

Park Establishment, Tourism, and Livelihood Changes: A Case Study of the Establishment of Chitwan National Park and the Tharu People of Nepal

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Abstract

Communities adjacent to National Parks may experience socio-cultural transformations from livelihood changes incurred from tourism. The creation of Chitwan National Park (CNP) in Nepal resulted in livelihood transformations for the indigenous Tharu people of Sauraha, Chitwan District, Nepal. This study examines the impacts of CNP and tourism on the Tharu people of Bachhauli Ward and Harnahari Ward in Chitwan District, Nepal. Comparative and qualitative analyses of interview results obtained from Tharu informants are discussed to explain the differential impact of the establishment of CNP and tourism on each Ward. Results show that the economic impact of CNP and tourism in Harnari Ward is higher than in Bachhauli Ward. However, the socio-cultural impact was found to be moderate in both wards. Based upon suggestions provided by Tharu respondents, interviews with park officials, and observations, recommendations are made for improved economic and cultural sustainable development for the communities of Chitwan.

Keywords: National Parks, tourism, sustainable development, livelihoods, Chitwan, Nepal

1. Introduction

Parks and protected areas (PA) serve a variety of functions and roles in society. The primary goal of a protected area is biodiversity conservation (Ormsby&Kaplin, 2004). The designation and management of protected areas is not only for the conservation of biodiversity, but increasingly is an element of sustainable development because of income generated from tourism in many countries (Pimbert& Pretty, 1997). A goal for many national parks is to demonstrate careful and sensitive tourism development that provides recreational opportunities while maintaining environmental quality and aesthetics of surrounding areas.

However, the designation of protected areas may result in a variety of negative consequences for rural communities. Many indigenous peoples inhabit areas in or adjacent to national parks or protected areas (Ghimire&Pimbert, 1997). Many indigenous peoples' livelihoods are based on subsistence use of local and natural resources, agriculture, agropastoralism, or nomadic pastoralism, often supplemented with hunting, fishing, and collecting forest products (Stevens, 1997). When PAs are established, local communities have to change their behaviors, as the natural resources they were previously using may become inaccessible (Stevens, 1997). Restricted access to traditionally used resources, disruption of local cultures and economies by tourists, increased predation of crops and livestock by wild animals, and displacement of people from their traditional lands, leading to social and cultural disruption and enforced poverty are all also considered consequences of protected areas (Hough, 1988).

The purpose of this study is to examine the impacts of the Chitwan National Park and associated tourism on the Tharu people of Sauraha in Chitwan District of Nepal (Figure 1). Chitwan National Park (CNP) was established in 1973, the first national park of Nepal. CNP lies in the southern part of the Central Development Region of Nepal and spreads over the four districts of Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Parsa, and Makawanpur (His Majesty's Government [HMG], 2002).

In 1984, the United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared CNP a World Heritage Site because of the unique ecosystems and cultures surrounding the park (Pun, 2004). Adjacent to, and residing within the northern side of the eastern sector of the park, is the indigenous Tharu population. Tharus are believed to be the first indigenous people to live in the country and this group represents 6.75% of Nepal's total population (Pandit, 2000). Although the Tharu population is dispersed along the southern Terai Plains of Nepal, the majority of them inhabit Chitwan District.

The Tharu population maintains an animistic belief system valuing the flora and fauna around them in the form of Gods and Goddesses. Their residence, food, clothes, art, religion, economy, and many other parts of life, are based on their interaction with nature while maintaining ecological balance (Muller-Boker 1999). Inevitably, the creation of CNP and influx of international tourists, and other Nepali ethnic groups, are likely to have impacted the livelihoods and culture of the Tharu people. Tourists coming to observe and learn about Tharu culture generate important revenue for the CNP; and this tourism is now an important economic source to the Tharu people, too. Tourism can result in cultural erosion and this question is of concern for the future of the Tharu people and to national and international organizations that work for the promotion and sustainability of the indigenous culture of Nepal.

The research presented here identifies impacts of the establishment of CNP and tourism on the Tharu people of Bachauli Ward and Harnari Ward in Chitwan, Nepal. The second author conducted semi-structured interviews with 42 individuals in Chitwan District, Nepal while in-residence in Sauraha, Nepal. We asked the following questions: In what way do the Tharu people perceive their sociocultural situation to have changed with the presence of the CNP boundaries? In what way do the Tharu people perceive tourism to have changed livelihoods, customs, and traditions? How has tourism impacted two different wards, Bachhauli and Harnari, differently? To explain our research, a literature review will be provided, followed by a brief introduction to the study area. Next, our methods will be summarized. Results of the interviews and analysis of the narratives will provide the basis of the discussion section. Ultimately, the conclusion will provide some recommendations for how parks, tourism, and sustainable development for the Tharu people can all be integrated for better cultural and economic sustainable tourism development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Park-People Conflicts and Tourism

Park-peoples conflicts are rooted in the premise that parks are areas without human habitation, which is based upon a North American model of conservation (Nelson, 1987; Nepal & Weber, 1993). The introduction of national parks, with a strict definition of landscape preservation, has entangled people who traditionally maintained control over the use over resources in conflicts.

Research has indicated that protected area conservation is more likely, and conflicts are lessened, when there are mutually satisfying relationships between PA authorities and indigenous peoples (Naughton-Treves, Holland & Brandon, 2005). Indigenous peoples are known to share responsibility of natural resources if resource management reflects appreciation of their significance of local knowledge, tradition, values, and conservation practices (Agrawal & Gupta, 2005; Brown, 1998). Mutual respect maintains and builds dialogues between PA authorities and indigenous peoples (Stevens, 1997). The involvement of indigenous peoples is more successful when park planning is participatory and integrates socioeconomic and political reforms that will benefit social and economic development.

When local people's access to resources is cut off because of the creation of national parks, their attitudes toward park authorities turn negative. There are many cases of confrontation between park officials and local people regarding resource restriction (Shrestha, 1995). Such unenthusiastic relations between parks and people intensifies illegal activities inside the protected areas such as hunting, collecting forest products, burning, and poaching (Johannesen, 2004; West, Igoe, & Brockington, 2006).

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and accounts for more than 10% of the world's employment, contributing 11% of the global gross domestic product (Chape et al., 2003). Tourism is an important export for a large number of developing countries and is a big income generator (WWF, 2001). As stated in the Nepal Year Book, "tourism is regarded as the fastest growing industry in the world, and there has been an exponential growth in global tourism over the past half century" (MoCTCA 2001, p. 22).

Effects of tourism can be both positive and negative. Infrastructural and resource demands of tourism (e.g., water consumption, waste generation and energy use) can have severe impacts upon local communities and the environment if they are not properly managed (Simpson et al., 2008). Habitat degradation, depletion of natural resources, generation of waste and pollution are also often caused due to improper tourism development practices (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Bandyopadhyay & Tembo, 2010). Whereas, successful tourism development practices help generate awareness and support for the conservation of local culture, and create economic opportunities for countries and communities.

In many developing countries, the tourism industry has become a backbone of national economies and it also plays a vital role in changing social, economic, cultural, and environmental structures (Greathouse-Amador, 2005). The success of tourism development may depend upon how well tourism related policies, strategies, and plans are made locally.

2.2 Protected Areas and Tourism in Nepal

Prior to 1960, very few tourists visited Nepal. Credit goes to Tenzing Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hillary who brought the world's attention toward Nepal by succeeding to climb Mt. Everest in 1953 (Gautam, 2005). After the transition to a democracy in 1951, Nepal followed an open door policy in the tourism sector (Ministry of Population and Environment [MoPE], 2004). Subsequently, the tourism industry began to grow after the establishment of the Department of Tourism in 1972. Then, a master plan for tourism was formulated to suggest several strategies to develop tourism through infrastructural development and the conservation of nature and culture (Basnet, 2002). Later in 1979, the government of Nepal promulgated the Tourism Act of 1979 to regulate travel, trekking and mountaineering activities and hotel and restaurant businesses (MoPE, 2004).

The tourism industry is one of the most dynamic and important sectors of socioeconomic development in Nepal, playing a vital role in employment (Pandey, 2003). Thousands of trekkers and tourists visit Nepal's protected areas each year to view wildlife, climb or see mountains, and experience indigenous cultures and traditions. The government of Nepal recognizes tourism as a priority sector because it is a major contributor to Nepal's economy, generating about US\$170 million annually (MoCTCA, 2001). Tourism is Nepal's major earner of foreign exchange dollars and represents 15% of total export earnings, which also provides direct and indirect employment for over 300,000 people. An estimated 30% of Nepalese depend on tourism for their livelihood (Pandey, 2003). However, due to the lack of effective tourism development plans, policies and strategies, Nepal has not yet achieved the optimum success from tourism (Niroula, 2003).

More recently, nature-based tourism or ecotourism is a growing economy in Nepal. Identified as any tourism activity based on nature, natural resources and protected areas, ecotourism occurs when visitors travel to gain knowledge about natural resources, wildlife, culture and adventure while contributing to conservation and welfare of local communities (MoPE, 2004). In principle, ecotourism should help conserve the natural environment because it is regarded as a protected area management tool that reconciles the goals of conservation and development (Himoonde, 2007). However, unless it is carefully planned and managed, it can create environmental and sociocultural problems as it brings people to areas that were historically more geographically isolated.

3. Study Area

Chitwan District occupies an area of 2218 km² and lies in the south central part of Nepal (Figure 1). Nepal possesses a wide range of natural environments and sharp altitudinal variation ranging from the tropics of the Terai in the south to the high Himalayas in the north. Geographically, Nepal is divided into three regions: the Mountain, Hill and Terai. The northern mountain range (Himalayas) is where the highest peak of the world, Mount Everest, stands. The middle range (Hill) is a region of rolling mountains, valleys, and lakes. The hill region has several fertile basins, which serve as the political centers of the country, such as Kathmandu and Pokhara. The southern range (Terai) is the Gangetic plain of alluvial soil and consists of dense forest area, national parks, wild life reserves, and conservation areas. Chitwan is situated 165 km to the south of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. It is known as the 76th District because it is populated by people that migrated from all other 75 districts of Nepal. It has one submetropolitan city (Bharatpur), one municipality (Ratnanagar) and 40 village development committees (VDC). The smallest political unit in Nepal is called a ward and there are nine wards under each VDC.

Chitwan National Park (CNP) covers 20.01% of the total area of Chitwan District. CNP boundaries extend from the west bank of the Narayani River, east bordering to Parsa Wildlife Reserve, north by Narayani and Rapti rivers and south to the international boundary with India (IUCN, 1996). Initially, the park had an area of 544 km², which was later extended to 932 km² in 1977. The park contains the Churiya hills, oxbow lakes, and the floodplain of the Rapti, Reu and Narayani rivers. The extent of the park and the buffer zone covers whole or parts of 35 VDCs and 2 Municipalities with 36,193 households having a total population of 223,260 in 2003 (Neupane, 2007). Thirty-five out of forty VDCs in Chitwan are situated adjacent to the CNP boundary.

The establishment of Chitwan National Park in 1973 was the first attempt made by the government of Nepal to protect the forest resources of Chitwan. This occurred soon after a large number of Hill people migrated to the Terai region and cleared land, resulting in massive deforestation. In Nepal, the National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1973 declares national parks have a primary purpose to protect landscapes of scientific and aesthetic importance together with their associated flora and fauna, and a secondary purpose is to develop tourism (DNPCW, 2006). The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation works under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation and is the responsible body for managing conservation areas, hunting reserves, national parks and buffer zones in Nepal.

Today, Nepal has established nine national parks in a network of protected areas, three wildlife reserves, three conservation areas, and one hunting reserve including a buffer zone for all national parks (Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation [DNPWC], 2006). Buffer zone Management Regulations of Nepal were passed in 1996 (HMG, 2002). Buffer zones are created around all national parks and reserves to ease the pressure on core areas and to promote sustainable management of natural resources (HMG, 2002). This conciliatory approach is aimed at motivating local communities through User Groups to undertake participatory management of forest resources to fulfill their needs for forest produce and to reduce park-people conflicts (MoPE, 2004).

The Park People Program (PPP) for community development in buffer zones of Nepal significantly helps to resolve park-people conflict with financial assistance from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). They also ensure that 30%-50% of park revenue is dedicated for socioeconomic development for buffer zone residents (Basnyat, 1999; Gautam, 2005). The buffer zone model focuses on the issues of wildlife conservation, community forestry, alternative energy program, development of physical infrastructures, skill development activities, training and educational programs which help local people living in buffer zone (MoFSC, 1999).

The indigenous peoples of Chitwan and several other ethnic groups inhabit the CNP buffer zone. The indigenous groups include the Tharus, Chepangs, Botes, Musahar, Darai and Kumal. The Tharus are the focus of this study because they are the largest indigenous group to live in the CNP buffer zone and are the most affected by tourism (Pun, 2004). According to the 2001 Nepal census, Tharu people occupy 25.1% of the total population of Chitwan District, which represents 6.75% of the country's total population of 22,736,934 (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2006).

A number of non-indigenous peoples arrived in Chitwan after the successful eradication of malaria from Chitwan in the mid 1950's. The Land Settlement Commission of 1964 resettled 22,000 people in the Chitwan Valley (Gautam, 2005). The number of migrants increased between 1960-1980 (Basnyat, 1999). Migration impacted the indigenous peoples of Chitwan. As soon as the migrants arrived in Chitwan, some of them took over the lands of the local indigenous people and subsequently forced them to be bonded laborers (a system of keeping each generation of people at home for the purpose of workers and servants). Consequently, that domination of the hill migrants over the indigenous people not only displaced them, but marginalized and made them landless. As a result of immigration, the Tharus of Chitwan were largely landless. Following the establishment of the CNP in 1973, the park policy of resource restriction further marginalized the Tharu.

For the purpose of this study, Bachhauli Ward (6 of Bachhauli VDC) and Harnari Ward (1 of Kumroj VDC) were selected because they are the closest wards to the CNP entry, and also have the highest concentrations of indigenous Tharu residents. Both of these wards are situated within a distance of about 1 kilometer from the CNP boundary. These wards lie in the Sauraha area, which is recognized as the famous tourist hub in the eastern sector of CNP. According to the latest data collected from a Nepalese tourism survey in December 2007, 79,086 visitors visited the CNP. The approximate distance between these two study wards and the CNP is also a kilometer from one another.

Bachhauli VDC has a total population of 10,443 within its approximate area of 19 km². Almost half (5016) of the total population in Bachhauli VDC is indigenous Tharu people. Of the total of 1,872 households of Bachhauli VDC, 263 live in Bachhauli Ward. An approximate population of Bachhauli ward is 1575. There are about 200 Tharu households in this ward (Secretary of Bachhauli VDC, personal communication, December 24, 2007). Bachhauli Ward is the closest ward from CNP covering the largest Tharu population of Bachhauli VDC.

Kumroj Village Development Committee has a total population of 7,561 within its approximate area of 21 km². These 7,561 people live in 1,488 households. Of the total of 7,561 population of Kumroj VDC, 2,642 are Tharus which represents 34.94% of the total population.

Harnari Ward is the closest ward from the CNP in Kumroj VDC. There are 859 people living in this ward. About 100 households (60%) out the total of 169 are Tharus in Harnari Ward (Secretary of Kumroj VDC, December 22, 2007).

Farming is the major source of living for a large number of Tharus in Sauraha. According to the statistics released in 2005, 89% of the total population of CNP's buffer zone is engaged in livelihood activities such as cash crop farming, pig farming, fishery, beekeeping, vegetable farming, goat raising, and tourism (CNP & BZMP, 2005). A number of people living in the buffer zone of the CNP are engaged in and rely upon business, wage labor, government services, private jobs, and remittances for their living.

4. Methods

Fieldwork in Chitwan was undertaken by the second author in December 2007 and January 2008, the winter dry season. Two Tharu field assistants were enlisted to help with interviews with 40 Tharu and 3 non-Tharu informants. Tharu field assistants established initial contacts with both of the village secretaries in Bachhauli and Harnari ward. They also helped by establishing contacts with Tharus respondents in both of the study wards. Often, they would help by translating some of the Tharu elders' words into Nepali language.

For the purposes of this research, it was important to collect data about the socio-cultural and economic conditions of Tharu people living in Sauraha before and after the establishment of Chitwan National Park. This was possible only by conducting in-depth interviews with people who were living in Sauraha prior to the establishment of the CNP in 1973. Therefore, the eldest persons in each Tharu households were interviewed and targeted as Tharu respondents for this study. The minimum age for the Tharu respondents was set above 55 years. Two Tharu field assistant friends (one from each ward) helped to meet and communicate with the Tharu respondents. Five local community leaders of Sauraha were selected as key informants to provide insight on needs, expectations, and problems in Tharu communities. All of the key informants were identified based upon the purposive and judgment sampling methods. Twenty-eight questions were asked of 20 Tharu respondents of Bachhauli Ward and 16 Tharu respondents of Harnari Ward. There were 9 subjective and 19 objective questions in each set. Seven open ended questions were asked to 5 key informants.

The questions asked of Tharu respondents were targeted at obtaining information about a) Tharus' perceptions towards the establishment of the CNP and the activities associated to tourism in Sauraha; b) positive and negative impacts of tourism on Tharu culture; c) Tharus' employment situation and their economic status; d) Tharus' views towards the changes brought by tourism on Tharu culture; e) Tharus' sources of energy for cooking; f) situation of resource use pattern by Tharus; and g) needs, wants and expectations that Tharus seek for their economic and socio-cultural development in the near future.

Interviews were also conducted with three park officials: the assistant warden at the Kasara Headquarters, the sectorial officer, and a park ranger in the Eastern Sector Office. The purpose of these interviews was to gather qualitative and quantitative data regarding the CNP's program and prospects for the improvement of Tharus' livelihoods in Sauraha. It also aimed at gathering the park officials' perceptions and evaluation over the effect of tourism on Tharu people. Seven structured and eight unstructured questions were asked to 3 CNP officials.

5. Results

Of the total households in the buffer zone of CNP, 6.68% are engaged in the tourism sector (Ghimire, 2000). Of the total of 2,467 households engaged in tourism, 1,110 are hotel workers, 419 are drivers, 119 are nature guides, 712 are café owners, 19 are restaurant owners and 88 are hoteliers. As stated in a report published by CNP and BZMP (2005), Tharus of Sauraha are employed in CNP, local hotels, and lodges, which are situated in Sauraha.

Tharus own hotels, and few Tharus have opened small shops to sell local tourist products such as baskets, sticks, purses, garlands. Many middle-aged women and girls in Tharu communities are involved in knitting, weaving and other kinds of handicrafts works, which they sell to tourists. People are also vendors who sell vegetables and fruits to the households, whereas some Tharus do sell their vegetable and dairy products in the nearest market towns and sometimes to the local people in Sauraha.

The questions asked of Tharu respondents, park officials, and key informants were designed to obtain perceptions on the issues related to establishment of CNP, Tharus' livelihoods, and tourism. Results were grouped into separate themes based upon common topics brought up by each respondent group. This was done on the basis of similar and frequent discussion of information and issues from each group of respondents.

The classification of obtained results is organized under the following headings: *cultural identity, cultural erosion and cultural tourism; access to resources; culture and community development; and employment opportunities.*

5.1 Cultural Identity, Cultural Erosion and Cultural Tourism

It is generally believed that tourism brings changes to the culture and way of life of the people living in and around tourist destinations (Acharya, 2001:1). Tharus are one of the inhabitants in the third most important tourist destination in Nepal. Therefore, to explore the present situation about changes on Tharu cultural identity, the use of native language is considered. The frequency of the use of native language in any tribal group or indigenous community shows the level of influence and change on their socio-cultural transformation. Two separate questions were asked to find the stage of Tharu language speaking: 1) by younger Tharus (age below 12) and 2) by Tharu elders. In Bachhauli Ward, it was found that some percentage of both Tharu children and elders did not speak Tharu in many places. Fifteen percent of the Tharu elders said they sometimes spoke other languages, even when Tharu was an option; they reported that about 30% of the children only spoke Tharu in the home. In contrast, all of the Tharu respondents of Harnari Ward reported that the children and elders of their ward always spoke in Tharu language.

It is generally considered that the effect of visitors or tourists usually does fall upon certain age group in any tourist destination (Acharya, 2001:1-2). Likewise, in the case of Sauraha, from the perspectives of Tharu elders the youths (age between 13- 25) and children (under age of 12) were perceived to be the most influenced by tourists. The results of the questions pertaining to what age group was most influenced by tourists showed that 75% youths of Bachhauli Ward were highly influenced, whereas 62.5% Tharu elders in Harnari Ward reported that children were influenced by tourists in their ward.

Questions related to changes on Tharu feasts, festivals, ceremonies and clothing pattern were asked to all Tharu respondents in both wards. The purpose of this question was to examine the effect of tourism on culture, religion and costumes. The responses to the question focused on the changes on Tharus' feast, festivals and ritual ceremonies because of tourists were ranked from "extremely" to "none" which also contained the numbers from 1 to 5 to enumerate the level of their role. The result shows an average of 3.5 in both wards. There was only one person in Bachhauli Ward who perceived that the role of tourists was closer to extreme exchanges on Tharus' feasts, festivals, and ritual ceremonies.

All of the Tharu respondents agreed that there was a change in the way they dressed compared to their traditional and cultural costume when asked about changes to Tharu clothing and style in Sauraha. Informants said they liked modern clothes because they were comfortable to wear and fit in. Tharus noted in interviews that they thought that their traditional clothes would look strange and odd in modern times. One of the key informants said that performance of Tharu cultural dance, celebration of Tharu festivals and rituals, and Tharu costumes were gradually disappearing. He also reported that there were very few old Tharu people who followed typical Tharu tradition on special celebration days.

Another question asked to Tharu respondents was about the level of impact that Tharus perceived on changes of Tharu culture as a result of CNP establishment and resulting tourism. The majority of the respondents in both wards perceived a moderate role of CNP and associated tourism to bring changes to Tharu culture. In Bachhauli Ward, 60% of the sampled population perceived that CNP and associated tourism had a moderate role to bring change to Tharu culture.

Twenty percent of the Tharu respondents believed that the role was "some," 15% reported that the role was "a lot," and five percent reported that there was no role of CNP and tourism to bring change on the Tharu culture. Similarly, 44% of the Tharu respondents in Harnari Ward thought that CNP and associated tourism played only a moderate role to bring change to Tharu culture. 38% of respondents evaluated the role to be "some," whereas 19% perceived that there was "a lot" of contribution of CNP and associated tourism to bring change to the Tharu culture. However, nobody seemed to be neutral to give their views in both wards to this question.

Many of the Tharu respondents thought that their culture would get promoted and become sustainable if they exhibited their traditional art, crafts, practices, culture through different means of demonstration to the visitors. On the other hand, a very few Tharu respondents argued that Tharu cultural shows to tourists had nothing to do with sustainability or promotion of the Tharu culture. Seventy five percent of the Tharu respondents of Bachhauli Ward and 81% of the Tharu respondents of Harnari Ward viewed that the Tharu cultural shows to tourists would help sustain and promote Tharu culture.

5.2 Access to Resources

Although the national park policy forbids the use of park resources, 4 of the total Tharu respondents of Bachhauli ward and 3 of the total respondents of Harnari Ward reported that they entered the park illegally to get firewood, fodder and wild fruits. Tharus reported that they wanted to get access to the CNP forest at least for firewood, thatch for rooftops, and fodder. Seventy five percent of the total Tharu respondents of Bachahuli Ward and 81% of the total Tharu respondents of Harnari Ward reported this demand. As an argument to support this demand, 90% of Tharu respondents of Bachhauli Ward and 88% of Tharu respondents of Harnari Ward argued that they could not afford gas and kerosene because of their poverty. Therefore, they confirmed that firewood was the only available source of energy for cooking to the Tharus. This group of respondents also reported that it was not possible for them to plant more trees in their small back yard.

Tharus strongly put forward their demand to park authorities to provide them with some options to collect firewood and thatch from CNP. They also argued that before the establishment of CNP they did not have a firewood problem and asserted that "one who creates problem must also solve that problem." All of the respondents in both wards reported that there are restrictions to access the park resources. None of the respondents in both wards stated that they gave a bribe to the park guards to enter the park.

5.3 Tharu Culture and Community Development

When Tharu respondents were asked about the impact of tourism on Tharu culture, an equal average of 2.4 in both wards reported that it was moderate. Forty five percent of the Tharu respondents in Bachhauli Ward, and 55% of the Tharu respondents in Harnari Ward, reported that non-Tharu hoteliers of Sauraha were using Tharu people and their culture as commercial products. They reported that there was a tendency of hoteliers to send their tourists to visit Tharu villages in the name of "Tharu Village Tour" program, but without providing Tharu communities any benefit. Therefore, 35% of the Tharu respondents in Bachhauli Ward, and 19% of the Tharu respondents in Harnari Ward, strongly argued that they should be provided a certain percentage of the income of Sauraha hoteliers. One of the respondents furiously stated:

They send their tourists to see us, our art, our living style, culture and everything. They take money from tourists by sending them here to see our stuffs, but we are not given anything in return either by the hoteliers or by the tourists. In fact, if they provide us some percentage, we would use that money for our development.

Tharu respondents further argued that tourists must buy entry tickets before they visited Tharu villages. They also pledged that they would use the money collected from the sale of entry tickets to improve and develop the Tharu Cultural Museums and to organize several Tharu programs on Tharu feast and festival celebration days. This view was stated by 75% of the Tharu respondents in each ward.

As a negative impact of tourism in Sauraha, Tharu respondents from both wards mentioned that tourist guides and staff of Sauraha hotels illegally solicit Tharu girls to engage in sexual intercourse with tourists. They also reported that tourist guides and tourists demonstrated rude behaviors to them. Fifty percent of the Tharu respondents of Bachhauli Ward and 38% of the Tharu respondents of Harnari Ward reported the problem of sex abuse in Sauraha and also pointed out that tourism and tourists were creating such problems.

CNP officials were asked to give their opinions on the rank of importance of Tharu culture as a tourist attraction in CNP. One of the park officials agreed and two strongly agreed that the Tharus' culture was an important attraction in the CNP. All of them perceived more positive and less negative effect of tourism on Tharu culture. A key informant stated that the Tharu culture is a unique and exclusive culture in Nepal. He commented that the state of Tharu culture was endangered and gradually degrading. He pointed out that he perceived an increasing threat to Tharu culture was the inactiveness and carelessness of the Tharu people to realize the importance of their own culture and effort was needed to sustain it.

Tharu respondents were also asked a question about who should be the most responsible party to sustain and promote the Tharu culture. Ninety percent of the Tharu respondents in Bachhauli Ward viewed that the Tharus themselves were the most responsible party for safeguarding Tharu culture. Only 10% viewed that it should be "other" such as donor agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations and International Non-Governmental Organizations. Similarly, 75% of the respondents in Harnari Ward also thought that the Tharus themselves were responsible party to take care and sustain Tharu culture. The remaining 25% of the Tharu respondents in Harnari Ward viewed that it should be "other."

5.4 Employment Opportunities

Tharu respondents were asked about their income source and the types of work that they were engaged in. Results showed that at least one person in each household were engaged in some type of job. However, of the total Tharu population, the number of people involved in tourism and CNP related work was found 49% in Bachhauli Ward and 62% in Harnari Ward. The common types of work related to CNP and tourism in Sauraha are park guards, nature guides, *mahouts*, canoe rowers, CNP jeep drivers, elephants care takers, cooks, waiters/waitresses, hotel jeep drivers, hand crafters, local teashops etc. Average male employment in both wards was found to be almost similar (1.5 in Bachhauli and 1.6 in Harnari) but the average female employment was 1.7 in Harnari Ward and 1 in Bachhauli Ward. The percentages of male and female employment in CNP and associated tourism in Bachhauli Ward were 85.72% and 14.28%, respectively. Similarly, 88% of males and 13% of females were involved in tourism related works in Harnari Ward.

When asked about the involvement of Tharu people of Sauraha in tourism activities, a key informant reported that there were very few Tharu people involved in hotel businesses in Sauraha. Only 6 out of the total of 61 hotels in Sauraha (outside the park boundary) were owned by Tharu people. Further interviews indicated that there were a total of eight hotels inside the CNP boundary and only one hotel was owned by Tharu. Tharu hotels were not seen as successful in their businesses compared to the non-Tharu hotels in Sauraha. The reasons for the unsuccessfulness of Tharu hoteliers, according to informants were the lack of marketing knowledge and ideas and strategies on how to run hotel businesses.

The data provided by the nature guides of Sauraha helped to explore the situation of wage rate for nature guides in Sauraha, and also to reveal data on the number of Tharu tourist guides in Sauraha. As of December 2007, there were a total of 164 tourist guides in CNP. They reported that about 40% out of the total were Tharus. Reported in the tourism data was that 80% of the total 66 Tharu tourist guides in Sauraha were from Ratnanagar Municipality and Bachhauli VDC. Only 20% of tourist guides were non-Tharus. The salary of private tourist guides used to be based on the category of tourists they were handling, and also on the types of packages bought by tourists. That means that the tourist guides who used to be hired by an individual tourist or by hotels used to get random wages. Those wages used to be based on the nature of tourists giving tips or additional money to the guides.

They reported that of the total guides in Sauraha, about 50% were affiliated with hotels whereas the remaining guides worked under private tourist guide firms (not associated with hotels). The guides who worked for hotels were provided a monthly salary paid by the hotel. The income of private tourist guides depended upon the number of tourists they got and the rates they could fix by bargaining with the tourists. The average monthly income of a private tourist guide did not exceed 5000 (\$72) per month. Data also revealed that the salary of each hotel tourist guide was about NRS. 6000 (\$85) per month. The inconsistency of salary depended upon the services guides provided to the tourists, such as half-day guiding and full-day guiding. The rate for the full-day guided service was nearly NRS.500 (\$7- \$8) per person and the rate for half-day guided service was about NRS. 300- 400 (\$5-6.5) per person. Salary-based tourist guides used to get NRS.150 (\$2- \$3) as tips or allowances excluding salaries.

6. Discussion

It is generally understood that all cultures are lived and, therefore, always in flux. For example, cultural anthropologist Gillespie views that culture, by its very nature, is “changing in the encounters with others although it is commonly reified as shared possession” (Gillespie, 1995:4). Taking this into account, this study revealed that Tharus’ livelihoods are being changed over time due to influxes and encounters related to the creation of a national park that has brought about a high amount of national and international tourism. Tharus perceived the effects of those changes to have both positive and negative impacts on Tharu livelihoods.

The majority of Tharu respondents in both wards perceive that the establishment of Chitwan National Park and resulting tourism brought changes to the economic and sociocultural traditions of Tharu people. The majority of Tharu respondents in both wards view the perceived changes to be more positive than negative. Tharu respondents distinguished the positive and negative changes by evaluating the level of their current economic and sociocultural conditions as a result of park creation and tourism activities.

These respondents discern tourism to have more of a role than the establishment of the park for bringing changes to the sociocultural customs of celebrating Tharu feasts and festivals, commemorating Tharu rituals, and pursuing Tharu cultural traditions. Tharus perceive the sociocultural changes as the result of the effect of sociocultural transformation, which reflects the changes in living style, eating habits, clothing patterns, interest and behaviors. Taking this perception into account, a majority of the Tharu respondents believe that a rising tendency of Tharus to adopt the life styles of other ethnic groups (Hill migrants) in their surroundings is one of the major causes for sociocultural transformation in Tharu livelihoods.

Tharus perceive changes occurred to affect Tharu livelihoods in two specific ways. Firstly, they view the establishment of CNP boundaries to have brought change to Tharus’ resource use patterns, such as collecting firewood, fodder, wild fruits, medicinal plants, herbs and fishing. All of the Tharus identify that the establishment of the CNP restricted their access to the resources, which they report as their major problem at present. They report that the restriction on access to park resources compelled them to earn extra money to purchase firewood, house construction material (thatch grasses), and other forest products. In the beginning local people were permitted to collect thatch grass and reed cutting as roofing material, particularly for 15 days of the year. Currently, thatch collection is allowed only for seven days which accounts for 100,000 local people collecting 12,000 metric tons of grass (Mishra, 2005:246-247). Tharus argue that the opening of seven days for thatch collection is inadequate. In addition, Tharus request that CNP administration must allow them the opportunity to collect sufficient amount of firewood, fodder and thatch grass from the CNP for household purposes.

Tharu respondents identify the role of tourism to have brought changes particularly to the Tharu culture and economy. The cultural changes were perceived by the level of loss of celebrations for Tharu feasts, festivals and ceremonies, whereas the level of employment opportunities obtained by Tharus was measured as the role played by tourism on Tharu economy. Tharu respondents from both ward considered the role of tourism to have created a moderate change to the Tharu’s sociocultural customs and traditions. Tharus do not believe that all of the changes observed in Tharu culture and livelihoods are because of tourism. The level of moderate change to them is evaluated by taking some of other inseparable elements into account; such as, a growing interest among Tharus to adopt sociocultural transformation, imitate hill migrants’ styles and behaviors and the increasing tendency to be influenced by modernization.

Tharus evaluate the economic impact of CNP and tourism on Tharu communities by the level of employment opportunities available to them. The majority of wage labor employment is in tourism related work such as in jobs at the CNP, hotels, lodges and restaurants, including making handicraft work and teashop businesses. Many of these opportunities were spawned along with the development of tourism in Sauraha. Some of the Tharu youths from Sauraha are also involved in employment in the travel and tourism industry in major cities of Nepal, which Tharus consider as a positive impact of tourism on Tharu economy. However, Tharus consider the negative economic consequences of CNP establishment and tourism on their livelihoods by calculating the imaginary earnings that they would have generated from their customary practices, such as canoe rowing, sale of fish, sale of medicinal plants, and sale of firewood. They compare their potential earnings that they would have earned in the absence of the park with the loss they have to bear now as a result of park establishment. Tharus think that the loss of those imaginary earnings as the negative impact of the park establishment.

Examining the situation of Tharu job holdings, the results demonstrate that at least each Tharu household in both study wards was employed in any type of work. The type of employment comprises both tourism and non-tourism related jobs. The tourism related jobs are: park guards, caretakers of park elephants, elephant drivers (*mahout*), jeep drivers, park ranger assistants, canoe rowers, nature guides, information providers in visiting centers, cook, waiters, and helpers. Some of the non-tourism related works are salespeople, helpers and assistants in shops, auto-mechanics, construction work, electricians, vendors, drivers, and waiters/waitresses in hotels and restaurants outside Sauraha.

Less than fifty percent of people in Bachhauli Ward are engaged in tourism related activities occupations, whereas more than sixty percent Tharus of Harnari Ward have tourism related employments such as park guards, elephant caretakers, elephant drivers (*mahout*), jeep drivers, canoe rowers, nature guides, information providers in visiting centers and cook, waiters, and helpers in Sauraha hotels, restaurants, and lodges. This difference in employment identifies that the economic impact of tourism is more in Harnari Ward compared to Bachhauli Ward. As reported by some of the Tharu respondents of Bachhauli Ward, there is a growing tendency among the Tharu youths of Bachhauli Ward to involve in non-tourism related works and go abroad for employment in recent years.

However, none of the respondents in Harnari Ward reported Tharu youths going abroad for employment.

As a number of employees in CNP and Sauraha hotels are hired seasonally, there is always a chance of being laid off which may create an economic problem for the seasonal Tharu workers in Sauraha. From my interviews with Tharu respondents, it was revealed that people often work as seasonal labor in CNP and tourism related work. Seasonal wage labor works include construction of houses and roads, loading and unloading sand and stones to and from trucks, working as a porter, rikshaw pullers, engaging in vegetable farming, goat raising and pork rearing.

Tourists and the role of tourism can create a negative atmosphere that can have an impact on the local community. Bad activities of tourist guides and visitors showing disrespect towards Tharu people are the frequent comments reported by many Tharu respondents in both wards. A majority of the Tharu respondents and key informants report that there is a growing concern and tendency of tourist guides alluring and trading Tharu girls for the purpose of sexual intercourse in Sauraha hotels. Tharus report the evidence of negative change due to tourism by identifying the increased level of activities among Tharus, such as; youths showing disrespect to Tharu elders, Tharus' involvement in drugs, alcoholism, quarrels, prostitution, and gradual loss in Tharus' language and customs. These negative activities are reported in Sauraha as rising rates of alcoholism, drugs, robbery, and prostitution (CNP & BZMP, 2005). Such activities are the negative impacts of tourism and they invite sociocultural threats to the societies.

7. Conclusion

The overall objective of this study was to examine the impact of the establishment of Chitwan National Park and associated tourism on Tharu people of Bachhauli and Harnari wards, Chitwan District, Nepal. Given the small sample size, there may be variations in results compared to findings obtained from a large sample size. However, since this research had not been investigated and published by prior researchers, it provides insight into a few issues associated with tourism and Tharu indigenous communities in Chitwan National Park of Nepal.

Data results and analysis of the impacts of CNP establishment and associated tourism on Tharu people were discussed. Results found that there is less negative and more positive impact associated with park establishment on the Tharu people of Bachhauli and Harnari wards. While examining the consequences that emerged as a result of park establishment, the root cause of change to Tharu livelihoods turns out to be the establishment of boundaries creating Chitwan National Park. The negative impact of park establishment is that it has impeded Tharus' access to resources such as firewood, fodder, medicinal plants and fishing. Whereas, compared to the impact of park establishment, tourism associated with CNP has more impact on Tharu livelihoods in both wards.

The impacts from tourism are considered to be more positive and less negative. A large part of the impact of tourism in both wards is perceived to have changed Tharus' cultural and economic situation. Sociocultural transformation also has occurred as a result of park establishment and government policies of resettlement in the 1960s. The emergence of increased cultural interaction among Tharus is clearly associated with an influx of multicultural migrants who came to settle in and around Sauraha after the resettlement program of government and the establishment of the park.

Overall, there are positive and negative impacts of CNP establishment and associated tourism to bring change to Tharus' sociocultural and economic situation in Bachhauli Ward and Harnari Ward of Chitwan District in Nepal. Since 1990, very few Tharus and many non-Tharus of Sauraha who invested money in tourism are benefiting from it. But the majority of the Tharu people in Sauraha are still struggling with fulfilling basic needs such as food, clothes and shelter. However, tourism related jobs have provided employment opportunities to a number of people in Sauraha.

Tharu culture is the Nepal's oldest ethnic culture. The Government of Nepal must be aware of the present state of Tharu culture and take effective initiatives to promote and sustain it. The ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation is the responsible government body to work and be concerned for the promotion and sustainability of culture, tradition, language, and religion in Nepal. Considering the overall development of Tharu people, there must be well-organized coordination between and among the Tharu representatives, non-governmental organizations that assist Tharus, and government agencies that are responsible and work for the improvements of Tharu livelihoods and the sustainability of indigenous culture of Nepal. A complete participatory approach must be adopted by involving Tharus in each phase of tourism development in Chitwan District.

Local residents need to be assured that their voices are included in the planning and decision-making process of any development programs that are launched for the improvements of Tharu livelihoods in Sauraha.

This study revealed that Tharus are increasingly demanding access to park resources and looking for technical and financial support to improve Tharu livelihoods and promote Tharu culture. Tharus view that the CNP administration, which is under the jurisdiction of the Nepal Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, is considered as the primary government agency that can help them. Therefore, considering the findings and suggestions provided by the Tharu respondents and key informants, recommendations are provided to the CNP administration to think of providing rational allocation of resource access to the Tharus. This would help Tharus fulfill their resource needs while sustaining their traditional customs and cultural values. The CNP administration must also formulate tourism development programs based upon Tharus' demands, needs and the availability of resources for the promotion and sustainability of Tharu livelihoods and their culture.

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Graphics:



Figure 1: Location of Chitwan National Park and buffer zone in Chitwan District, Nepal