planning, hardworking and opportunities. It can vary to a considerable extent depending on the kind of cases being investigated (Johl & Renganathan, 2010). One should be very conscious while gaining access and building rapport to get access to the real informants (Shenton & Hayter, 2004).

Personally, I did not know anybody representing Majhi community at the beginning of my fieldwork. I was somehow confused in gaining access to the informants. So, I follow the idea of Rubin and Rubin (2005:59) that the researchers follow their social network in order to find and gain access. I tried to contact some people who are working in indigenous movement. Even I were not familiar with the place which I chose as my field study. I contacted Pemba Gurung Bhote, the general secretary of NEFIN, who is also my friend. I talked to him about indigenous recent activities and movements. Bhote suggested me to meet Govinda Lal Majhi, the president of Majhi Development Forum and member secretary of National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN). As Govinda also suggested me to meet Dan Bahadur Majhi, the former president and researcher of Majhi people, then only I got a clear way find my informants.

As the area study was new for me, I went there with a friend. The hotel owner also helped me to gain access to Majhi people. He contacted me with one of his fish suppliers to help me. During my fieldwork, I found that the Majhi people are living economically difficult life. As their main source of livelihood is daily based wages at present time, it is very difficult to meet them at houses in the daytime. It was the time of monsoon and some people were busy in farming.

To get easy access with Majhi people, I took help of one local Majhi as a mediator so that they would not feel strange talking with me. The mediator helped me to find right people who could contribute by giving the right information. By taking the help of the mediator, I also visited some places which are helpful for my project such as rivers where they use to fishing, the hydroelectric power house and the place where they use to collect sand and gravel from the river.

3.4 Selection of Informants

As my primary purpose is to find out how the Majhi people are affected by the rapid growth of urbanization and development activities and what are their present adaptive strategies, I planned to talk with people from different categories to understand their views. For the overall information about Majhi people and the issues related to their rights and struggle, I discussed with the Majhi activists and leaders who are living in Kathmandu. For this purpose, I interacted with Dan Bahadur Majhi, an indigenous activist and former president of Majhi Development Forum. He is also one of the main researchers of Majhi people who has published some books and article about Majhi people. I got much more information about Majhi people from him. Similarly, another pioneering figure is Govinda Lal Majhi who is the chairperson of Majhi Development Forum and member secretary of National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN). From him, I got important information about current indigenous issues, the indigenous peoples' view about new constitution and issues concerned about Majhi people. Similarly, Basanta Majhi who was a former lawmaker also informed me about why Majhi people are still marginalized and have no access to the mainstream. My discussion with Pemba Bhotte Gurung, the general secretary of Nepal Federation for Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) who is also my close friend become very fruitful to understand about recent activities of NEFIN and indigenous movement.

To know about the traditional occupation and resource management of Majhi people, I discussed especially with the elderly people who can share their own experiences. I found these people are very excited to share their experiences and knowledge. It's a very fruitful discussion about their traditional occupation, how they manage limited resources for their livelihood and how their lives change into the economically inconvenient situation.

Similarly, I also talked with the young generation to understand their view about traditional occupation whether they want to continue their traditional occupation or want

to shift to the new area. Altogether I was able to approach with twenty-four people. In this regard, I am very hopeful that the information gained through these informants play the key role in my research to fulfill the targeted aim.

3.5 Data Source and Method of Data Collection

In the process of data collection, the qualitative method had been applied with the aim that it would help to bring out the voices and experiences of a targeted community (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, it also helps to understand the picture of a social world where we live and how things go around us as well as how individual or groups have different looks at their own world (Handcock, et.al, 2007). As my project also focuses on how Majhi people are affected by the rapid urbanization and development activities, and about the socio-economic status of these people, the qualitative research approach permits to make in-depth understanding and study behaviors, their views and experiences using a holistic framework through subjective and systematic methods (Bryman, 2001).

3.5.1 Interview

“Interviews are discussions, usually one-on-one between an interviewer and an individual, meant to gather information on a specific set of topics. Interviews can be conducted in person or over the phone. Interviews differ from surveys by the level of structure placed on the interaction” (Harrell & Brandley, 2009: 6). The interview is probably the most widely used method employed in qualitative research which helps to “explore people’s understanding of their lives and aspects of their experiences” (Edward & Holland, 2013:1). It is important for qualitative researchers to be able to draw their participants onto the terrain of the research interview, for them to understand what the research is about and how the interview will differ from others they might have experienced (ibid.). In a qualitative interview, good questions should be open-ended, neutral, sensitive and understandable which are easily answered by participants (Gill, et.al., 2008). As my research is on impacts of urbanization and development activities on their traditional occupation, interviews help to reflect their hardships and predicament as well as recall their past experiences.

In order to understand the real picture of the socio-economic status of Majhi people and their way of livelihood, I used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows

the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Gill, et.al., 2008). I had prepared the lists of different questionnaires for different informants. It made the interviews more specific and right questions were asked to the relevant person according to interviewee's experience. I had categorized the informants as 'elderly people', 'local authorities', 'young generation' and 'representative/ activists/ leader' and prepared questionnaires accordingly. The questions were about how urbanization changed their lives, way of earning money, the traditional way of resource management, changes in the rivers, how has fishing changed, problems in continuing traditional occupation, plans for the development of Majhi people etc. I took notes and used recorder while they spoke to record their views. Altogether twenty-four people were interviewed with different questionnaires. Out of twenty-four, four were interviewed in Kathmandu and rest were in Dolalghat.

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion is highly valued as a qualitative research tool, most notably for its ability to generate in-depth insights into a topic in an efficient and timely manner (Masadeh, 2012). It is a flexible and unique tool for gaining in-depth understanding—and gathering diverse opinions and perspectives—on a wide range of subjects (ibid.). Focus groups are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views. They are also useful in generating a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs (Morgan, 1998). Similarly, “focus group discussion provides an opportunity to obtain large and rich amounts of data in the respondents' own words and allows the researcher to interact directly with respondents” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990: 16).

To acquire detail information about the impacts of urbanization and development activities on the traditional occupation of the Majhi people and to know about their socioeconomic status, FGD was conducted in Dolalghat. There were seven participants altogether including Majhi peoples, a teacher from nearby school and representative of local Village Development Committee. It lasted for one and half hour. The discussion was mainly centered on the impacts of urbanization and development, their changing livelihood, socio-economic status of Majhi community, their way of resource management, comparison of past and present way of fishing etc.

3.5.3 Observation

Observation can be an invaluable method of primary data collection as it is the perception of our sense organs. It is the “most reliable source of data which is based on what we see, what we perceive through our sense organs and no need to filter by what other might have reported or author of some documents might have seen” (Yin, 2000: 143). I agree with Bryman (2001) that a researcher in observation is advantaged to capture data in a more natural social setting. While conducting the fieldwork, I got the opportunity to observe the lifestyle of the Majhi people. I was able to realize how difficult the life of Majhi people as they do not have enough land for farming, no better education, no skill for new works and no access to the mainstream of the country. I even visited the site of one hydropower, from where the Majhi people were displaced. The Majhi people told me that after the dam was constructed, they were displaced to the higher place from there. The land where they used to cultivate was cover by water. Due to the diversion of water, there was an ecological impact too. Similarly, I saw the rivers were extracted unlimitedly for sand and gravel. Due to which the natural inhabitant of fishes is disturbed. Because of unlimited extraction of rivers in the winter season, the Majhi told me that these rivers would change their natural flow and will damage the peoples land and property in the summer.

Moreover, I also observed the way of fishing in the river which is continuing as their heritage. Though there are modern bridges over the two rivers in Dolalghat, we can still see some small boats. Especially the local people use it for short way to cross the rivers and the tourists and visitors who come in Dolalghat use it for a new experience and for refreshment. I also experienced the boat trip in the river which was very amazing.

3.5.4 Document Review

Document review is an important part of research method in qualitative research which examine the wide range of documents including personal documents, official documents, press items, visual output etc. to gain an in-depth understanding about particular social phenomena (Bryman, 2001). Documents provide background and context, additional questions to be asked, supplementary data, a means of tracking change and development, and verification of findings from other data sources (Owen, 2009). In my case, I have collected books, articles and research papers related to Majhi community and indigenous people. I have also collected some master's thesis from Tribhuvan University library for more information.

3.6 Field Experience

I was very excited going back to Nepal for fieldwork for my thesis. It was my first visit to my homeland after I came to Norway for study. After my short visit to my family and relatives, I used my all energy getting access to the informants. Though I was unfamiliar with Majhi people and their culture in the beginning, the interaction and discussion with the Majhi activists and leaders in Kathmandu make me feel comfortable. I was fully confident and had made a clear picture of Majhi people and their culture and livelihood. In this sense, the leaders and activists from the Majhi community helped me a lot. Dan Bahadur Majhi provided me some very important books written by himself about the culture and lifestyle of Majhi. He even provided the names and contact information of local Majhi peoples who could contribute to my project. Apart from Dan Bahadur Majhi, I met and talked with Govinda Lal Majhi, Basanta Majhi and Pemba Gurung about Majhi and indigenous movement. In this way, I spent one week in Kathmandu before going to Dolalghat. I collected important information and knowledge before going to Dolalghat.

When I reached Dolalghat, I was overwhelmed by the natural beauty of it. Emerging city on the lap of high hills, with two rivers Indrawati and Sunkoshi flowing in the center, Dolalghat really fascinated me. While being there, I stayed in a hotel. But I spent all most time with Majhi peoples listening to their experiences and stories. There are two small villages of Majhi in Dolalghat. In contrast to the beauty of Dolalghat, the life of Majhi people is not so easy. Nepal was hit by the massive and disastrous earthquake in April 2015. It is good to hear that all the Majhies of Dolalghat were safe in the earthquake but sad thing is that almost all the houses of Majhies' were demolished. The Majhi were waiting and expecting some help and support from the government and other non-government organizations. When I was there, in the beginning, they thought I belonged to government person or some aid agency, coming there to support them. It was obvious to expect some support and help who were victimized by the massive earthquake. Some even suspected me coming there to make money. It is because many people working in NGO/INGOs use to come there and provide the dreams of prosperity and happy life. But in reality, they do not do anything. When I told them about myself and my purpose, then they openly helped me. I found the Majhi people were very humble and helpful.

The time I went for field work was pre-monsoon time in Nepal and it was time to plant crops. It was almost impossible to find the Majhi people at home, except some elders and

children. They were busy not only in farm planting crops; it was almost last season to extract sand and gravel from the rivers too. when the rainy season starts, it is impossible to extract sand and gravel from the river. So, it was challenging to meet and talk to them. I utilized my time by visiting their working site, met the fishermen, observed hydroelectric powerhouse which helped me to understand more about them. Anyway, I managed to take interviews and was able to organize one focus group discussion in my two weeks schedule of Dolalghat.

Overall, my experience of fieldwork was exciting. I gained what I have expected before going to fieldwork. Despite being busy in their work, they tried their best to provide me information.

3.7 Ethics and Reflectivity

Ethical issues regarding indigenous people are always sensitive and the researcher should be aware of the consequences and effects of one's action as it affects the people and community (Olsen, 2015: 4-6). Similarly, Kovach (2009:100) emphasizes the need to follow the strict ethical norms so that there will not be the misrepresentation of Indigenous cultures and communities. For this Kovach (2009) argues that if the informant wants to review the story, the researcher should have to give the opportunity to check and approve it. There always exist the potential ethical conflicts while gaining access to a community group and this can be reduced or avoided by applying appropriate ethical principles and maintaining privacy (Orb et.al., 2000: 93).

During the process of data collection, I was very conscious of the ethical issues. As I belong to non- indigenous, *Brahamin* so-called superior caste of Nepal, representing different socio-cultural background, I took it as a great challenge to access the informants. I agree with Wilson (2001) that the research will be more challenging when the researcher is an outsider. Before going to the area study, I gathered important information about the culture and rituals of the Majhi people so that I could maintain my position while dealing with them. I took the idea of Wilson (2001) “respect, reciprocity and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology” as my guidelines while collecting information from the Majhi people. I also strictly followed the common ethical norms of research. Before the interviews, I informed the respondents about my goals and method in detail. I did not hide my personality; who am I, why I was there, what I did and what I would do with that information. I also assured them

about the privacy and none of the informants would be harmed. I conducted the interviews with the consent of my informants. I told them that it was a purely a voluntary work and they were free to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. Moreover, I also told them that they would not be personally benefitted by it and requested not to expect any monetary or other benefits form the researcher.

Chapter 4: Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I focus on the theoretical perspective for the analysis of the data. It specifically deals with the concept of sustainable development, traditional ecological knowledge, and resource management.

4.1 Sustainability and Sustainable Development

IUCN¹¹ Inter-Commission Task Force on Indigenous Peoples (1997) defines the term sustainability as ‘a characteristic of a process or state that can be maintained indefinitely’, and sustainable development as ‘improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems (IUCN, 1997: 32). The central concept of IUCN is to improve the quality of both human being and the ecosystem. People need to improve their relationship with the ecosystem so that it does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity. The indigenous communities who have lived for many generation following sustainable lifestyle by developing harmonious relationship with environment are threatened by a series of problems like overuse of natural resources, pollution, soil degradation, global climate change etc. (Freitas et al., 2004).

Sustainable development does not have any fixed goals to be achieved by using specific technologies, policies, institutions or actions but it is a continuous process characterized by the approach used in guiding change (Mog, 2004). For Mog, a sustainable approach must be one “based upon continuous learning and adaptation if the participants of development are to have any success in a world where conditions e.g., environmental health, resource constraints, policies, technologies, markets, etc. are in constant flux” (Mog, 2004: 2140). Sustainable development is possible by using the traditional skill and knowledge of indigenous people and participating themselves in the process which can help to keep the nature and environment intact. Sustainability and sustainable development is an alternative of ‘western- inspired development which has a disastrous effect on the planet and for world’s indigenous communities’ which supports to use the biological resources in a sustainable way (IUCN, 1997: 33).

According to Loomis (2000) the indigenous peoples’ knowledge, experience and efforts are overlooked to conceptualize and operationalize the term sustainable development. It is because of the indigenous peoples’ attraction towards traditional lifestyles and their

¹¹ International Union for Conservation of Nature

dependency on nature for livelihood strategies. Loomis (2000) sees the necessity to utilize the indigenous knowledge and experience for the successful completion of any development projects. Loomis observes sustainable development as self-determined “holistic development” based on indigenous knowledge and practices with “traditionalism” (Loomis, 2000: 893). Loomis also emphasizes the relationship between the human economy and the natural environment. For the positive influence of international development agendas and state policies, the tendency of recognizing indigenous peoples’ knowledge, science and ethics have much to offer to the sustainable development. Loomis (2000) argues that there is no need to live in poverty or follow subsistence living while following traditional perspective rather one must keep harmony with nature for sustainable development.

The connection between indigenous knowledge and sustainable development have been recognized by various reports, international agreements and documents. The Brundtland Report defines sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987: 54). Brundtland Report emphasizes the continuity of nature and environment as it was in the past, as it is in the present and as it will be in future for coming generation (ibid.). It is the right of future generation to utilize the gift of nature as equally as their predecessors which is only possible through the ‘positive utilization of indigenous knowledge’ (ibid.). Similarly, Principle 22 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development 1992 also acknowledges the key role of indigenous people. It states:

Indigenous peoples and their communities, and other communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture, and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development (United Nations, 1992).

Likewise, the 26 Chapter of Agenda 21 also emphasizes the role of indigenous people in achieving sustainable development which states:

In view of the interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic and physical well-being of indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and

sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities (United Nations, 1992).

In the case of Nepal, sustainable development might be the reliable alternative to uplift the indigenous groups from the vicious circle of poverty. Many indigenous groups have been using their natural resources such as forest and water for their livelihood. Especially, the indigenous groups like *Majhi, Bote, Musahar* are heavily dependent on water. Similarly, for other indigenous groups like *Raute, Kusunda, Chepang*, the forest is everything for surviving. Due to the rapid growth of urbanization and unplanned development structures, the natural resources have been declining and the indigenous people are being deprived of conservation and consumption of the natural resources for the community benefits and future generation (Kunwar & Kshetri, 2014: 32). Kunwar & Kshetri (2014) argues that for the inclusive and environmentally sound development which can reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for today's population and continue to meet the needs of future generations, we should follow the three pillars of Sustainable development- economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion (ibid.).

4.2 Indigenous Knowledge as Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge which is also known as traditional ecological knowledge is based on local knowledge and technology which is considered as inefficient, inferior and an obstacle to development by many theorists of development in the 1950s and 1960s (Agrawal, 1995: 413). But after the failure of Western social science, technology, and institutional organization, the indigenous knowledge with local technology is viewed as the best alternative to fight against hunger, poverty and underdevelopment (Agrawal, 1995: 413). Agrawal (1995) takes the idea of Warren (1991) who defines indigenous knowledge as "*a local knowledge which is unique to a given culture or society that can facilitate the development process in cost-effective, participatory and sustainable ways. It is also the basis for local level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management and a host of other activities in rural communities. Such knowledge is passed down from generation to generation in many societies by word of mouth*" (Agrawal, 1995: 416). Kalland (2000) highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge for the formulation of resource management and the conservation of ecosystem; as they possess the empirical knowledge which is different from the conventional scientific paradigm. Jamieson (2010) claims that indigenous

knowledge has indefinite value and importance in keeping environmental integrity. Jamieson also brings the idea of The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which defines indigenous knowledge as: “*The knowledge that an indigenous (local) community accumulates over generations of living in a particular environment. This definition encompasses all forms of knowledge - technologies, know-how skills, practices, and beliefs - that enable the community to achieve stable livelihoods in their environment*” (Jamieson, 2010: 165). Traditional ecological knowledge is the experience collected from the thousands of years of direct contact of human being with the environment which has a long and rich history. (Berkes, 1993:1). Berkes (1993) defines traditional ecological knowledge as a "cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment” (Berks, 1993 :3). It is the knowledge carried by the non-industrial or less technologically advanced societies especially by the indigenous or tribal people which has the characteristic of historical continuity in resources use practices (ibid.). Focusing on the relevance of traditional knowledge, Berks (1993) has adapted the lists from the IUCN program on traditional knowledge for conservation (IUCN, 1986):

- i. *Traditional knowledge for new biological and ecological insights. New scientific knowledge can be derived from perceptive investigations of traditional environmental knowledge systems.*
- ii. *Traditional knowledge is relevant for contemporary natural resource management.*
- iii. *Traditional knowledge for protected areas and for conservation education.*
- iv. *Tradition knowledge for development planning. The use of traditional knowledge may benefit development agencies in providing a more realistic evaluation of environment, natural resources, and production systems. Involvement of the local people in the planning process improves the chances of success of the development.*
- v. *Tradition knowledge for environmental assessment. People who are dependent on local resources for their livelihood are often able to assess the true costs and benefits of development better than any evaluator coming from the outside. (Berkes,1993: 5-6).*

In the case of the Majhi people, they have their own traditional knowledge which is nature friendly. They have been using this knowledge which was transmitted from their ancestors. They are very aware and sensitive to keep ecological integrity. Due to the subsistence nature of the traditional occupation, it has become a great challenge to preserve the traditional ecological knowledge from the indigenous people.

4.3 Indigenous Resource Management System

Resource management is the only way to get rid of the 'tragedy of commons' (Hardin, 1968). The resource is always limited in nature and people want to extract it in maximum limit which brings the 'tragedy of commons' likely to occur. The successful resource management helps to achieve sustainable improvements in human lives in terms of social justice, ecological sustainability, economic equity and cultural diversity (Howitt, 2001). For the sustainable management of natural resources, along with the active participation of local people, it also requires the social relations, a means of regulating the peoples' access to these resources (Kalland, 2000). Kalland emphasizes on taking a broader approach and consider the socio-cultural dimension while formulating the management regimes. It must be based on the premises and priorities of local people using their language and idioms (Kalland: 2000). The good example of successful resource management is the Sami pastoral areas where there is no historical evidence of overgrazing (Bjorklund, 1990). To avoid the situation of overgrazing and ecological catastrophe, the Norwegian authorities have introduced a law and a set of regulations to reduce the numbers of animals and the numbers of pastoralists hoping that it will help to increase the weight of the animals and consequently the income of the reindeer owners (Bjorklund,1990).

For the sustainable resource management, the joint effort between the government and the local indigenous peoples is necessary. Nadasdy (2005) proposes cooperative resource management as a tool for empowerment of local communities and for the effective management of resources. On the one hand, it allows for the integration of traditional ecological knowledge held by the indigenous nationalities with the modern management strategies which help to make more responsible to the local ecological condition. On the other hand, it empowers the local people by 'giving them a meaningful role in planning and implementing projects that will directly affect them' (Nadasdy, 2005: 217). Nadasdy further argues that in the context of increasing environmental threat posed by the development, co-operative management can play a significant role in community-based or

participatory models of development which guarantees the participation of local peoples in development and makes easy to implement (Nadasdy, 2005: 217). The rise of co-management is directly related to the emergence of community based or participatory models of development where the local people can contribute their knowledge about their societies and environment that the outsiders lack and it is also supposed to be more rational and cost-effective in comparison to centralized bureaucratic management which tends to be inefficient and expensive (ibid.). Nadasdy also talks about the unforeseen and unintended consequences of co-management. There might be the chance of “bureaucratization of the people and communities who participate in co-management and rather than empowering local aboriginal communities, it may actually be serving to extend state power into the very communities that it is supposedly empowering” (Nadasdy, 2005: 216).

Co-management of natural resources between indigenous people and state agencies can contribute in empowering the disadvantaged community from the margin by making them participate in meaningfully in decision making and benefit sharing (Castro and Nielsen, 2001). Co-management also helps to balance the traditional ecological knowledge with the modern methods while dealing with nature (ibid.). The empowerment of indigenous people is possible only through co-management of natural resources which helps to bring the “previously excluded disenfranchised and sometimes alienated user groups and stakeholders into the management decision-making process by reshuffling power and responsibility among them” (Jentoft, 2005: 1).

The Majhi people have lost the right of managing their local resources since there have been the intervention from the other communities and the government. With the increasing invasion on their local resources from the outsiders, they not only lost their traditional way of livelihood, the environment is also adversely affected. The Majhi people are the first victims of environmental degradation which affects directly on their life. So, to stop further ecological degradation and keep environment intact, there should be the joint effort from the government and the local people. It is possible only by regulating some rules and regulations which are developed by the Majhi people and making their meaningful participation in decision making and implementation process.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Analysis

In this chapter, I discuss and analyze the current situation of the Majhi people after their traditional occupations were changed. Firstly, I present the details about the traditional occupation of Majhi people. I discuss the type of occupations they had in the past. How they exercised their life in the past is analyzed. Secondly, I elaborate about the way to resource management of Majhi people. The aim is to present how the Majhi people managed limited resources by using their traditional ecological knowledge. Then, it covers the impacts of urbanization and development activities on the livelihood of Majhi people in details. The attitude of young generation towards the traditional occupation is presented in next part. Finally, it presents the expectations and aspirations of Majhi people.

5.1 Traditional Occupations of the Majhi People

The Majhi people have been living in the bank of rivers since long ago. When people were scared living near the rivers because of different kinds of diseases and fear of wild animals, these people chose the same area for their settlement and livelihood. They used rivers for boating and fishing while the land near the river for cultivation. In this way boating, fishing and cultivation were the main occupation of the Majhi people in the past. According to Majhi (2005), the Majhi people were allowed to use the plain land near the rivers for cultivation, settlement and to land boats with certain conditions that they should not leave the land without cultivation. The land was given to them by the then king as '*Kipat*'. Adhikari (2011) defines the *kipat* system as a traditional form of community based land ownership, where the land was allocated according to their need but not for sale or purchase. This system was abolished in 1964 by the government and brought under state ownership (Adhikari, 2011: 19). The Majhi people had to full fill certain responsibilities for using *kipat* land such as they had to operate boating in rivers in any circumstances to cross the river at least once in a day and had to make cross the river to the staff of post offices and government staffs (Majhi, 2005). There is no more right of this community in the land after it was abolished in 1964. Until the *kipat* system was in existence, the Majhi people were economically in a good position. Beside boating and fishing, agriculture was also their medium for survival. But later when the government canceled the *kipat* system, people from other communities seized the land from Majhi by hook and crook and finally this community was limited in very small area (Majhi, 2005). Majhi (2005) argues that one of the reasons behind the poverty prevails in Majhi

community is the abolishment of the *kipat* system. According to Dan Bahadur Majhi, the Majhi people are very honest by nature and trustworthy. They do not do any kind of things that harm and hurt others. While talking about Majhi peoples' cause of losing land he says:

Majhi people are honest and believe other people very easily. The crafty people deceived on Majhi peoples' honesty and seized good land from them by hook and crook. The uneducated and honest Majhi people could not defend with them. Many other indigenous groups also have similar grievances like Majhi people that the other so-called superior people from 'Khas Aarya'¹² who have access and power intruded and seized the fertile and good land (interview,2016).

There are more than two thousand rivers in Nepal. The Majhi people have dense population especially in the bank of tributaries of *Sapta Koshi* river, one of the biggest river of Nepal and settlements in almost all part of Nepal except some mountainous districts. This is the one main reason behind their settlement in 63 different districts out of 75 districts of Nepal. Nepal is still a developing country and for a long time, it was away from modern developments and technologies. In many places, people are still using risky way to cross the rivers. In the past when there were no bridges the majhies were the only medium to cross the big rivers. According to the elderly male informant (72), boating was the main medium for livelihood in the past for majhies. He further states:

when we were children, there were no bridges and roads. People had to walk to go to another place. In every main route, there were majhies for crossing the rivers. They charged some money for crossing the river. The majhies took the responsibility of different rivers to help the people cross the rivers. My grandfather did boating in Dolalghat for his whole life and my father and three uncles also joined the same profession but in different places. I also started the boating profession when I was sixteen. I learned to boating when I was 12/13 (male informant, 72).

According to him after the construction of bridges over the rivers, the Majhi slowly left this profession and shifted to other fields. His three sons also did not choose this job. He further informed me that there were high competitions among Majhi people to get a good

¹² Khas Aarya are the privileged groups of Nepal who have been enjoying the power

place for boating. In the busy place where peoples' mobilities were high, it was very difficult to get chance to register their boat.

Another male informant (58) shares his experience about this profession, “...*people had great respect to Majhi people as they were the rescuer for many people and people sang songs in praise of Majhi people. But now a day, nobody cares Majhi people*”. I heard similar kind of bitter experience from other elder Majhi people that the society and the state could not recognize their contribution of past.

Fishing is another traditional occupation of Majhi people. Apart from boating, fishing was also their supporting job. These people used to catch fish using traditional skills and equipment. According to another male informant (48), Majhi people have cultural value with fish. Fish is inevitable in different rites and rituals of Majhi people. In every cultural occasion fish and food made up of fish are necessary. He adds, “...*fish is an integral part of Majhi people. We cannot imagine any rites and rituals without fish. Fish is used from birth to death rituals of Majhi people*”.

He further adds, “... *fishing is our culture. We do not catch fish only for consumption and gaining income, fishing is our medium of entertainment. Every age group of Majhi people; child, young, elder, women, all enjoy fishing*”.

Obviously, fishing is not only the way of earning for Majhi people, it is connected with their culture. Unlike the boating, where only male members are engaged; in fishing women are also actively participated. My female informant (46) adds: “...*I used to go fishing from my childhood with my parents and friends. I still enjoy fishing. We Majhi people can catch fish of flowing water with bare hands. When we were children, we had a competition of catching more and big fishes*”. According to her (46) Majhi people do fishing for different purposes. There were many Majhi people whose main job is to catch fish and sell them in the market. While some catch fish for food and entertainment too. Fishing is a source of income of some Majhi people still now. Whenever they do not have other work, they go fishing in the rivers. One of my male informants (45) whom I met in the river doing fishing says, “... *I go fishing whenever I do not have other work urgent. It helps me to earn extra some more money and good food for the family. I sell it in the market and buy household things like salt, oil etc.*”. He is an example who has been continuing traditional occupation of fishing beside his other profession of chicken farm. When I asked him how much he earned by fishing in a day, he replies, “...*it depends on how much fish you*

caught, it is very difficult to catch 1 kg fish in this season and it costs according to type of fish from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 1500 per kg (around 80-130 kroner)”. It is a good price in the context of Nepal. He also added that there is no problem of a market if you can catch more fishes.

In the past when there were no big markets near the Majhi village, they used to exchange fish with grains with people of other communities. According to the informant (72), the Majhi people exchanged fish with grains like rice, maize, millet etc. In festival time, there was high demand for fish from the elite people of society. He further says “...beside exchanging with grains, many the Majhi people used to take fish to the houses of Ranas¹³, ministers and businessman in different occasions. We dried the fishes which were collected and went to Nepal¹⁴. There we sold and bought clothes, salt and other necessary things for households”. Even today this place is popular for delicious fish. Many people come to this place to taste the local fish.

Likewise, farming and husbandry are also their traditional occupation which they are continuing. They are doing these in very small scale which is not sufficient for livelihood. In the fieldwork observation, I noticed some chickens, goats and one or two pigs in almost all houses. They also have a small piece of land which is not so fertile for agriculture. When I talked to a couple working in the farm, they told me that the production from the land is hardly sufficient for 2-3 months.

Similarly, another traditional occupation of these people is making ‘*marcha*¹⁵’ and ‘*jhad*¹⁶’. Specially majhi women involved in this profession. Majhi people take *jhad* as an alternative to food. They believe *jhad* gives high energy and keeps them energetic. While going to fieldwork, I also noticed women involving preparing *jhad*. While talking with local women, one of my female informant (44) said, “... now a day we are not allowed to make *jhad*. If the police knew about it they would destroy all. Though there is high demand for it, we could not make it because of fear of police”. In Nepal, making house-made beer and alcohol is illegal with the purpose of selling in the market but they can make it for household use. In many indigenous communities, alcohol is inevitable in different rites

¹³ The ruling class of Nepal for 104 years

¹⁴ People call Kathmandu, the capital city as Nepal even today in some places

¹⁵ A chemical use to make local beer

¹⁶ A house made alcohol like beer

and rituals. Indigenous communities offer homemade beer and alcohol to their guests as a culture of welcoming.

Collecting firewood from the river is another traditional occupation of the Majhi women. The Majhi people live near rivers and spend most of their time in the river. The Majhi women make engage in collecting firewood which is carried by the rivers from the jungle. Especially in the time of summer (the rainy season in Nepal from May to August), the rivers bring firewood and timbers from the jungle. The Majhi women collect it and sell in the market. My female informant (44) says, "*... it is very risky collecting firewood from the river. Sometimes there is equal chance to be drowned in the river. There is no good price of firewood in the market. Sometimes single bundle of firewood is not sold and have to return home empty hand*". According to her, the price of one bundle of firewood is from Rs. 25 to Rs. 50 (from NOK 2 to 4) which is very low in comparison to the labor and time it is needed to collect and sell.

5.2 The way of Resource Management of The Majhi People Then and Now

Many indigenous people have their own way of resource management system. They primarily depend on the natural resources for livelihood which are found around them. They have developed a chain of knowledge system how to utilize the limited resources in a maximum way and for sustainability. Indigenous peoples' resource management system is a part of their traditional knowledge which is continued from one generation to another generation. For the Majhi people, their main resource for subsistence was water (rivers). So, they have their own rules and regulations and system for managing the resource. The Majhi people knowledge of resource management is transferred from one generation to another. Anita Maurstad (2002) terms this kind of knowledge as "conjurer type knowledge" which is protected and shared by only a few. It is transmitted by special rituals which have a meaning in a social context as part of a social activity (Maurstad, 2002: 162). Storytelling to their grandchildren by the elderly people is another interesting way of transmitting knowledge to the new generation. The Majhi boys started to learn fishing and boating from the age of 10 to 12. They used to follow their grandfathers in the rivers. My male informant (52) narrates his childhood memory:

when I was ten years old, I started to follow my grandfather in the river for fishing. We used to go river in the early morning with nets for catching fishes. I enjoyed fishing and more than that I loved to listen to interesting stories from my

grandfather. He not only taught me how to catch fishes in different ways but also shared me interesting stories about his experience. He also told me the Majhi peoples history, their lifestyle in the past, his experience of selling fishes in the city and many more (informant, 52).

As fishing and boating are the main traditional occupations of the Majhi people, their main resource for livelihood is water. For them rivers are everything. They have a very intimate connection to the rivers. Majhi people claim that they are the nature lover and they worship river as the source of purity and spirituality (Majhi, 2005: 90). My informant (72) shares the folk story of dolphin and Majhi to show their relationship with other animals of the ecosystem:

In the past when Majhi men went for fishing they used to take help of dolphin for catching fishes. Majhi whistled in a special sound and the dolphin knew it was the Majhi. The dolphin then went to the place where there were more fishes and splashed the water. The fishes then moved to the bank of the river and the Majhi threw the net and caught more fishes in short time. The dolphin also came to the bank of the river and the Majhi served some fishes to dolphin (informant, 72).

Elaborating the relationship between Majhi and the dolphins; he further adds, *"We worship dolphins as water god. For us, they are very trustworthy friends. Dolphins could identify what kind of person you were. Dolphins could easily recognize your whistle whether you were from Majhi or from outsiders. Nowadays, you cannot see dolphins in the rivers"*. He further counterargues towards the people who blame the Majhi people for killing dolphins, *"we cannot even imagine eating dolphins. For us, eating dolphins is worse than eating human being"*.

From this folk story, he is trying to prove the spiritual connection of Majhi people with nature. Taking the help of dolphin was possible because of their nature-friendly manner and respect to other creatures of the ecosystem. On the other hand, we can also argue that the Majhi people were using the dolphin for their benefit.

Majhi peoples also have developed a set of rules and regulation about fishing which they take as 'religion'. These sets of rules and regulations are developed as their culture and every Majhi follows it by heart. Majhi people have certain rules regarding about the size of

fishes and the time of fishing. Majhi people do not catch very small fishes. They believe that catching small fish is a kind of 'committing sin'. My informant (72) adds:

We Majhi people do not catch very small fishes. When they are trapped in the net, we send them back to water. It is because we love them even though we kill them. When we send them back to water, they will grow up and later we can catch again (informant, 72).

This is also an example of how Majhi people are maintaining the ecosystem from their side. Majhi people do not catch fishes in the season of fish's reproduction time. He (72) further adds:

we know the time of reproduction of fishes and at that time we do not disturb them. In the reproduction time, fishes come up from the down especially in the month of August and September. we can find different types of fishes in the different season. The movements of fishes are different according to their types. Some fishes enjoy in the bank of the river where water flow is low while some fishes are found around and under the big stones and rocks (informant, 72)

Fishing is done individually as well as collectively in Majhi community. Especially, the *Duwali*¹⁷ is done collectively in this community. The person who is not involved in the process of *Duwali* is not allowed to catch fish there because lots of energy and time is spent for *Duwali*. *Duwali* is very famous in Majhi community. On the day of *Duwali*, Majhi people leave everything urgent and all the members of the family participate in *Duwali*. My male informant (62) elaborates about *Duwali*:

Duwali is a kind of festival for Majhi people. The Majhesaba¹⁸ decided day for Duwali with certain day in a certain part of the river. All of the members of Majhi community have to go there and equally have to contribute to blocking or diverting water. After diverting the water to another side then you are free to catch fishes as much as you like. But if you do not contribute to diverting water process, then you are not allowed to participate in catching fish there. In Duwali time, all the age group including children and women enjoy catching fish. They also sing songs

¹⁷ It is the process of blocking or diverting the water of small rivers or streams to other side and catching fishes when there is no more or very little water

¹⁸ The traditional political and social organization of Majhi community.

while catching fish. Duwali is organized especially in the winter time when there is less water in the rivers (informant, 62).

Though they do fishing individually too, they enjoy fishing in groups. My informant (72) reflects his past days: *“we especially male people used to go fishing from the early morning in groups of 4-5 people with nets (Jaal). It was also the moment of sharing one’s personal feelings, sorrows to other members”*.

The Majhi people do not use harmful chemicals for killing fishes. They use certain methods and instruments of fishing which are made by themselves at home. The main instrument is net (*Jall*) which is different in size and they have named it according to its size such as very big net (*Mahajaal*), big net (*Thulojall*) etc. Similarly, they put different types of traps for catching fishes such as ‘*Dhadiya*’, ‘*Khunga*’ etc., which are made up of bamboo. Catching fish by using fishing rod is also very famous in Majhi community. They also use some locally found herbs which make fish dull for some time (source: respondents). They use the different types of nets for catching different types of fishes according to their sizes. For example, ‘*Asala*’ are local fishes which are found in small rivers and are in small sizes. These types of fishes are very tasty and are expensive too. To catch these fishes, they use the small net (informant, 62).

Another male informant (58) shares his experiences about trapping fishes in ‘*Dhadiya*¹⁹’:

Making Dhadiya is very common for catching fishes in the river. For Dhadiya, we divert a small part of water to the bank of the river and make a trap. Especially in the night time fishes come to the bank of the river where there is a small flow of water and they are trapped in the Dhadiya. Dhadiya is prepared in such a way that the very small fishes can flow in water. In the season when there are many fishes in the river; 2-3 kg of fishes are collected in one Dhadiya within 2-3 hours. In the whole night, some time we collect 15 to 20 kg fishes. But in offseason, we just fix Dhadiya in the river and go back in the morning to check fishes whether they are trapped or not. While fixing Dhadiya we do have the specific place. We should fix it by preparing ourselves. It is illegal to fix Dhadiya in other's place. If we fix in other's place, then the other person can take both fishes and Dhadiya too (informant, 58).

¹⁹ A trap made up of small bamboo sticks knitting each other

The Majhi people have developed their own traditional skills and rules for catching fishes depending on their local knowledge. Being an indigenous group, their skill and rules are also unique. The instruments for fishing are also locally made by themselves and are ecosystem friendly. They are equally conscious about small fishes. So, that small fishes can easily escape from the trap.

The demographic distribution of Majhi people is very scattered. They have covered almost all part of Nepal. Dan Bahadur Majhi argues that it is their strategy to utilize the resources. In an interview, he argues:

The reason behind living in a small number in different places is to utilize the resources of different parts. When there were no bridges and another medium to cross the rivers, the Majhi were the only option. Instead of living in one place and struggling for the livelihood, they chose to migrate to different places where people need their help to cross the rivers. In many places, the government and the local people had requested Majhi people to go there and help them (interview, 2016).

For boating too, they have developed their own rules which helped them to manage resources in an optimum way. According to Dan Bahadur Majhi, who has visited almost all the communities of Majhi people informs that they have a similar type of rules regarding boating. He further says, *“I found almost similar rules all over Nepal regarding boating. There was an inheritance system in choosing Ghat²⁰. If father boated in a certain spot, then his son had the first right to claim it. Still today the Majhi people are guided by same policy”*.

My informant (72) who used to boat some twenty years ago in Dolalghat claims that he is the third generation of his family boating in that place. He adds:

My grandfather came here from Ramechhap (neighboring district of my fieldwork) and chose this place. He told us he had to struggle a lot to get Ghat here. He waited for six months and finally got Ghat where the peoples' flow was less. Later my father also started the same job. Among the three sons of my father, I am the only one to stay here. The two others went to other parts of rivers (informant, 72).

²⁰ Spot for boating where people come to cross the river

It was not easy to get a place for boating in the past too. They had to struggle hard to get good *Ghat*. They have developed the rules for newcomers. One cannot start boating in certain *Ghat* without the consent of the local Majhies and their *Majhesaba*. The *Majhesaba* should give permission for new majhies. But the rule was not applicable for the new place. In the busy *Ghats* where peoples' movement was high, the number of boats was also high. They used to make a schedule for boating and other time they used to involve themselves in fishing and other works (interview, 2016).

The Majhi people used to make the boats by themselves. While making boats, other Majhi people also voluntarily helped. My informant 72 told me that they used to follow certain ritual while making boats. He adds:

Making boats was very important for Majhi community. All the members of Majhi community involved in this process. When we saw a straight tree in the forest, we protect it for making a boat. Before cutting down the tree, we used to worship the tree. All the male Majhi voluntarily help to make a boat. When it was finished we took the help of other people from the different community to bring it to the river. The owner had to give a communal party on that day (informant,72).

5.3 Impacts of Urbanization and Development Activities on Traditional Occupation

Though there are many other factors behind the causes of vanishing traditional occupations of Majhi people, however, urbanization and development activities played the important roles. Urbanization and development bring the changes in the society. Along with many positive changes, urbanization and development activities come with long-term adverse impacts on indigenous communities and their way of managing resources.

Stephens (2015) argues that “urbanization can impact positively or negatively, directly or indirectly on the indigenous community but in terms of access to safe housing, water, and sanitation, personal security and alienation; they are particularly negatively affected”

(Stephens, 2015: 56). Furthermore, urban development processes can affect indigenous peoples by encroaching on indigenous territory and displacing them from traditional land. Similarly, the process of “urbanization can also push resource extraction processes into indigenous territories and create widespread environmental destruction, undermining indigenous livelihood sources and creating a range of health issues in these communities” (Stephen, 2015: 57).

5.3.1 Urbanization and Development: Curse or Blessing?

The central focus of this study is also to analyze and explain how the Majhi people are affected by the rapid growth and unplanned urbanization, how the development activities pushed them to the corner instead of rewarding them from the benefits. Due to the urbanization and development activities, the Majhi people not only lost their traditional way of livelihood based on their traditional occupation and knowledge but also forced to be displaced from their native territory. My informant Dan Bahadur Majhi explains how the modern form of development affected the Majhi people to continue their traditional occupation. He explains:

After the Koshi barrage²¹ was built around in 1956 in Sunsari district of Nepal, the black days for Majhi were started. The Koshi barrage was built with the purpose of controlling the flood to India, it blocks the natural way for fishes to come up from the sea. It directly affected the Majhi people who were living in the bank of tributaries of Koshi river. After the barrage was built, the fishes could not come up when the water level is low in the river. From that day, the Majhi peoples' traditional occupation fishing was in crisis (interview, 2016).

This is one example how development affected the traditional occupation of indigenous people. Instead of benefiting from the environmental changes that follow urbanization and developments, it pushes the indigenous people towards further marginalized and brings serious challenges in their livelihood strategies (Chhetri, 2006). The Majhi people who were depended on rivers for survival were forced to change their occupation because of this barrage. The authority did not think about the result of a single barrage that thousands of Majhi people would be affected by it. This is also an example of government's insensitiveness towards indigenous people. When I talked to my informant (72) he also expressed the same kind of grievances with the government.

The government did not think about poor people that they would die of hunger. Many Majhi people were in shock at that time. We had no land to cultivate, we did not know other works. Many young went to India seeking for work at that time (informant, 72).

²¹ Koshi barrage was built in 1956 near Nepal and India border to control the flood came from seven tributaries of Koshi rivers.

The path for moving forward to development does not appear to be equally friendly for all kind of people in the country (Bista,1991). He argues that “contrary to the common expectation, some marginalized groups of people seem to be paying most or all of the costs of the so-called development that has to come to their door-steps so that other living around them could gain” (ibid., 133).

According to the World Bank, development projects every year involuntarily displace one million people in the developing countries from their land and homes for the reasons related to the betterment of living conditions, environmental infrastructures, or expansion of public services (World Bank, 1994).

Majhi people are becoming the victim of developments activities till now. These people are not against the developments but their grievances to the government are that the government should respect and acknowledge their culture and way of life. Govinda Lal Majhi argues:

We are not against development activities but it is not a justice to dislocate one from the traditional territory and the government has no right to seize food from one's mouth. The example of Melamchi water project of Sindhupalchowk, in which the water of Melamchi river will be diverted and bring to Kathmandu valley. The local Majhi people are opposing the project saying that it will lose their way of survival but the government is turning its deaf ear. Similarly, another project Budhiganga hydroelectric power of Gorkha and Dhading district also displace the more than fifty Majhi family. The government is offering some compensation but losing one's traditional territory is not compensated by monetary value. Our culture, history is connected with that place. Our blood is mixed with that water (interview, 2016).

Obviously, losing one's native land is not compensated by any value. Along with land, they are losing their way of life, tradition, culture, and everything. Though Nepal has ratified ILO convention 169, it is not fulfilling the condition of taking consent of local people before the development project started. The Majhi people are forcefully displaced from their native land which is against the ILO convention 169.

Development projects aim to facilitate the people, bring prosperity but for Majhi people these projects are impoverishing. Before the bridges were built, many Majhi people were

involved in traditional occupations. They had not to be worried about hand to mouth problem. Many Majhi people had managed to survive by boating in the rivers. But at present, the situation is not similar. They have to struggle hard just to survive. Mehar (2009) puts his opinion against the mega development projects. He argues, “such development projects are causing the massive displacement of human populations and the decimation of the sustainable subsistence agriculture of the peoples who have traditionally been dependent upon their local ecosystems for survival” (2009, 458). These projects only generate benefits for the few relatively better sections of the population while marginalizing and excluding the poorer tribal peoples (Mehar, 2009: 459).

My male informant (62) remembers the past days which were comparatively easier than now. He adds:

My father and I used to boat in Indravati river. We did not have any problem for surviving. We were paid some money from the people and grain from the villagers. The villagers had to give a certain amount of grain annually for making them cross the river. And we ourselves used to catch fish. So, the life was easy and joyful. But now there is nobody to use the boat for crossing river as there are many bridges are built above the rivers (informant, 62).

Despite having several positive impacts of urbanization and development activities, the Majhi people are adversely affected by these indicators of modernism. Instead of bringing the light of prosperity and happy life in Majhi people, urbanization and development activities taking place in their territory pushed them to the corner of opportunities.

5.3.2 Ecological Impacts of Urbanization and Development Activities

The main impact of urbanization and development activities for their sustainability and resource management is ecological impacts. As the Majhi people depend on nature for livelihood, the direct impact is seen on nature and natural resources. The growing rate of urbanization and development activities “produces some of the greatest local extinction rates and frequently eliminates the large majority of native species which ultimately threatens the uniqueness of ecosystem” (McKinney, 2002: 883). Due to the ecological impacts of urbanization and development activities, the Majhi people are facing various problem in their day to day life. The main impacts as McKinney argues is the extinction rates of fishes from the rivers.

My informant Dhan Bahadur Majhi argues that due to the growing rate of urbanization in the native Majhi community, the outsiders are not only intervening their natural resources but also creating the problem in the ecosystem. He adds:

Due to the rapid urbanization, the rivers are being polluted day by day. People add their safety tanks directly to the rivers. The harmful chemicals are mixed with the water. Due to the pollution and harmful chemicals, in some of the rivers like Bagmati and Bishnumati, the single creature does not exist. This might happen in all rivers if the strict measure is not applied. In many emerging cities of Nepal, the rivers are the easiest way to manage the garbage. The municipality and other government agencies are not looking an alternative place for garbage management. If the government and other stakeholders are not serious about managing the garbage in right place, the other rivers also face the same fate like Bagmati and Bishnumat (interview, 2016).

Li and Ma (2014) also argue, “the process of urbanization affects the condition of an environment by changing the levels of polluting emissions which is more than the development of the economy and the population's health, education and socialization” (2014, 5143). While interacting with the informants the Majhi people have also realized that they are victimized by the ecological impacts brought by the urbanization and development activities. My informant (62) claims that pollution and use of harmful chemicals are the main factors for decreasing numbers of fishes in the rivers. According to him, the rivers were crystal clean just before twenty years ago. He adds, “*these rivers were very clean till twenty years ago. We could see fish playing deep in the rivers. But now the water is very much polluted. Even we feel hesitation to swim. I have not seen the dolphins since last twenty years*”.

He further recalls his memory and compares with present reality. He adds, “*when we were young we easily caught 2-3 kg fishes within 1 hour but now it takes an entire day. The number of fishes is decreasing due to the pollution and different kind of chemicals mixed in the rivers*”. When talking about the loss of fishes in the rivers he adds, “*people use a different kind of harmful chemicals for fishing. They want to catch more in the short time. They do not think the ecological impact of chemicals in the rivers. The other reason is the growing trend of using electric shock to the fishes. This electric shock kills the fishes along with other aquatic animals like frogs, snakes*” (informant, 62).

Due to the use of harmful chemicals and use of electric shock to catch the fishes in the river, many local species of fishes and other aquatic animals are endangered (Kantipur Daily, 2018, March 4). In his research in some rivers, it was found that out of 108 local species of fishes, 60 are in highly endangered position and the rest of the other are already disappeared (ibid.). The local fishes are full of nutrition and are very good for women and children. For the good health of women and children too, the local fishes should be protected (ibid.).

Similarly, the over-exploitation of the river for sand and gravel is another reason for decreasing number of fishes. My informant (49) also expresses the same concern. He adds:

Now the rivers are the easiest source for sand and gravels. As the urbanization and development activities increased, the demand for sand and gravels are also increased. The overexploitation of rivers for sand and gravels disturbs the flow of rivers which ultimately interrupts the natural habitat of fishes (informant, 49).

I have witnessed the exploitation of river when I went there in data collection process. The excavators and dozers were everywhere in the bank of rivers extracting sand and gravel. Hundreds of trucks and trippers were waiting in queue for uploading the gravel and sands. The gravel extraction and destructive fishing practices such as chemical poisoning are the major forces affecting fisheries resources as well as fishers' livelihood (Dahal and et.al., 2013).

Likewise, the unplanned development activities also brought natural disaster in many indigenous communities. The Majhi people have also become the victim of landslides and flood every year. After the construction of the motorable road near the Majhi community, every year in monsoon they live in fear of landslide and their source of drinking water was dried up. One elder informant (72) complains about the effects of construction of the road near the community. He says, "*before the construction of this road, we were living in the very peaceful environment. But now it becomes a hazardous place. Our source of drinking water was also dried. We are exhausted by the noise, pollution. We, the nature lover, want to live in a peaceful place*".

Similarly, Govinda Lal Majhi also expresses his anger towards the government policy for not being serious about the future of around 37% indigenous people. He adds:

The government of Nepal is not indigenous friendly. It is not doing anything to promote the indigenous and ethnic people. Though we have 58 indigenous group and many ethnic groups but not a particular group is dependent on their traditional occupation. The language and culture are almost disappearing. The indigenous people are obliged to displace from their native place for shelter and security (interview, 2016).

5.3.3 Social and Cultural Impacts of Urbanization and Development Activities

Urbanization and development come with some social change and awareness. It naturally pushes change and modifies traditional life style of indigenous people (Gurung, 1998). While visiting the Majhi community and interacting with the Majhi people I found positive as well as negative attitudes of people. The people shared their experience with present reality. My male informant (51) is not so glad about the changes made to urbanization and development. He argues:

At present, the so-called modernity interferes with every aspect of life. In past, we have our own type of dress, language, and culture. People started to forget their originality. Even I cannot speak my language well. Whom to blame. People wear the market clothes; the young generation cannot speak Majhi language. When we request them, they feel shame to speak Majhi language in another people presence. The new generation is more fascinated to celebrate others' festivals than owns” (informant, 52).

It is the bitter reality and challenge of every indigenous community to create an attraction of young generation towards their culture and tradition. Except in some cultural programs, the traditional clothes are not seen.

When I talked to a lady (34) she proudly told me that she enjoyed watching Hindi serials²² than the local programs. She further adds, “...except very few elder peoples, other people even do not know to speak Majhi language. There is no any benefit of speaking this language. It does not give us work. Even in school, we are taught in Nepali and English, how can the new generation learn to speak the language”. Her conversation reflects the importance of native language in children. In Nepal, the medium of instructions is mainly the English and Nepali in schools. Despite the growing concern and recognition of the

²² The TV programs broadcasted from India

need of mother tongue education in school level education, there is an increasing trend of adopting English medium of instruction in the name of getting more opportunities and getting quality education.

My informant (66) is worried about the developing tendency of ‘I’ from ‘We’. According to him, the communal feeling was very strong in the Majhi community in the past. The whole community is like a single family. They used to share their joy and sorrow together. They strongly followed the community decision as their own decision. They had a culture of respecting each other. He worries, “... *now the people do not follow community decisions, they are more focused on their private benefit rather than community benefit. The trend of respecting each other is also decreasing*”. He further explains the reason “... *it is because of urbanization, people have access to people from other cultures. People watch television programs, they learn different things. People are divided into different political parties. Now, people start to keep relation based on wealth, ideology. People forgot their tradition and culture*”. My other informants also agree on the facts that the feeling communal is degrading day by day in the Majhi community. The elder lady (61) also is worried about the growing individualism in the Majhi community. She further shares her experience, “... *the Majhi community was not like this in the past. They used to share each and everything with the members. We never used to feel that we were single. The community was always ready to help each other. If one was in trouble, we felt it as a common problem. We even knew what did the cow give birth to a certain house? But now even the brothers of the same house do not speak to each other. It is because of the influence of outer culture. I want my own culture*”.

People also talked about the brighter side of urbanization and development in Majhi community. Because of urbanization and development, people have the broader access to employment, market for their production, awareness is increasing day by day and enjoying the more comfortable life than before. My male informant (48), who worked in India for some years argues:

We should not engage in past and tradition. We should move according to the world. The world has done so much progress but we are still in a primitive stage. I think if we hesitate to walk with the speed of world, we cannot do any progress. We must accept the present. For me, the culture of the Majhi people is the main factor for our poverty. We should have to look other alternatives. Though I could not

study, I have sent my three children to English medium school. I want to make my children more competitive (informant, 48).

My female informant (34) also agrees with my previous respondent. She argues:

For me the urbanization and development at least brought awareness in the community. I read only up to five class but my elder daughter is reading in class 9 now. Urbanization and development have brought many positive changes in the Majhi community too. People go to the hospital when they are sick instead of taking traditional medicine. All the pregnant women deliver their babies in the hospital instead of giving birth at the house. Children go to school near their house. Now, we do not bother for traveling. We can go where ever we want. Many have mobiles phone in their pocket. So, for me, urbanization and development make the life easier (informant, 34).

Going through the interaction with the Majhi people, urbanization and development activities have created some positive as well as negative impacts on society and culture. They are slowly being assimilated on new cultures. Though the elder people are found more worried because of loss of their originality, the new generation is seeking opportunities in present situation.

5.3.4 Economic Impacts of Urbanization and Development Activities

The Majhi people were enjoying their life in subsistence economy for a long time. They did not need to worry about hand to mouth problem like present time. They had abundant natural resources and traditional knowledge which they could use for surviving. Along with the settlement of urbanization and development taking place, their traditional way of life was disturbed. They neither could easily adjust to new circumstances nor continue their traditional way of life. The urbanization and development activities obviously bring the economic growth and prosperity in the country but in case of the Majhi community, it is just opposite. The Majhi community could not take benefit of it instead they are economically ruined. The development projects and urbanization took place since the 60s and 70s decade and was rapidly expanded from the 90s. Along with the expansion of urbanization and development activities, the traditional subsistence economy was disturbed. The natural resources where the Majhi community was depended was intruded by the outsiders. Before the urbanization and development took place, the Majhi people

were mainly dependent on the barter system. Their communal organization *Majhesawa* also played a significant role in economic activities. My informant 72 recalls economic system of his time:

Our economic system was mainly dependent on barter system within our community. If I needed something, I brought it from my neighbor and later I returned it back. We simply did not buy many goods from the market. We got crops from our customers and from our own production. We mainly exchange fish for crops like rice, millet, maize etc. with people from other community. We used cash money only for traveling and to buy salt and clothes (informant, 72).

The modern marketization has replaced their traditional barter system. From the day, they could not make money from their traditional occupations like fishing and boating, their bad days of economic scarcity started. They did not have enough land to cultivate, they did not know other skills other than fishing and boating for the new occupation, they were not economically strong to run the business and they were very backward in education also.

5.4. Present Livelihood Activities of the Majhi People

Due to the rapid growth of urbanization and development activities, the Majhi people are forced to change their livelihood strategies from the traditional natural resources based activities into a growing engagement with non- natural resources based activities. They found themselves challenging and difficult to continue their subsistence-based traditional occupations in the present context.

The Majhi people are mainly depended on daily wages based work, farming, livestock and going abroad for their livelihood. As their traditional occupation is not sufficient for survival, almost all the Majhi people shifted to another field of work. They do not have any fixed type of job rather they do what they get for livelihood. Though they are obliged to shift to other various kinds of works for generating income, they have been continuing their traditional occupations such as farming, livestock, fishing etc. as a means of supporting the family.

Farming is one of the supporting livelihood activities of the Majhi people. The Majhi people use their land for seasonal farming. As they do not have enough and good land for farming, they cultivate a variety of crops such as millet, maize, rice, and vegetables. They use these foods for the consumption by themselves and for the family. While talking to

one couple working on the farm, they said to me that it is enough for maximum three months and they have to look alternative for other nine months (interview, 2016). While talking about food security of the Majhi peoples of my field work area, I did not find any family which is dependent on their own farming. Mostly, the Majhi women are found involving in such farming. The men often go outside home for seeking works and the women stay at home upbringing children and caring elder family members. Every Majhi family has separated a small piece of land for vegetables in their yard. Mostly the elder women take cares of these vegetables. This is a good way to spend time with the elder people too (interview, 2016).

Another characteristic of livelihood strategies of the Majhi peoples I found is every family has some livestock, such as pigs, goats, buffalos, and chickens. They use these animals mostly for the family consumptions and some time for cash income too. These animals are the good source of meat and dairy production. Almost all the families own pigs, goats, and chickens which are comparatively easier than owning buffalos. Buffalos are expensive and need more care. Pigs are special for the Majhi people because they are necessary for cultural and social activities such as wedding ceremonies, festivals etc. (interview, 2016).

Fishing is also a supplement livelihood activity of the Majhi peoples. Though it is no more a professional occupation, the Majhi peoples have not been completely detached from it. It is very difficult to find fishes in the rivers as the numbers of fishes are decreasing due to various reasons. We can see nets and other fishing equipment in every house of the Majhi peoples. Fishes are used for family consumption and sometimes good source of cash income. The freshwater fishes are very expensive in the market. If they could catch fishes it has a good market and earns good money too (interview, 2016).

Apart from the above-mentioned supplement livelihood activities, the Majhi peoples have to involve themselves in different other activities for generating income. According to Dan Bahadur Majhi, as the Majhi people are very backward in education, only very few are able to get jobs in public sector. He argues, the government policy, the poor financial status of parents and the lack of awareness are the main reason for the Majhi peoples backward in education. (interview, 2016). During the interview, I found most of the Majhi peoples work as unskilled labor in different areas.

My informant 31 works in the river near his house where his job is to collect sand and upload it in vehicles. His work starts from early morning to late evening in the season time. He is earning good money too. He adds:

This works is only for the winter period. In the winter, the water is very low in the river and easy to collect sand. If you can work there is no scarcity of work for 3-4 months but after that, we have to look for other work. Sometimes I go to Kathmandu (the capital city of Nepal) looking for work. It's not easy to get work in Kathmandu. We get work there if there are any known friends or contractor. Otherwise, we have to stay at home without work (informant, 31).

As my informant said, there is no guarantee of the fixed job in the same place, he is worried for next job after it is completed. There are around fifty Majhi labors and some from other community working now. The Majhi workers are also worried about the increasing number of workers from other community in their local areas (interview, 2016).

Working in factories, construction site, seasonal labor in cities, helper and drivers in vehicles are the main source of income for many Majhi peoples. Some choose to go to India the neighboring country to sell their labor. One of my informants 52 shares his experiences of working in different areas. He adds:

When I was just 14, I went to India looking for work with my senior relatives. There I worked very hard in young age. As I did not know the language and culture there, it was very difficult time for me. But my relatives were there and I had to earn money to support my family. I had to work 18 hours in a hotel. I came back Nepal when I was 21 and got married. Then I did not want to there again. So, I tried here different work. I worked in a brick factory, construction of houses and also worked as a rafter in later time. Now I do not work anymore outside the house. I just take care of this livestock and farming around my house. Now my two sons are supporting the family. Both sons are in Gulf countries since some years (informant, 52).

He is one of the representatives of the Majhi people. Almost all the Majhi have gone through same fate in their life. They have to wander from one place to another place for getting better work. But positive changes are also seen. They are very aware of the future

of their next generation. The young lady 28 is running her own business. She is happy with her job and very much hopeful for the future. She adds:

I started this hotel two years ago. I sold my pig in fifteen thousand and took some loan to start it. Now I have returned all my investment and I am able to teach my two children in good school. If we can do something new, we can get success (informant, 28).

5.5 Attitudes of the Young Majhi Generation towards the Traditional Occupations

My objective of the research is also to know the attitudes of the young generation of Majhi towards the traditional occupation. I tried to know their responses towards their traditional occupations. During the interviews, they showed the respect and love towards their traditional occupation but none of them is ready to continue it in the current situation.

One of my male informants (22) who dropped out his school when he was studying in class ten works in the river collecting sand and gravel. He told me that he has been working this work in the winter season since he was fourteen years old. When I asked him the reasons for dropping out the study, he explains, "*I am from very poor family. We have to buy each and everything from the market. My parent income was not enough for household expenses. I even used to work when I was a student. I could not read well. So, I dropped out the school*". He knows how to do fishing. He has been doing fishing since childhood but does not know boating. When he was a student, he used to buy the stationery materials including bag and uniform by selling the fishes in the market. He is not sure about his future plan. He is sure that he cannot manage his life from traditional occupations like fishing and boating at present time. He adds:

We love our culture and occupation but the present time is not similar to my grandfather or forefather' time. The life is very difficult now. We have to struggle each and everywhere. As we do not have a good education and enough money, we are forced to work as laborer which is considered as the toughest work. If my parents were educated or had enough money I should not have to do this work. I do not want to continue same work and want to make my children like me (informant, 22).

The above opinion tells a lot about the frustrating situation of Majhi young generation. They are much worried about their educational and financial condition. It is very hard to

find young people who are studying higher education. They are forced to drop out their education at the school level because of poverty and lack of awareness. Here, I agree with the opinion of Jain (2015) that poverty and illiteracy are the main factors to dropout and lower attainment of secondary schools. While talking about the future plans with the Majhi youth, I did not find any clear picture. They just want to get rid of from the life they are living now. Another male informant (24) is also not ready to continue traditional occupation which does not give enough money. He *adds*:

I do not want to continue our traditional occupation because there is no good money. I cannot run my family from it. Like other people, I do have also a dream of earning more money and living a good life. Now, I am working hard collecting sand from the river. If I could manage some money, I want to go gulf country²³ where I can earn good money. After collecting some money, I want to do some business or want to buy a vehicle (informant, 24).

There is no trust of the Majhi youth that even from their traditional occupation too, they can live an easy life. Pemba Bhote blames the government policy for the distraction of indigenous youth towards their traditional occupation. If the government has the policy of promoting all the groups of people equally and has adopted the policy to protect the distinctiveness of indigenous people, this situation would not have come. The government neither can create new jobs nor can protect the indigenous peoples' traditional occupation (interview, 2016). Though the young generation is not interested towards traditional occupation, the elder majhies are wishing their descendent to follow. My informant (66) wants to see his traditional occupation to be continuing in future too. But he cannot even suggest his 18 years old grandson continue it. He *adds*:

I am worried to see the new generation not interested in culture and tradition. Fishing and boating are our identities. When nobody is ready to continue it, our identity is sure to vanish. Even I cannot tell my grandson to continue fishing and boating. I know there is no future. The government should do something to promote it (informant, 66).

Supporting to grandfather, the young Majhi (18) who has recently completed school level says, “if there is a guarantee of our easy livelihood from our traditional occupation, we do

²³ Many Nepalese youths go to the abroad like Saudi Arab, Malaysia, Qatar etc. for work.

not want to wander different place for work. We want to continue our traditional occupation. For this, there must be a proper environment. If I can earn good money from fishing nearby my home why do I go other places"? He also knows how to do fishing and has been doing since childhood but does not know boating. When asked about the plan of further study, he shows interest but I could not see the enthusiasm in his eyes. He clarifies:

Obviously, I am interested to pursue higher education but I am not sure I could finish it or not. I cannot get economic support from the family. I have to work for it. If I could finish higher education and start a good job, it would be the inspiration for my juniors. In case, if I could not finish the study, then my juniors might be demotivated (informant, 18).

The question raised by the Majhi youth is genuine in the sense that until and unless there is no environment to sustain by the traditional work, no one is ready to continue it and there is no meaning of worrying about its future too. Talking formally and informally with the young generation, I found they are much worried about their future. They want to get out of the poverty cycle as fast as possible which is not possible from continuing traditional occupation.

5.6 The Expectations and Aspirations of the Majhi Peoples

In this part, I focused on the expectation of the Majhi peoples from the government for their empowerment and access to the resources. I tried to know the peoples' aspiration for the future. For this purpose, I talked to the leader of NEFIN, activists of the Majhi communities, the local government authority and some Majhi and other local people individually as well as in focus group discussion.

During the interviews and focus group discussion, what I found the common concern is the Majhi peoples are much worried about the loss of their traditional occupation and intervention of outsiders in their local natural resources. The participants mostly focused on the necessity of empowerment of the Majhi peoples.

5.6.1 Need to Recognize and Respect the Indigenous Rights

Though the Majhi people are included in indigenous groups of Nepal, in practice they have not still realized that their rights as an indigenous group are recognized. Nepal has ratified many international laws and treaties related to indigenous people right. But, they are not

applied in practice. Pemba Bhote claims that the government has not done any significant works in favor of indigenous people. He adds, “*the government should recognize the right of indigenous people, their right to land, their right to natural resources, their right to have education in mother tongue, their right to enjoy their culture and tradition*”.

The government of Nepal has addressed very few agendas of indigenous people. It is declared as a secular country but in practice, the Hinduism is still dominating over other religions. The indigenous people who claim that they eat cow meat since the history, are not allowed to slaughter cow²⁴. It is a subject of debate and conflict in Nepal. Gurung (2009) also observes that identity, representation, participation, and social inclusion in every sector of their life as challenges and constraints of indigenous and marginalized people. He suggests “the government should protect and promote their traditional artisan and make them dignified” (Gurung, 2009: 14). The government should implement various international covenants and conventions to end all forms of discrimination and to promote multiculturalism which ensure social, cultural, economic and political rights of indigenous people (ibid.). In an interview, Basanta Majhi who is also a former member of Constitution Assembly argues that the first condition of empowering the Majhi community is ensuring their recognition by the state. He adds:

The government should understand the vulnerability of Majhi people. They are like the defeated soldiers of war who have no any skill to work, no land, no education, no access. Due to the urbanization, their natural resources for livelihood was destroyed, the development activities not only affected ecosystem, they are forced to displace from the ancient place. (interview, 2016)

He further informed me that when he was a member of Constitution Assembly, he had proposed a majhies’ autonomous state including some districts which have dense Majhi population.

5.6.2 Free and Quality Education for Majhi Children

Education is a key factor for the empowerment of every people. The Majhi people have very low status in education. The informants told me that there are very few Majhi who have completed higher education and have a government job. There are several reasons behind the low status of education of the Majhi people. According to Majhi (2006)

²⁴ Hindu people worship cow as Goddess Lakshmi and respect as a mother

poverty, lack of awareness, displacement, and lack of opportunity are the prime reasons for low education status of Majhi people. The government should take the responsibility of free and quality education of all the children and should provide technical education for immediate employment (Majhi, 2006: 22). My informant (58) also sees the similar reasons for the low education of Majhi people. He adds:

I also could not send my four children to school. We did not know the value of education at that time. I was busy at work and stayed most of the time away from home. They were admitted to school but could not continue. For me, lack of awareness and poverty are the main reason for dropping the school of Majhi children" (informant, 58).

My male informant (46) who is a primary school teacher, sees the positive changes in recent days. He adds:

The admission rate of Majhi children in primary school is satisfactory but the problem is in continuation. Most of the Majhi children are regular up to primary level but after that, they drop out. It is because they follow their seniors and the parents also do not force to continue their education. Now, the parents are more conscious about their children's future" (informant, 46).

My young informant (18) who has finished his school level education recently who is planning to pursue higher education. He is not so excited about his future. He further adds, *"I worked hard for getting a school education. I even worked as a laborer many times and collected money for my education. My parents cannot afford for my higher education. There is no guarantee of getting a job also. If I have got the job according to my education, this will attract the parents and the young generation too".*

From the above discussion, it can be said that the Majhi people are being conscious about the importance of education. They have certain limitation too. The government should try to address their concern about free education and guarantee of a job after education. For this, the government should promote technical and practical education which can ensure them engage in different kinds of employment.

5.6.3 Development of Traditional Occupations towards Entrepreneurship

Due to the change in technology, encroaching population, economic shift, social acculturation and dislocation from the ancestral territory, the indigenous people around the world became the victim of chronic poverty, lower education levels and poor health (Peredo, et al., 2004: 3). To improve the socio-economic condition and to rebuild the indigenous 'nation', indigenous entrepreneurship can be the central supporting endeavor (ibid.). Developing traditional occupation as new entrepreneurship might be the good option to empower the Majhi people economically. Govinda Lal Majhi suggests rafting and fish farming are the best option for entrepreneurship for Majhi people. He adds:

Both rafting and fish farming are similar to our traditional occupation and can be the best alternative for livelihood. Due to the construction of motorable and suspension bridges over the rivers, the boating is completely disappearing and due to the intervention of outsiders, extreme use of chemical and extraction in rivers, it is very hard to get fishes from the rivers. Rafting and other adventure games related to rivers are the good way to attract tourist. Similarly, fish farming might be a reliable source of income for Majhi people (interview, 2016).

Instead of regretting what is not available at present, thinking it in a constructive way is a better option. In Majhi case too, if we look for alternative options, rafting and fish farming are the best option for generating income and livelihood. In these kinds of entrepreneurship, they can use local natural resources with which they are acquainted.

Participating in focus group discussion, Buddhiman Shrestha, the local government authority also agrees on the need to change of traditional occupation into entrepreneurship. He adds, *"We have many rivers and lakes all over the country. Recreation in the river is very popular in present days. We can shift Majhi into this new field. If we can use their traditional skill in this field, it is a good source of income for Majhi and finally, it will help to promote tourism in the country too"* (interview, 2016).

My informants also suggest promoting aquaculture as another way to empower Majhi people. Basanta Majhi puts his view, *"the government should bring 'one pond for one family' program for Majhi people for fish farming and provide all the necessary things. We can also promote fish farming communally also. As it is an easy and fast earning*

occupation, this will help to eradicate the poverty of Majhi people and develop them as entrepreneurs”.

Similarly, Govinda Lal Majhi suggests the government to secure job for Majhi in forest and river base industries and occupation. He adds, *“there are many ferries and boats still in Koshi river but the Majhi could not compete with other and deprived of getting a contract from the government. Similarly, same applies to the extraction of sand and gravel from the rivers”.*

Govinda Lal Majhi is worried about the intervention of other people in their traditional occupation. His concern is genuine in the sense that many Majhi people are wandering from one place to other for work and they are struggling for hand to mouth. On the other hand, the works which are related to their traditional occupation and dependent on natural resources are seized by the other people. He also emphasizes on the need of joint effort from the government and the local Majhi people which can contribute in maintaining the ecology and giving employment to the local Majhi peoples.

5.6.4. Right to Revenue of Rivers

The activists and the leaders of Majhi people claim the right to revenue of rivers for the empowerment. As the Majhi people are the native dwellers of the river bank and solely dependent on rivers for livelihood, it's the natural right to get the benefit from the revenue of river-based natural resources. The ILO convention No. 169 recognizes the special importance of land and natural resources for the preservation and development of the identity of the indigenous peoples (Yupsanis, 2004). It also guarantees the right of access and calls for special safeguard for the right of indigenous peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources (Yupsanis, 2004). But in case of Majhi peoples, they have not got anything from the state.

If there are any community victimized by the development of Hydroelectric projects, conservation area, and national parks, it is obviously the Majhies in Nepal. The Majhi are not losing the natural resources for livelihood, but are forced to displace from the traditional territories. Govinda Lal Majhi strongly claims the right to revenue from the natural resources related to Majhi people. He adds,

The Majhi people are victimized in one or other way of development and the policy of conservation. The government of Nepal has the policy of generating as much as

hydroelectric power from the rivers but there is no policy of addressing the victimized. The Majhi people should get some percent of revenue from these projects (interview, 2016).

Basanta Majhi also supports the idea of sharing revenue from the river and river-based resources. As the distribution policy of the government is not equal and based on power and access, the local revenue might be the good source for the empowerment of local people. He further elaborates the importance of local revenue as:

When the local people get right of revenue of local resources, it helps to empower the people according to their local needs. It encourages the marginalized peoples' participation and representation in development and policy-making process (interview, 2016).

The aspiration of indigenous people to share the local revenue for the local need is somehow addressed in the new constitution which was promulgated in 2015.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study is based on a qualitative field research conducted in Dolalghat of Kavrepalanchowk district of Nepal. The local Majhi people of Dolalghat, the activists and leaders working on indigenous movements and the Majhi Development Forum contributed as the main informants for this project.

The main objective of this study was to find out the impacts of urbanization and development activities on sustainability and resource management of the Majhi people in Nepal. In the blaze of development activities and growing urbanization, the indigenous peoples' basic concern and agenda were ignored and suppressed for a long time by the state authority. As a result, some ethnic and indigenous peoples in Nepal are on the verge of losing their identities. Furthermore, they not only lost traditional occupations for their livelihood but also, are being deprived of the resources which they have been using for centuries. Depending on the study analysis, it can be concluded that instead of being benefitted from the urbanization and development activities, the Majhi peoples are adversely affected. First, due to the urbanization and development activities, they have lost their easy traditional livelihood strategies which were based on the sustainable development of the Majhi people. Their way of resource management which was based on traditional ecological knowledge was intervened from the public as well as from the government. Second, they are losing their tradition, culture, and language which are the marks of identification of any indigenous people. Due to the overflow of people in their native territory, they are pushed into the minority in terms of language, culture and religion. Third, after they lost the traditional occupation, they are further pushed into poverty. It is because they do not have new skills and education to compete in the outer world. Based on the findings, the research also highlights the need for empowerment of the Majhi people which may be possible by respecting and recognizing the rights of the Majhi people as indigenous peoples from the government.

The Majhi people were enjoying their livelihood strategies depending on the rivers for fishing and boating till some decade ago. But at present time, due to the urbanization and development activities, the Majhi people are forced to adopt new livelihood strategies. Their traditional occupation like fishing and boating are replaced as people do not need to depend on Majhi for crossing rivers and the number of fishes in the rivers are also decreased. The traditional occupations of the Majhi people were nature-friendly and they

enjoyed their life playing with water either fishing or boating. When there were no bridges over the rivers, the only medium to cross the rivers was by boating. The rivers were not polluted and extracted. So, the fishes were easily available in the rivers. But due to the urbanization and development activities, the traditional occupations of the Majhi people are on the verge of extinction. Based on the findings from the informants' responses and my observation, it is evident that it is impossible for the Majhies to survive through the continuation of the traditional occupation. In most of the places, boating is outdated. The construction of bridges over rivers replaced the boating occupation of Majhi people. In some places, where boating is used as a medium to cross rivers or lakes, the Majhi do not have their control over it. Similarly, due to the rapid urbanization and development activities near the rivers, the number of fishes are depleted. Along with urbanization and development activities, pollution has increased in the rivers. The outsiders interfere the natural resources of the Majhi. The use of harmful chemicals, use of electric shock and explosion for fishing, disturbance of natural habitat of fishes by unlimited extraction of rivers for different purposes, the construction of bridges, canal, high dam etc. in the rivers are main factors of decreasing number of fishes in the rivers. Unlike the boating, the Majhi people are still continuing fishing as supporting occupation and also for family consumption. They are still continuing fishing because of its cultural importance. Fishes are compulsory in some of their rituals as well as they take fishing as a culture. The researcher had seen equipment like fishing nets, traps, fishing rod etc. in almost all the houses while observing in fieldwork.

The underlying purpose of this research was to bring out the way of resource management of the Majhi people. The Majhi people have their own rules and regulation for managing the limited resources which were transmitted by their ancestors. Especially for fishing, they have eco-friendly rules and regulations. They do not use harmful chemicals for fishing. Do not kill very small fishes. They do not kill fishes in the season of reproduction of fishes. Likewise, for boating too, they had certain rules like one should strictly follow the rules and responsibility according to *Majhesaba*.

The major goal of this study was to find out ecological, social and economic impacts of urbanization and development activities. Due to the ecological impacts of urbanization and development activities, The Majhi people are severely suffered. The reason of depletion of fishes in the rivers is due to the ecological impacts of pollution in the river and disturbance of development activities in the natural habitat of fishes. Similarly, because of the

unplanned development activities like construction of roads, extraction of mines, deforestation, the Majhi people are suffering from the landslides, flood, dried sources of drinking water etc. Moreover, urbanization and development activities have affected the social life of Majhi people. The Majhi people are enjoying in others' culture and tradition. They even do not like to speak in their mother tongue. The communality is changing into individualism.

The research also reveals the present livelihood strategies of Majhi people. Based on the informants, there is not a single Majhi who is solely dependent on traditional occupation such as fishing or boating for livelihood. Either they are doing it as a supporting work or just for consumption purpose. They are involved in different kind of unskilled works for their livelihood strategies. The interaction with the young generation of Majhi also supported to conclude that they are very reluctant to continue the traditional occupation. They see it worthless to carry on such occupation which cannot generate good income

This study also identifies the expectations and aspirations of the Majhi people. Though the Majhies are indigenous nationalities of Nepal, their grievances are that the government does not respect and recognized their distinctive characteristics. They want to be recognized as an indigenous group by law and practice. For this, the government should follow the code and convention related to indigenous rights. The government need to protect their native territory and the natural resources that belong to indigenous people. Entrepreneurship based on their traditional occupation may be an alternative to empower the Majhi people from the poverty and backwardness. The study highlights that communal fish farming and water tourism are the best alternatives for entrepreneurship of Majhi people which are somehow related to their traditional occupations.

Hence, due to the urbanization and development activities in native territory of the Majhi people, they are further marginalized. The livelihood strategies of the Majhi people of Dolalghat is in transition in the sense that neither they can continue the traditional occupation nor they can compete in open market. Sustainable development of the Majhi people is possible if their traditional occupations are modified into modern commercialize enterprises which are based on local natural resources.

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