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What Has 20 Years of 'Freedom' Meant for Kamaiya Men in Kailali District, Nepal? Analysing Changing Patterns of Migration as a Marker of Freedom

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Abstract

Almost 20 years after being officially 'freed' from the Kamaiya system of bonded labour in July 2000, this paper considers the lived experience of freedom for male Kamaiya former bonded labourers in Nepal. The article considers the symbolic and material significance of migration in the post-bondage era within Kamaiya communities. The focus on migration for this group of young male former bonded-labourers who were previously unable to migrate, facilitates analysis of the ways in which migration between Nepal and India enables new performances of masculinity. Ultimately, this paper argues that migration, however precarious, has become an important marker of freedom for the Kamaiya.

Keywords: kamaiya system, migration, masculinity, nepal, modern slavery

Introduction

Slavery takes many forms in the contemporary world (Bales 2004, 2007). Estimates of the number of contemporary slaves worldwide range from 12 (ILO) to 27 million (2004, 9). Despite the variability of these figures, there is little dispute that there is both diversity in the types of slavery throughout the world and that there are more slaves in South Asia than in any other region. Bonded-labour is one manifestation of contemporary slavery, in which people take on often unrepayable loans, that are paid back through their labour (Kara 2012). Such loans are frequently passed on through generations. Anti-Slavery International estimates that 20 million people are working as bonded labourers (Upadhyaya 2004, 118). This paper considers the experience of a system of bonded- labour and what freedom from this system has meant in relation to the Kamaiya in Nepal.

This paper uses qualitative data collected in far-west Nepal between 2009 – 2017, that was subsequently thematically analysed. Theoretically this paper uses theories of masculinity (R. Connell 1995; Maycock 2018) to analyse the gendered meanings of movement and migration and the extent to which movement has become a marker for freedom for the Kamaiya men in far-west Nepal.[1] The specific experiences of one young Tharu man (Ram) are analysed in order to

provide insights into the ways in which young Kamaiya men are moving and migrating having been freed from the Kamaiya system of bonded labour in 2000.

In South Asia slavery in its many forms is a significant and persistent factor, with 15 to 20 million bonded labourers in the region (Bales 2004). While in relation to Nepal, in 2004, Bales estimated that 2.5 million people were living in slavery in Nepal (2004, 98). There have been, and still are, many forms of slavery both in and between the various countries across the region, among which bonded labour takes specific local forms according to locally-specific interconnections between ethnicity, class, caste and, critically, gender structures. A small but emerging literature considers masculinity in the social relations integral to situations of both bondedness and post-bondedness, providing a basis for considering masculinity in this context. These are issues that this article foregrounds within the context of movement for work following freedom from a system of bonded labour – the Kamaiya system in Nepal.

The Kamaiya System

Although most of modern Nepal was not formally under colonial control as India was, the area that is now Kailali district was under British rule until it was returned to the Nepali State by the British East India Company in 1816. Rankin suggests that the Nepali State's taxation and resettlement policies that created a new Pahari[2] landlord class which was responsible for the transformation of the Kamaiya system into one of oppression (Rankin 1999, 28). This Is complemented by a Backward Society Education (BASE)[3] report, which states that the influx of Paharis following the eradication of malaria marginalised the Tharus already living in the Terai[4] (1995, 4). As the Tharus had no records of the land they were living on, Paharis were able to register land in their name with a State that was responsive and understood their needs. There was little or no Tharu representation in central government at this time, limiting the ability of Tharu communities to resist this change and the increasing oppression that came with it. McDonaugh outlines the extent of these changes below:

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

This quote indicates that there were Tharu landlords with Kamaiya working on their land historically, and this remained true at the time of freedom in 2000. The mass movement of Paharis brought changes in the Terai that affected the Kamaiya system that existed largely amongst different Tharu communities previously. Following the eradication of malaria, the cultivated area of the Terai increased significantly as did the average size of farms, putting greater pressure on the Kamaiya to do an increasing amount of agricultural work.

While there were many systems of bonded labour in Nepal,[5] a number of factors made the Kamaiya system different from many of the other forms:

> The landlord retains the right to sell his Kamaiya to another landlord. This makes the Kamaiya relationship in effect, a form of slavery. (Seddon and Subedi 2000, 10)[6]

This was not always the case in other forms of bonded labour, where labourers had more agency to change where they worked and for whom. Given the oral history of the Tharu (the wider ethnic group from which the Kamaiya originate),[7] the historical perspective on the Kamaiya system is fluid. During my fieldwork some Kamaiya, usually the of older generations, had difficulty recalling aspects of the system. Some would simply not discuss it, while others, usually younger men, were more comfortable doing so. Generational differences seemed influential in these discussions and the recollections of the violence implicit within the Kamaiya system. The Kamaiya system was a system of bonded labour, in agricultural areas of west and far-west Nepal mediated by debt. During all my periods of fieldwork over eight years, the Kamaiya were widely considered formerly bonded agricultural labourers from the Tharu ethnic community. It is important to recognise that while the Kamaiya system restricted the movement of the Kamaiya within the system, it was and remains today quite common for Kamaiya children to move to urban areas of Nepal to work as domestic labourers.

The Movement towards Freedom

At various stages in Nepal's history bonded labour has been made illegal.[8] Efforts to end the Kamaiya system changed after 1990[9] when they coalesced into a highly visible movement leading up to July 2000, led particularly by the NGO BASE. According to Guneratne (2002, 104), the movement towards freedom crystallised in May 2000 with the protest of nineteen Kamaiya from Geti VDC in Kailali, who demanded both their freedom and payment for their work. Arjun Karki's (2001) PhD book has an illuminating article exploring how the movement gained momentum during this period, and some of its shortcomings. The International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and NGOs involved with the Kamaiya freedom movement, including BASE, Anti-Slavery International, MS-Nepal, INSEC and ActionAid-Nepal, highlighted Kamaiya issues in various national and international contexts.[10]

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

Post-'Freedom' Kamaiya experiences

A broad range of Kamaiya experiences were recounted to me during my research, beginning from July 17th 2000 when forced evictions of Kamaiya by landlords were reported in the media (Bales 2007, 105). A key factor in the experiences of post-freedom, now *mutki*, Kamaiya, is whether or not they have received land from the state. Land and Tharu identities are inextricably linked (Guneratne 2002, Chapter 4). Prior to their freedom, the vast majority of Kamaiya were landless. According to Anti-Slavery International, in 2007 40 percent of freed Kamaiya had still not received their full entitlement from the state.[11] A significant number of certain types of classified Kamaiya, have received five *kuttha* (0.17 hectares), and many have yet to receive land. Land remains an issue for both resettled Kamaiya who have received land and, more urgently, for the landless such as those in the Dhangadhi *basti* discussed elsewhere in more detail (Maycock 2018). Kamaiya families given an allocation of 5 *kuttah* of land told me this was far from sufficient for their subsistence; the Freed Kamaiya Society (FKS) demands at least 10 *kuttah* per ex-Kamaiya family. Without meaningful land reform in Nepal, one could argue that the Kamaiya, and many other landless groups like them will not be able to transcend their current situation, which are largely defined by their previous status as bonded labourers.

While the Kamaiya were freed in 2000 there was no meaningful state or NGO/INGO rehabilitation programme. Lack of support and planning consistently emerged from my interviews with Kamaiya and NGO workers who work with them. Some were simply forced off the land where they had been bonded labourers. In 2007, about 40,000 − two thirds of freed Kamaiya − had received no support from the state and one third of the total were still living in refugee camps (Bales 2007, 106). Bales draws a clear analogy between the emancipation of American slaves in 1865 and the freeing of the Kamaiya, in that both were botched by lack of state planning (ibid. 107). While they are very different situations, the Nepali state seemed to free the Kamaiya begrudgingly and accordingly had not planned for what might happen afterwards.

Continuity of the Kamaiya system

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

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

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

These changes were not so apparent at my fieldwork sites in Kailali, so may be exaggerated by someone heavily involved in the liberation movement. Despite some of the achievements of the freedom movement, Karki (2001, 125) finds that it has failed to address the structural issues of exploitation related to the Kamaiya system, enabling it to evolve and continue in alternative forms. The lack of state, INGO and NGO input into rehabilitation sustains this. This relates more broadly to consistent lack of engagement with issues of land and class in rural Nepal, other than by the Maoists. Interestingly, Cheria considers the success of the Kamaiya Liberation Movement to be associated with ex-Kamaiya becoming Tharu once more (Cheria 2005, Chapter 8). This is an interesting proposition in relation to identity and class hierarchies in the Tharu community, but does not accord with my findings, where the divisions between various Tharu sub-groups remained considerable (Maycock 2018).

Having discussed the relevant literature on the Kamaiya system, the movement towards freedom and outlined post-freedom experiences, I now outline my methods before considering Kamaiya experiences of movement following freedom.

Methods, ethics and fieldsites

Methodologically this article is based initially on a PhD project (Maycock 2012, 2018), complemented by a number of subsequent visits to the same fieldsites. Methodologically this article is based initially on a PhD project (Maycock 2012, 2018), complemented by a number of subsequent visits to the same fieldsites. Fieldwork was focused on generating the material for analysis through ethnographic methods, principally multiple and consecutive semi-structured interviews, life history interviews and participant observation; alongside a household survey. These methods were focused on Kamaiya men's experience and testimony of the Kamaiya

system, the transition to freedom and post-freedom experiences. While I did interview and spend time with Kamaiya women and girls, this data is not included in the analysis underpinning this paper. Adopting ethnographic methods situates this paper within the 'ethnographic moment' in masculinities studies (R. Connell 2012).

Ethical approval was attained from the University of East Anglia, International Development Ethics Committee ethics committee, and approval for the study given by the Ministry of Education in Nepal. When entering both fieldsites, prior to undertaking any fieldwork I visited all households in each *basti* and discussed my research and undertook a verbal consent process given that most villagers with illiterate.

I spent my time between the two fieldwork sites (*bastis* or settlements) in Dhangadhi, the district HQ for Kailali District in far-west Nepal, and Kampur *basti (a rural fieldsite within a local forest))*. I spent ten months in 2009 and one month in 2012, cycling[12] between the two sites. My visits in 2014 and 2017[13] were much shorter (less than a week each time). This longer term perspective of eight years, has a number of important benefits, and has allowed the changes identified in 2009 to be better contextualised and understood. The evolution of some of the key areas is striking during this period. For example, in 2009 it was inconceivable that anyone from either fieldsite would be able to migrate to undertake work as labourer to the Gulf or South East Asia. However, in 2017, there were three households in my main fieldsite who had a family male member who had migrated to either Dubai or Malaysia, representing a significant development in opportunity to move further afield. These changing patterns of migration are consider in more detail below.

What are the implications of mobility for Kamaiya communities and masculinities?

In this final section of this article I focus on how new forms of work are leading to various forms of mobility that are changing Kamaiya communities. Mobility is one way of achieving certain types of work, this emerges as conferring an advantage for those who are able to be mobile i.e. certain men. This section considers the ways in which movement is an important component of modernity (Appadurai 1996). Furthermore, this section reflects Sharma's (2007a, 22-25) discussion of mobility, as opposed to migration, exploring various aspects of mobility and how these relate to certain masculinities at particular times in the life-cycle.[14] Where the word 'migration' is mentioned it is the word the author cited for mobility in this sense. Mobility and masculinity in South Asia have been explored in Nepal (J.R. Sharma 2007a; J. Sharma 2007b), South India (F Osella and Osella 2000, 2006; Filippo Osella and Gardner 2004), North India (McDuie-Ra 2011) and Pakistan (Charsley 2005). These studies cumulatively find that migration and mobility are important factors influencing masculinity across the region.

The Kamaiya have a specific history of very limited mobility, due to the constraints inherent in the Kamaiya system of bonded labour. While the system dictated that Kamaiya were not free to move when and where they liked (a central marker of bonded labour), sometimes

Kamaiya children particularly girls moved as a consequence of demand for domestic labour in urban areas if their owner permitted this (Giri 2004). This section presents a new perspective on how mobility is becoming an emerging part of Kamaiya masculinities. Following the abolition of bonded labour, certain types of mobility have become becoming closely associated with certain new masculinities and stages in the male life course in Kamaiya communities. Kamaiya men are following mainstream pathways to becoming adult that have existed in other Nepalese communities for many years (Hausner 2007; J. Sharma 2007b; 2007a). Their increasing mobility illustrates their acceptance of broader, more mainstream currents of masculinity; this is relevant not only for the men who move but also for the *basti*s to which they return.

Opportunities for mobility correspond to both places in the wider geographical horizon, which were limited to Nepal and India in 2009, but had become significantly broader in 2017 as Kamaiya men were migrating to Malaysia and Dubai. This relates to types of work resulting from higher levels of industrialisation in both economies of these countries. Consequently, mobility can involve exposure to specific configurations of economic and gendered relations. These processes of mobility to places in which certain gendered relations exist are complicating Kamaiya masculinities in formative ways. I discuss the consequences of such mobility below.

Mobility in Nepal

In the Nepali context, mobility is conventionally understood in relation to poverty (Peralta 2007; Donaldson 1991). Shrestha's (1991) research explicitly focuses on landlessness as a cause of migration, additionally Bhandari points out the importance of land in patterns of migration:

> My findings support the hypothesis that individuals from households with relatively less access to cultivated land are more likely to migrate in search of work compared to those from a relatively well-off household with more land holdings. (Bhandari 2004, 475)

While this analysis relating to data collected in 1996 is important for this paper in so far as Bhandari here links access to land to migration. More recent research indicates that access to finance facilitates varying types of migration from Nepal. Those with more limited resources move to urban areas of Nepal and India (such as the Kamaiya in my fieldsites in 2009), those with access to more capital might migrate to the Gulf or Malaysia (a change that had happened in my fieldsites by 2017). There are also important flows of young men to more lucrative countries such as the US, UK, Japan, Korea and Australia (Bhattarai 2009; Seo 2019; Yamanaka 2000). These countries entail higher costs of migration, but higher potential returns.

Gender and in particular masculinity emerges as critical across these diverse destinations of migration as according to the latest Government of Nepal statistics, men account for just under 95% of all those who migrated between 2008/2009- 2018/2019 (CBS 2020). However, there is emerging evidence of a significant increase in the proportion of women migrating from Nepal

(Shrestha, Mak, and Zimmerman 2020). Masculinity wasis also a critical factor in in both fieldwork sites, as only men moved for labouring work. More broadly, the studies mentioned above do not consider gender or other forms of identity and how these might be important to understanding various forms of mobility. Sharma's (2007a, 193) research on masculinity and mobility in Nepal indicates that such studies cannot account for the fact that around 90 per cent of those who migrate outside of Nepal are men. Sharma's research highlights the importance of masculinity in explaining mobility and what it means for local communities.

There are multiple interlinked forms of mobility, some of which are not new, as mobility has been a feature of Nepali life for many years (cf. Hausner 2005; J.R. Sharma 2007a). Following the end of the Kamaiya system in 2000, many new opportunities for work and movement have emerged for the Kamaiya. There are many forms and destinations of mobility, including locally in Nepal mainly to Dhangadhi (in a form of urbanisation), regionally to India (an often temporary, circular form of migration) and more recently international migration to Malaysia. While there is varying mobility from and to Nepal, mobility to India is critically important in the Nepali context, and particularly in the Terai. Precise figures are very unreliable in this area, partly due to the open border between India and Nepal and compounded by poor data collection. In 2001, 760,000 people had officially migrated out of Nepal, 77 per cent of whom had gone to India (McDonald 1994). Seddon et al (2000) estimate that between 0.5-1.3 million Nepalis temporarily migrate to India. In the subsequent section of the article, I consider Ram's experiences of migration to India for work.

Ram, mobile Kamaiya masculinities, and working in India

To explore some of the implications of mobility to India for Kamaiya masculinities I now consider Ram, a Kamaiya man whom I met on several occasions (in 2009 and 2012) when he returned to Kampur basti. There are a number of reasons why he is the focus of this part of this article, principal among which is that of all the young men I met in Kampur he was one of the most challenging, and his moving to India was a critical part of this. He was a transitory presence during my time in the *basti*, which made him interesting, partly due to the fleeting nature of his presence in the *basti* as he was a migrant worker and was only intermittently there. Importantly, Ram's story and experiences are not assumed to be representative of all Tharu men and their experiences of migration.

Ram was about 20 years old in 2009, neither he nor his mother were sure of his exact age. My research assistant and I both thought he looked much older. He had six brothers and sisters, one older sister and the rest younger. He was dismissive of his siblings and had little time for them, despite their obvious affection and high regard for him. One of his younger brothers told me that this was because he travelled and was away in India so much. His family were largely unaware of the hardships of Ram's working life in India; he worked as a labourer in various places, mostly in Uttar Pradesh (UP), a state that shares a border with Kailali; hence he was able to return home relatively easily. Despite going to India on a frequent basis he was consistently

critical about it, although he had found certain income-generating opportunities there that he felt were not available to the same extent in Nepal.

Like most men in the Kampur *basti*, Ram was illiterate. While he was not proud of this, he was assertive about it. Education and the path that his younger brother had chosen had no appeal for Ram, as this was not generally seen as a valid route to making a living or, more importantly, to being a man. For Ram, being a man was closely connected to hard and unrelenting physically demanding forms of manual labour and the associated income that it generated (reflecting Chopra's (2004) point mentioned previously that hard work is important for manliness). Bennett adds a nuance to the perspective on hard physical labour and how this interacts with the caste system in Nepal, in opposition to Bahun[15] notions of work and masculinity:

> Any [Bahun] man who can afford to pays someone else to do the heavy farm labour for him. None of Narikot's respected elders, nor indeed any of the younger generation of men who have gone to school, would demean themselves by doing physical labour. (Bennett 2002, 24)

Ram is illustrative of this point, it was evident that Ram performed a type of subaltern masculinity that is positioned in opposition to less physically demanding masculinities (such as Bahun and some emerging Kamaiya masculinities). From this subaltern position he is able to generate a sense of pride and confidence as a man, despite this being work of low paid and status. Ram did not seem to understand the point of education, which was not common in the *basti* (at least in 2009); Ram considered that it was not how Kamaiya men should make a living. According to Ram, being more literate had nothing to do with the Kamaiya being freed; many of those who had kept the Kamaiya in situations of bondedness were highly educated and despite working all the days and hours they could, many Kamaiya remained extremely poor while many Bahun were 'lazy' yet still rich. He was sceptical, too, of office-related work, of which politicians were the most obvious example, there was widespread disdain for politicians, irrespective of political allegiance. Ram's views resonated with the majority of the older men in Kampur *basti* is views about the associations between hard work and masculinity.

Ram's father was not in the *basti* but I could not discover whether he had died or left the *basti* for some reason although Ram's family and other people in the *basti* would not talk to me about this. In his father's absence it was clear that Ram's mother was the head of their household. While this is not uncommon in the *basti* due to the significant levels of outmigration by men, the fact that it was permanent in Ram's household was unique in 2009 (the number of female headed households increased during subsequent field visits). As Ram was the oldest son, one would assume that he would take on responsibility in his father's absence and more of a leadership role in the household. However, this did not appear to be the case. When he was in the *basti* his mother retained her position of authority and responsibility in the household and, more widely, in the *basti*. In other houses, where men migrated, even when their father was present the sons often

took on dominant leadership roles in the family, due in part to their higher income and ability to work for longer hours. The younger and more economically active generation adhered closely to the most highly valued ways of being a man, which were evolving from the sorts of masculinities predominant in the Kamaiya system.

Knowing Ram's family background is important, as it helps to contextualise his mobility. As the eldest son, there were certain expectations of him regarding providing and leadership in the household, which he seemed to find difficult to meet. His mother had given him a small amount of money to enable him to move to India initially in the winter of 2005, in the winter), and she had encouraged him to go there. From his family's perspective, Ram moving to India might have been a diversification strategy like that of other Kamaiya families and their investment more in the education of their sons. Similar impetus behind mobility has been explored in other contexts (cf. Herzfeld 1985), and this might help to explain why his mother was so keen that Ram go to India.

On several occasions I had the impression that being away from his family, particularly his mother, was also an important reason behind Ram's moving to work to India. This does not mean that he did not fulfill some of the expectations to provide materially for his family, or that this was unimportant to him. Ram provides an interesting example of a man adapting to a certain set of life events, and of how this in turn has become an important part of his masculinity. Most Kamaiya men have no experience or wider history of mobility, making migration difficult and potentially dangerous. Sharma (2007a, Chapter 6) illustrates the importance of knowing someone at the destination point who can help to find work, show one around and provide an entry into the social networks associated with certain diasporas. These diasporas in some ways recreate the social worlds of home (Marschall 2017). Marius-Gnanou also makes this point in relation to seasonal migration in Tamil Nadu:

> Without social networks, migrants are more vulnerable to intimidation or non-payment of wages, and are unable to get out of debt or overcome a crisis. (Marius-Gnanou 2008, 133)

Ram's experience provides an insight into the wider experiences of Kamaiya men who often move without an established social network although a stronger diasporic network was evident in 2017. Ram told me that he always migrated alone, and often only met other Tharu while travelling but had never met another Kamaiya on his journeys, and appeared not to want to. However, the isolation and vulnerability that this led to was sometimes challenging. This reflects what Breman identifies as part of the motivation for Dalit men from Gujarat to move:

> Their motivation for migrating is the anonymity which accompanies them in the outside world… they are not immediately identified and stigmatized [as Dalit]. (Breman 1996, 238).

Mobility relates not simply to material considerations (which in some instances may be negligible anyway due to low wages) but also to the range of male behaviours that mobility facilitates. While mobility was not a wholly positive experience for Ram, there were benefits. For example, he told me that when he was in India he was neither Kamaiya nor Tharu, he was simply a poor Nepali like the many other Nepali men in India searching for work. Ram seemed to be constantly striving to transcend or escape the *basti* and to become associated with parts of India, as he felt this gave him more freedom. While I was in Kampur, Ram was rarely in the *basti*, on a number of field visits he wasn't there at all, but I got information from his mother. His absence from the *basti* enabled him to give the impression that in this way he was different from most men in Kampur, despite doing similar work to most of them but in a different location. This suggests that the location, and not the type of employment that Ram was engaged in and aspired to, is central to the image he wanted to present. This was an image of a man different to the other male inhabitants of Kampur *basti*, this difference was accentuated by mobility.

Ram opted out of many social activities when in the *basti* and did not attempt to behave like the popular and 'successful' men of his age. The time he spent in India and the work he did there formed his sense of masculinity, and he brought the way he experienced his ethnic identity in India back to the *basti*. He was not overly engaged with any of the political manifestations of Tharu identity such as the Tharuhat. He found little, if any, economic benefit in participating in politics of any kind; nor, due to the pressures he was already under, did he have time for it. When in the *basti* he was not at all interested in Kamaiya or Tharu festivals or religious practices. This again implies that he wanted to distance himself from these aspects of Kamaiya identity and ritual in Kampur, and preferred the kind of anonymity he experienced while in India.

While many Kamaiya men such as Ram have always lived close to the Indian border, they and a small number of women have only been able to cross the border since the abolishment of the Kamaiya system in 2000. The Indian border is only 3 km from Dhangadhi and about 12 km from Kampur *basti*, making it very easy to go to India and back in a day if required. This created a different sense of being 'away' and being 'at home' for Ram. On average he stayed away for three or four months at a time. Breman (1996, 53) calls such mobility 'circulation', to describe the brief nature of these movements, the lack of consistency in the location of mobility and the type of work undertaken. One positive implication of this type of circulatory migration that Ram's movement reflects, relates to his inheritance. This type of movement didn't question his inheritance and in fact strengthened his position, as it was assumed that when he did inherit the family's land financially, he would be in a strong position as a consequence of moving to India. This would then allow him to improve the land his family had, as well as potentially buying more.

Ram travelled by the cheapest and therefore slowest means possible, often taking several days to reach the *basti* and then return to India for his next period of work. If something went wrong, such as losing his job or was robbed or cheated he could quickly and easily get back to Kampur, which was both an advantage and a disadvantage given that part of the reason for his mobility was to get away from the basti and his family. This reflects wider changes in transport

and communication that facilitate mobility (Almeida 1996). Ram usually moved to urban areas in India, often in and around Delhi, where he told me most work was found. One result of his moving frequently and erratically back and forth from Kampur to various urban areas of India, is the blurring of the boundaries of 'urban' and 'rural' masculinities; Campbell and Bell (2000) call for caution in making distinctions between these two located masculinities.

I had the impression that Ram would rather not return to Kampur, although he told me that things might change when he got a wife. He was unmarried and had no girlfriend; he appeared to have little interest in women, or at least he didn't want to discuss this with me. In 2009 he assumed that when he had made enough money he would come back to the *basti* with some savings, and his family would arrange a marriage for him. As he was towards the upper end of the average age range at which men get married, there were growing expectations that he would be married. Some eight years later, his mother hold me that he still hadn't married.

The Lived Experience of Migration and continued exploitation

Having discussed how mobility provided a means by which Ram has been able to construct a different masculine identity to those that predominate in Kampur, I now consider his lived experiences of mobility. Ram engaged in a broad range of unskilled labouring work in India. He essentially did whatever work was available, most of the time working as a road cutter. This entailed very long hours of physically demanding labour. He had no protective clothing, and his chronic cough was the result of all the smoke and tar he had inhaled while working on road-building projects over the years, and seemed to take risks while doing his work that can be a central aspects of the performance of masculinity in the workplace (Stergiou-Kita et al. 2015) His manual work had made his hands some of the roughest I have ever shaken. His appearance seemed infused with the dust and dirt of his work, even though the dust itself had long gone. The work drained him completely; his mother told me that when he came home he often said very little for days, as he was so exhausted and completely spent physically. Breman's (1996) research in Gujarat found that migrant workers had limited scope to influence their situation whether they migrated or not, as migration can create new types of bondage. This resonates with Ram's experience: as he had very few options in relation to what sort of work he did (not least as he rejected all forms of formal education). He was one of many other men moving around India in search of work and providing a pool of cheap, disposable labour for various employers (Breman 1996).

Ram took an evident pride in his work-related endeavours and the fact that he rarely took time off, as he would not be paid if he did. He was proud to work as hard as he did, but there were negative consequences. When he returned to the *basti*, as he did every couple of months on average, he was distant and almost vacant until he readjusted to being back and recovered from his most recent period of work. There was a kind of mental and physical emptiness for a few days after he returned from India. He was there when I first went to the *basti* but he left soon afterwards, so I was able to spend limited time with him. I saw him about three months later and

on subsequent field visits, when he returned for a short period before he left again to work in India.

Mobility can be explained partly in reference to the economic opportunities that it represents. It facilitates the sending back of remittances which enables men to fulfil an important aspect of their masculinity, providing for their household: In one sense mobility can facilitate meeting expectations associated with 'breadwinner' masculinities in Kamaiya communities. This has been explored elsewhere, with migration making an important contribution to men's ability to maintain their gendered, breadwinner roles (cf. West 2001). However, this may not be the case for all men who migrate:

> Migration to Delhi challenges tribal masculinity. It moves tribal men away from the environment where their masculinity is produced and also gives tribal women new opportunities for independence and mobility. (McDuie-Ra 2011, 8).

Critically, McDuie-Ra studied men and women migrating together, as a consequence remittances were less important in this situation. This resulted in a greater disconnect from the places that these men and women migrated from. In my (and Sharma's (2007a; 2007b)) research only men migrate, thus links to home are more important and sending money back is a way of proving one's success as a man who has migrated. Like many men I met during my research, Ram's future plans revolved around seeking better-paid work simply in order to make more money. While I was in Kampur he was not able to send much back to his family by way of remittances due to his very low wages.[16] This gave him a relatively low status in the *basti*. Ram seemed to feel it necessary to come back if only to keep up the impression that he was supporting his family – not just financially, but also emotionally and in relation to security. Therefore, appeal of mobility for Ram was broader than the fact that it enabled him to provide economically for his family (as he was not very successful in this). For him mobility was partly to do with the ways in which mobility itself was becoming a significant marker of adult masculinities. Ultimately, for some Kamaiya men moving is not just a marker of being free, but is also becoming a marker of proving one's masculinity as a Kamaiya man.

Srivastava (1984) suggests that migrants often receive both delayed payment and extremely low wages, raising the question of why people migrate if it brings such hardship. Ram told me how various factory and road construction company owners had cheated him on multiple occasions during his time working in India, not paying properly and treating him with disdain and sometimes violence. As these owners are closely linked to various branches of the Indian government, including the police, Ram had no recourse to justice and was forced to leave in some cases without his pay. These experiences of exploitation were consolidated with both the threat and the reality of violence from the police and private security staff. In several respects there were many more powerful men than him in these settings, with Ram at the lower ends of multiple forms of stratification in particular, class, caste and ethnicity. These experiences compromised and challenged his personal security and his masculinity, which was becoming

increasingly dependent on his mobility. Despite these challenges, which included being confronted by various forms of violence combined with alternative masculinities that he had not encountered previously, he remained committed to his status and position as a man who moved. The *basti* presented less obvious threats, although his low income subverted his status there.

I now turn to notions of 'success' in relation to mobility. As has been stated previously, the idea of competency in masculine practices helps to explain certain masculine behaviours (cf. R.W. Connell 2009, 58). It is not enough to simply move; it is also important to be considered successful as a result. Ram showed no obvious signs of success, perhaps because he had had limited success in his working life in India. Ram moved not just for economic reasons but also to fulfil the expectations of his family as the eldest son in a context of limited economic opportunities. Consequently, disposable income was in short supply for both him and his family. Like all the other people I spoke to who had moved to India, he felt significant pressure to send as much money home as possible.

The more money sent back to the *basti* the more successful the sender was seen to be, giving him good standing in the *basti* relative to other men. How the money was made did not seem to matter. This helps to explain the disconnection between the often harsh and sometimes brutal working conditions experienced by Kamaiya men like Ram, and perceptions of these conditions amongst the men's families in Kampur. Success in relation to mobility and masculinity also relies on the consumption that it facilitates, as Osella and Osella discuss:

> Migration helps maintain one's prestige by concealing one's occupation and by splitting the moment and site of wealth accumulation from its moment of consumption, enabling and encouraging a focus upon the result, cash earned. (F Osella and Osella 2000, 121)

This is significant for men such as Ram, as the work he did was difficult and earned him little status either in the *basti* or in India. His relatively low wages limited his potential to consume in ways that would accord him status. He had bought some clothes in India of which he was proud: while he was not able to consume in the same ways as some of the other young men in Kampur. However, what he was able to buy had a certain kudos as it came from India. Being able to consume in these ways was important aspect of the way Ram tried to portray the appearance of successful masculinity, despite the many challenges such as his low income that made this difficult.

Conclusion

Ram's work in India has led to a new type of masculinity that depends on various aspects of mobility to create an image of success. This article has illustrated that mobility represents a range of opportunities not solely economic ones and conversely, constraints, particularly in relation to Ram's experience of exploitation and violence associated with the types and locations of his work in India. Ultimately, this paper has shown that mobility is leading to types of

masculinity in Kamaiya communities that were non-existent prior to the abolition of the Kamaiya system.

The changes in movement outlined in this article, are specific to the post-bondage era for the Kamaiya (although some forms of movement such as to urban areas for domestic labour existed before and after freedom in 2000). This article has examined the changing expectations that Kamaiya men are negotiating and how providing for the family is becoming a critical component of Kamaiya masculinity: of proving one's worth and success as a free man. Partly as a result of the increasing complexity and diversity of the links between masculinity and work in Kamaiya communities, successfully providing is difficult for many Kamaiya men even if they migrate. More generally, for them to be seen as successful is now more difficult than previously within the Kamaiya system with a greater range of pressures and expectations than before. Meeting the range of new expectations and competencies associated with these changing masculinities such as the breadwinner, is becoming part of the transition to adulthood for Kamaiya men. Ultimately, the transition to freedom is multiplying and diversifying the possible ways of being a Kamaiya man, but this also multiplies the possible ways to fail.

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[1] The focus on young men and masculinity is in no way meant to minimise the complexity and importance of Kamaiya women and girls gendered experiences of movement and freedom since 2000. There are important projects and research undertaken on women and children's experience of migration, undertaken by organizations such as AATWIN in Nepal and Terre des hommes.

[2] *Pahari* means a Bahun or Chettri (i.e. upper caste) migrant from the hills.

[3] BASE is a Tharu organisation in Nepal established in 1994

[4] The Terai is the region of the southern plains in Nepal.

[5] Other forms of bonded labour and slavery in Nepal include Badi, Deuki, Haliya Kamlari, Kumari, Jhuma, and Chhaupadi.

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

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

[8] It should be noted that 2000 was not the first time slavery was banned in Nepal, although it was the first time the Kamaiya system was specifically banned. Bonded labour was banned in 1926 to little effect. This has resulted in cynicism amongst Kamaiya leaders about the state's commitment to ending the Kamaiya system.

[9] 1990 is a significant year in Nepal's history as it was the year of the Jana Andolan (People's Movement) that brought a type of democracy to Nepal.

[10] During more recent field visits, there seems to be increasing levels of resentment in the two bastis of NGO and development efforts in the name of the Kamaiya. It seems that many Kamaiya long ago gave up hope of meaningful support from NGOs or INGOs.

[11] Summer 2007 Feature -- Nepal bonded labour http://old.antislavery.org/archive/reporter/reporter_summer_2007_articles.htm (accessed 24th August 2011).

[12] Cycling was particularly useful, as it was not included in the many *bandh* (strikes) that restricted all other forms of transport.

[13] I have been able to stay in touch with a number of key contacts from one of the bastis (Kampur) through an intermediary, which has enabled me to stay informed as to significant events that have taken place between fieldwork visits.

[14] The notion of mobility I use here doesn't take into account other influential forms of mobility, such as women moving from their natal to marital home.

[15] Bahun is the colloquial term for the Brahmin caste.

[16] For more on gender differences relating to remittances see Orozco, Lowell and Schneider (2006) and Carling (2008).