

WATER, WEALTH AND POWER: A CASE STUDY FROM UPPER MUSTANG OF NEPAL

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Background:

This paper examines the relationship between micro-social political institutions and unequal access to water which is ultimately molded by macro social world. The indigenously managed irrigation system existing in Dhee-Upper Mustang of Nepal is the manifestation or reflection of local kingship, village headmanship, institution of polyandry, property inheritance system, access to land, *bikas* (green garden), animal husbandry, state monarchical system (which is now abolished), *modus operandi* of NGOs/INGOs and governmental officials. The local unequal social political complexities led to age old indigenously managed irrigation system which is ultimately manufactured and protected by wider social structure. Dhee village Upper Mustang is a semi-arid Trans-Himalayan region in western part of Nepal which is known for its water scarcity. The indigenous or community-managed irrigation system existing in Dhee-Upper Mustang seems highly exploitative and power-ridden.

As irrigation water is a free gift of nature and held in common, rhetorically it is perceived as a 'common good', 'public property'. In community-based water management system, it is presumed that nobody has the exclusive right over it. Water is allocated equitably among users, commoners or farmers making proper institutional arrangements (Trawick et al. 1994 and Uprety, 2005). The romantic statement of water as 'common good' sometimes discourages the idea that water can be owned,

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controlled and appropriated by powerful actors in local level (Mehta 1999:19, Leach 1997:233). So there is an urgent need to unpack the notion of 'users', 'farmers' or 'commoners' that is not a homogenous group but a heterogeneous or inorganic group that comprises different classes, castes, ethnicities and gender and power groups. So prevailing social differentiation, power, and politics play a vital role on their water access and control in which powerful and prestigious people dominate the whole processes of institutional arrangements of water allocation and distribution. In such situations, landless and powerless become deprived of water on their dire need and only powerful landlords become benefited (Mehta, 1997). In a class-based society, all commoners are not equal. They are the multiple actors having multiple interests, purposes, and goals. Their position, authority, and power influence the whole processes of water access and control (Robbins and Agrawal, 1999). In an unequal social, political, cultural and economic system, irrigation system reinforces existing social hierarchy by making the privileged more privileged at the cost of powerless. It cannot address the needs and aspirations of small farmers and poor but becomes 'blue gold' and 'individual possession' of powerful actors in local realm. So we can say that ignoring existing social, political and cultural system is tantamount to making the rich richer and poor poorer. It cannot uplift the poor and small farmers' life but rather exploits their labor in canal maintenance because they are powerless and voiceless in society. Within an unjust social structure, water enhances production, food security, wealth, power and social dignity of the local elites. Ultimately, water rights, access to and control over it are intricately tied with land rights

Theoretical Perspectives:

I have used environmental entitlement analysis, political ecology, and the theory of power elite to examine the access, rights to water and other environmental resources that are prerequisites to life. Entitlement approach was developed first by Amartya Sen. In his famine analysis, he has talked about food scarcity, famine and poverty. Famine and poverty are not the results of limited resources available in an environment but the causes of unequal distribution of environmental resources. When people lose command over the means of livelihood, they might suffer from famine and poverty. Environmental entitlement refers not only

rights to resources in a normative sense that people could have but a range of options, possibilities and choices that people can have with resources which are means of livelihood.

Conventional community-based natural resource management approach treats people-environment relations in equilibrium, consensual, and balanced way. Malthusian interpretation overemphasizes on population pressure as if population growth were the sole cause for the imbalance of environment that disrupts the people-environment harmony. Afore-mentioned assumptions repeat the logic of evolutionists and functionalists. But entitlement approach treats people environment relation in more processual and dynamic way. Through the lens Amartya Sen, community is treated as differentiated, dynamic, and divisive social unit. Different actors have different self interests, needs, priorities, purpose and goals in community. Sen states that rights, entitlements, endowments, range of options or possibilities to environmental resources are always influenced by social institutions and power relations in which powerful, rich, and prestigious people appropriate the resources and powerless become deprived from it (Leach et.al. 1999).

The political ecology developed from the root of Marx's political economy also examines the people-environment relation in a more and processual and dynamic way. It avoids static, natural, historical and apolitical constructions of locality, rights, access to resources and its' governance system. It states that local rules, customs, traditions are not isolated from wider social, political, cultural, and economic processes. So it examines uncertainty and scarcity of resources at local level linking with the global processes. Hence, the political ecology asserts that the means of production such as land, water, pasture, forests and labor are distributed and governed on the basis of power and social differentiation depending upon relation of dependence and dominance. Existing social differentiation, power, authority shapes not only the resource governance system but also the day to day live interactions, negotiations, the abilities of articulation, and manipulation and struggle. Thus, the heterogeneous nature of institutions and power is underscored under political ecology (Blaike and Robbins, 1998).

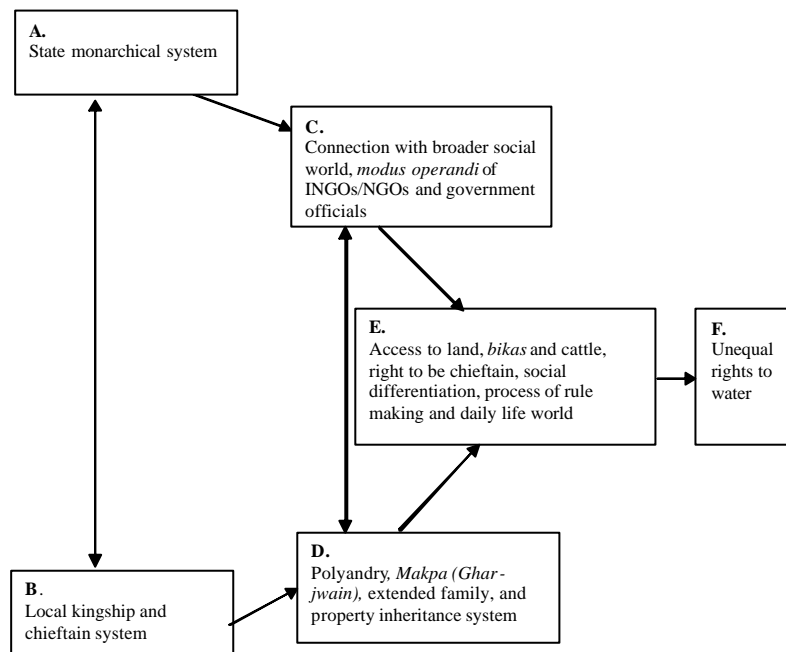
The theory of power elite developed by C.Wright.Mills states that

some sorts of elites are universal in human society. The term 'Elite' refers to top ranked people of society and the term 'power' refers to the ability to impose will upon others. Mainly elites concentrate on social power to capture the economic resources for their own benefits through three ways, i.e. domestic, political and commercial. Elites capture power and resources domestically by means of kinship, politically by means of rulers and commercially by means of markets. In an elite-directed institution, judicious distribution of resources cannot be imagined. By creating own favored institutions, a minority of elites captures the resources and overwhelming people lose the command over them.

Operational Conceptual Framework:

Based on the afore-mentioned theoretical framework, I have developed my operational conceptual model. More specifically, inequality in equitable property rights to water and other resources is shaped by micro and macro social world. The interlocking relationships between micro and macro institutions have produced and sustained unequal distribution of property. In the case of Dhee- Upper Mustang, micro social institutions such as local kingship, chieftainship, polyandry, *makpa (gharjwain)*, extended family, property inheritance systems, system of reproducing the illegitimate children, land, *bikas*, and cattle are the leading factors behind unequal rights to water and other resources. At macro level, state monarchical system (now abolished), its policies, programs, and bureaucracy have protected and legitimized local monarch and directed micro socio-political institutions. On the one hand, it is apparently seen that even after the abolition of petty kings in 1960, the state monarch had given the authority to the Mustang king to rule over Upper Mustang leaving *Raja* title untouched with some honorary position and allowances. The state monarch had bestowed the rank of colonel and the salary to the Mustang king. The Mustang king was also appointed in the standing committee of the state council of the state monarch. These instances show a glance about macro micro socio-political connection. On the other hand, the programs and policies of state are also indifferent towards the unequal distribution of resources available at the local level. For instance, NGO/INGOs and governmental officials always work together with local king and his allies being indifferent towards the misery of Morangbos/Forangs, Ngyalu/ Ngyamu and Ghenchang, the underprivileged

local communities. NGO/INGOs operated programs are chaired by local king and his men such as Jigme Foundation, Annapurna Conservation Committee, Monastery Restoration Committee and Saving Credit Program. The governmental and non- governmental officials have such mindset that they have to work with local bigwigs to succeed their programs. A brief account of conceptual framework can be seen as follows in figure 1.



Methodology Used:

I used qualitative methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interview and life history methods to know the practices, perceptions, cognitions, and the experiences of daily life world of inhabitants of Dhee Upper Mustang. Even though the main emphasis was on qualitative methods, census was conducted in the village at the end of fieldwork in order to identify household heads and categories of people based on local social differentiation. Villagers were accompanied on their daily

chores including fetching, irrigating water, farming and grazing activities. Emphasis was placed on capturing the different layers of variation in the structure of the village's social composition and people's resource endowments.

The Study Area:

Fieldwork was conducted in Dhee, a village in Surkhang upper Mustang. It is located in the trans-himalayan region of the upper Kali-Gandaki in north-western Nepal. It lies in the Tibetan plateau. The Annapurna and Dhaulagiri mountain ranges separate this area from the other Himalayan mountain regions of Nepal. It is a rain shadow and cold desert area. It is situated in 3500 meters elevation point from the sea level. It is the third closest village of Mustang district towards Tibetan border. It is next to the king's village Lomanthang which has been linked with Tibet by a community-built road. But it is very far from district headquarters and other cities of Nepal. Three to four days' walk is required from Jomsom trail to Dhee village. The village possesses variation in topographic features; it comprises many colors of rock hills, pastureland, farm (khet), and Green Garden (Bikas). It lies within three potential villages where two season crops are grown. The main crops of Dhee are barley (uwa), and buckwheat (faper). It also grows potato, salagam, cabbage, tomato, pumpkin and other green vegetables. In fruits apple, *arubakhada*, *khurpani* and grapes are also grown here.

Gurungs (Lopas) living in Upper Mustang, physically, linguistically and culturally, bear strong affinities with Tibet. There are 25 households in Dhee village Surkhang. It comprises 12 households of Dhongba, 12 households of *Morangbo/Forang* and one of old, isolated people *Ghenchang*. The total population is 110. Although eight people from the neighbouring villages are also living in Dhee working as herder and household worker at local bigwigs' homes, they are not counted as family members of Dhee. So they are not mentioned on aggregate population.

Social Structure of Dhee:

All 25 households existing in Dhee belong to the same *Gurung* ethnicity. However, they are not homogenous but heterogeneous in terms of wealth,

power, and social status. Polyandry, property inheritance system, local king system and other social sanctions create the different categories of people from the same clan. The state and other macro institutions legitimize it. Mainly, there are six categories of people which include the property holder brother (*Dhongba*), the younger and propertyless brother (*Forang*), the alone and propertyless sister (*Morangbo*), old men (*Ghepo*), old women (*Ghemo*) and illegitimate children (*Ngyalu/Ngyamu*), etc. Though they do not get respect from other members of their own family, the old men and old women (*Ghepo* and *Ghemo*) are not treated as badly as *Forang/Morangbo* and illegitimate children (*Ngyalu/Ngyamu*) are treated. Fifty years ago, the system of polyandry marriage was in dominant position. After the change in polyandry marriage and extended family system due to the connection with outer social world with monogamy marriage and nuclear family system, new categories of people have emerged in Dhee. Although there are so many changes in family, marriage, and occupations but the system of property inheritance do not become changed. The unequal distribution of property on household level and its forever continuation and protection by local king has produced the different categories of people. Old norms of polyandry and extended family are defended and manipulated for the sake of elder brother in the name of tradition and custom. The matter of resource has produced these different categories of people. Village head man, politician, king's own man and the king remain on the top rank of the local social hierarchy. Among *Dhongbas*, those who are affluent and powerful, hold the highest position in the society. So access, and right to water is deeply rooted in local social differentiation and power relations.

Property Holder Elder Brothers (*Dhongbas*):

There are 12 households of *Dhongbas*. The *Dhongbas* are mainly the family of property holders. Among 12 households, ten have become *Dhongbas* on the basis of their background of elder brothers and the remaining two on the basis of property. The two younger brothers got chance to go to bride's father's home who had no son. In this way, they could get the land, *bikas*, and cattle and their father-in-law's water turn. Thus, by getting property from their father-in-law, they reached the position of *Dhongbas*. So *Dhongba* is a synonym of property, power and social dignity which is produced by micro social and political

structure. The main basis of *Dhongba* is property which is fundamental to live the life. In this study village, only *Dhongbas* have the water turn. Among *Dhongbas*, king's men and rich *Dhongbas* have the first and former turn to irrigate their land. Within households, the *Dhongbas* are in top rank. They are not unlike the king at their home. They decide the division of labor. For example, who among the family members should engage in business, herding and agricultural work. Traditionally, *Dhongbas* engage in business and public ceremony while their younger brothers engage in herding and agriculture. This division of labor gives more reward, power and prestige to *Dhongba* and triggers powerlessness among the *Morangbos/Forangs*. In such a way, *Morangbos/Forangs* are treated as meaningless people. They do not have the sense of dignity either.

Forangs and Morangbos:

There are 11 households of *Forangs* and *Morangbos*. The process of monogamous marriage and unequal distribution of parental property produce the *Forangs* and *Morangbos*. If younger brothers follow the monogamous system of marriage and stay being propertyless, then they turn into the position of *Forangs*. In the case of sisters, if they produce children in their parental home and become separate by getting a nominal piece of land from elder brothers, then they are known as *Morangbos*. Isolated females either from their ex-lovers or husbands after having children are called as *Morangbos* who stay in their elder brothers' homes with their children. Such females are regarded as people belonging to lower stratum in Dhee village. There are seven *Morangbos* households and four *Forangs*. There is a social system that dictates that if the illegitimate children cannot earn cattle, land, and *bikas*, they also turn into the position of *Forangs/ Morangbos*. Non-possession of land, *bikas* (green garden), and cattle triggers their situation to turn into labor. They are living their life working as wage laborers, herders, and tillers. Sometimes, they work as salesmen of *Dhongbas* who invest in temporary sweeter business in Ludhiyana India. Some poor families from four *Dhongba* households also work as salesmen on sweeter business in India. All *Forangs* and *Morangbos* households have no water turn though canal is built and repaired by their labor. Thus, albeit they have no possession of land to irrigate, there is a compulsion to go on canal maintenance for

more than 40 days in each year. To irrigate their nominal piece of land, they are annexed with their *Dhongba* counterpart.

Ghepo/ Ghemo (old isolated people):

There are two households of *Ghepo* and *Ghemo*. The old people who separate from their sons and in-laws are called as *Ghepo/Ghemo*. Isolated male is regarded as *Ghepo* and female as *Ghemo*. They do not have respect both at home and in the community. These households are also in the situation of utter neglect. Such people are called as *Ghenschang* as well which gives the meaning of separated people from their own son and in-laws.

Local King System:

Local king is perceived as a form of Lord Buddha in upper Mustang. His voice is like a law till now. He has the land and palaces in all seven villages in upper Mustang. Being so powerful and prestigious, the local king is both the rule maker and implementer in upper Mustang. His position is perceived as a hub of wealth, power, and prestige. The local rights and privileges are determined and bestowed upon by him. His palace is equated with the Supreme Court and himself is considered as the ultimate judge. All kinds of disputes in relation to pasture, water, and firewood are settled by him and in so doing his allies get the justice and others do not. In the case of Dhee village, he has arranged the water turns as per his own will considering the local social differentiation in which 12 households of *Dhongbas* get the water turn while 11 households of *Morangbos/Forangs* do not. The king has directed that the 11 households of propertyless brothers and sisters have to go for canal maintenance for 40 to 45 days in each year. Among *Dhongbas* who are rich and have close nexus with the king have the first turns and those who do not have close ties and relatively less landholding have the later turns. Sometimes, it happens that when the buckwheat of *Dhongbas* who have the privilege of first turn of water gets green, the *Dhongbas* get their water turn to plant their buckwheat. Sometimes, they miss the planting season which results in the drastic reduction of their production and consequent is the suffering of the famine.

Property Inheritance System:

Under the existing social sanction (which is heavily influenced by the local kingship), the elder brother (*Dhongba*) has the exclusive right over parental property such as land, *bikas* (green garden), and cattle. Except for the adoption of polyandry, it sidelines younger brothers and sisters from inheriting the parental property. Property gives the power, prestige and sense of dignity to elder brothers (*Dhongbas*) while powerlessness, hopelessness and meaninglessness are given to younger brothers and sisters (*Forangs/Morangbos*). It shapes their daily interaction, negotiation, contestation, capability of articulation, and manipulation in which elder brother becomes superior and younger brother and sister inferior in the social hierarchy. For instance, in public sphere, elder brother is seated in middle of the position who is offered good hospitality and younger brother has to sit down somewhere in the peripheral space bereft of hospitality. This weak and fragile position of younger brothers and sisters leads to the powerlessness in water governance system. They do not get any role in rule making to implement the water distribution. Neither they get any compensation nor any other benefit for their labor used for the canal maintenance.

Illegitimate Children (*Ngyalu/Ngyamu*) System:

Getting children in parental home by a girl before formal marriage is regarded as normal phenomenon in upper Mustang. In the past, the king, *Bista* family and other powerful persons used to produce such children despite having their own wife at homes. Such children were regarded as *Ngyalu* and *Ngyamu* in local vernacular. Boy is addressed as *Ngyalu* and girl as *Ngyamu*. In the past, if somebody produced such illegitimate children, then he would not have responsibility more than one word to say that, " I am his or her father ," and offer some Rs. 10 or Rs. 20 and one garland to girl's parents. If girl can marry another person, then her children become isolated from mother and father. Then such children become dependent with their maternal uncle for their rearing and caring. Such children are treated badly because of propertylessness and lack of parenthood. If their maternal uncle is also poor, then they have to face double discrimination. If they cannot earn property in their whole life, then they cannot gain power, prestige, and social dignity. In their later life, especially after getting married, such *Ngyalu/Ngyamu* are also known as *Forangs/Morangbos*. Their fatherless and propertyless

situation makes them powerless, and worthless in every social sphere. They do not possess the right to be a village head. First, they become fatherless and later they do not get the water turn. Thus, they neither get their right to water nor any compensation despite having labor contribution to canal maintenance. They do not have any role in rule making to implement. So their isolated position in the social sphere reflects water governance system.

Social Division on God's Worshipping (*Manepeme*):

The 11 *Morangbo/Forang* households have their separate worshipping system (*Manepeme*) from the 12 *Dhongba* women. Once it was done together but *Dhongba* women needed some wider place and especial seat with especial food, drinks and Tibetan butter tea. The *Morangbos* were unable to provide so in their homes as *Dhongba* women could. Lack of good homes, cattle and *bikas* is the main cause of their inability. So one day, *Dhongba* women told *Morangbo* not to come to their residence for God's worshipping. They do not want to stay with landless, fatherless and poor. Since that day, they became separated from common God worshipping ritual. They tend to worship their God for the betterment of their life after death. They perceive Dalai Lama as a form of Lord Buddha and worship him. Thus, the religious ritual has divided them in two separate groups. Now *they have separate religious institutions (Manepeme)*. It separates *Morangbo* and *Forang* from *Dhongba* and compels them to think that they are the second class citizen in the same community. Such cognitions and perceptions have made them weak on their daily interactions in public sphere and as a result, they have had the unequal rights to water.

Process of Headman Selection:

As per local social rule, only 12 households of *Dhongbas* have the traditional privilege to be the village headman. Each year, village headman is selected from *Dhongba* family through a lottery system. Eleven households of *Morangbos* and *Forangs* do not have right to be village head. They are locally regarded as "uncertain people" and are not considered as eligible candidate for this social position. The headman conducts the village meetings and works as a water judge. He also

possesses the right to implement the decisions. He is regarded as high ranking and prestigious official. Thus, *Morangbos/Forangs* have been sidelined from being headman and are deprived of water.

Interface between Polyandry and Macro Social World:

Traditional value of upper Mustang directs the young people to adopt the polyandry while modern values foster them to adopt monogamous marriage and nuclear family- a function of the social connection with the modern cities of Nepal such as Pokhara and Kathmandu and external world notably, India, China, and America. Due to this social connection, all younger brothers are adopting the monogamous marriage and nuclear family despite the fact that there are a very few cases of polyandry and extended family systems. Polyandry and extended family are on the verge of extinction now. But in the case of separate marriage, micro social political structure punishes the younger brothers by depriving them of parental property. In this way, scarce resources are monopolized by hands of elder brothers and younger brothers become deprived of them. Adoption of polyandry and extended family is prerequisite to use the parental property for younger brothers as per the local social sanction. Micro social system is manipulating the old norms of polyandry in the favor of elder brothers. This situation is also manifested in water in which elder brother becomes the rule maker for water right and has the access to and control over it while younger brother becomes the follower and has no access to water. They are annexed with their elder brother to irrigate their very nominal piece of land.

Access to Land and *Bikas* (green garden):

Most of the land and *bikas* in Dhee are occupied by *Dhongbas*. Land refers to cultivable land while *bikas* refers to green garden. Among *Dhongbas*, king's own men have large land holding. The *Dhongbas*, who have large landholding and have close ties with the king, have the first turn of water and those who have relatively less landholding and do not have close ties with the king have the water turn at a latter stage. The *Morangbos/Forangs* who have not land or nominal piece of land do not have water turn. *Bikas* is a name imposed by development agency such as Care Nepal and Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP). Before

25 five years ago, there were no trees, fruit plantation, and greenery. Care Nepal had introduced tree plantation, kitchen garden, and fruit plantation near their settlements. This development innovation has been named as the *bikas*. In this village, access to land and *bikas* has been the

Table 1: Description of Access to Land, *Bikas* and Water Turn

S.N	Name	Social category	Access to Land in <i>ropani</i>	Access to <i>Bikas</i> (green garden)	Turn No. in lower canal	Turn No. in upper canal
1	Pemba Gurung	Dhongba	21	Y	3	6
2	Kunga Pasang Gurung	Dhongba	23	Y	2	2
3	Nima Dhoma Gurung	Morangbo	2.5	N	×	×
4	Chhiring Dhoma Gurung	Dhongba	8	Y	×	11
5	Chhiring Gompo Gurung	Dhongba	36	Y	1	4
6	Chhendi Gurung	Morangbo	0.5	N	×	×
7	Pema Nursang Gurung	Forang	0.5	N	×	×
8	Vitti Gurung	Dhongba	18	Y	7	9
9	Angjoo Gurung	Dhongba	11.5	Y	10	11
10	Pasang Gurung	Dhongba	8	Y	12	12
11	Tharchen Gurung	Dhongba	15	Y	8	7
12	Karma Samduk gurung	Dhongba	21.5	Y	4	7
13	Dhuduk Gurung	Dhongba	19	Y	9	6
14	Balu Gurung	Forang	2.5	N	×	×
15	Samden Gurung	Morangbo	0.7	N	×	×
16	Dhenden Gurung	Dhongba	17	Y	5	3
17	Chhiri Angmo Gurung	Ghenchan	3	N	×	×
18	Rinja Ange Gurung	Ghenchan	3.5	N	×	×
19	Ongdi Gurung	Dhongba	17.5	Y	6	1
20	Tenjing Gurung	Forang	0.2	N	×	×
21	Dawa chhiri Gurung	Forang	0.7	N	×	×
22	Bhujung Gurung	Forang	1.3	N	×	×
23	Sonam Gurung	Morangbo	0	N	×	×
24	Angmo Gurung	Morangbo	0.6	N	×	×
25	Ngldi Gurung	Morangbo	0.4	N	×	×
	Total		252.4			

Source: Fieldwork, 2005

Notes: Yes (Y) , No (N)

the main determinant of water right. The interface between land, *bikas*, and water turn can be clearly seen in the following table in a descriptive way.

Daily Life World:

The poor Dhongbas, Morangbos/Forangs and illegitimate children cannot raise their voices for their own rights and against their exploitation. In every day life, they are perceived powerless/worthless people while king's men, rich Dhongbas and village politicians are perceived as powerful and prestigious people. It is legitimized in social daily interactions, rites, rituals, feasts, festivals, village meetings and selection of village head man. In public gatherings, there are different forms of social hierarchy discerned. Dhongbas, king's men and village politician sit on the middle position with especial seat, table and cup and illegitimate children, Morangbos and Forangs sit somewhere in the peripheral space with their cups and tables. While serving them the barley beer and other dishes, the hospitality and manner is also shown different towards the people sitting on the middle position but Morangbos/Forangs are treated offensively. The treatment for illegitimate and Dhongba children is also different. In village meetings, the role of Morangbos and Forangs is perceived as meaningless. Their presence is not mandatory in the process of rule making. So the weak position in everyday life makes them worthless/powerless in the process of rule making and holding village meeting. In this way, the daily life world of subordination and superordination led to unequal rights to water.

King's Love Story behind First Turn of Water:

Existing water rules and turns were renewed 40 years ago in a period of former king Ghyalchung Parval Bista. During his period, he fell in love with a rich man's daughter, Tasi Angeya Gurung (name changed). One son and two daughters were born from his relation. Although he could not marry a daughter of his ordinary subject, nobody could show the courage to resist against this kind of love. Later, the king married a Tibetan girl. His lover also married another man in Dhakmar V.D C. It is reported that such kind of love with ordinary girl by the powerful king was tolerable in Upper Mustang. The love between the girl and the king

made girl's father closer to the king and he manipulated that relation on his own benefit influencing all decisions and arranging water turn in number one among all villagers. He reached on top rank being decisive person. The *Dhongba*, king, and village headman's nexus became powerful and influenced the turns of water distribution.

***Modus Operandi* of INGOs and Government Officials:**

The INGOs/NGOs and the government officials who sporadically visit the communities always work with the king and his allies. They never paid attention towards the woes, problems, and miseries of *Morangbos/Forangs* and *Ngyalu/Ngyamu*. They think that working with the local king, and *Dhongba* allies is necessary for making their program successful. For the underprivileged segment like *Morangfbos* and *Forangs*, the INGOs and governmental officials are there only to ride the horses and making the king and his men staying only in their hotel and thereby make them rich. The Annapurna Conservation Area Project has invented the old festivals Teejee in which prosperity for the king is prayed by the local people. These kinds of *modus operandi* of officials are sometimes are responsible for the unequal rights to water and other resources.

State Monarchical System:

Local king and state monarchy (now abolished) had very close ties. Ultimately state monarchical social and political structure had given the authority to local king with some traditional rights. The '*Raja*' title with some traditional rights and allowances was left untouched by the state king even after the promulgation of the Act to abolish the petty kings and principalities in 1961. The rank of colonel and equivalent salary was given to the king of Mustang by state authority. He was appointed to the Standing Committee of the State Council to advise the king of Nepal. Fifteen years ago, two especial horses were given to the king of Nepal by the king of Mustang. The crown prince used to visit Mustang each year. The palace of the local king used to be his place to stay. It is reported that the crown prince used to encourage the local king to rule the upper Mustang as per his desire. He used to assure the local king for giving arms and ammunitions if he needed to suppress common people

(who wanted to reject the rule of Mustang king). Strongly backing the local king to rule over upper Mustang explicitly or implicitly, state monarchy was connected with local rules and social political complexities. So elite-centered rules, rights and old norms are somehow state-driven and directed. Without state's backing, unequal rights, rules and institutions could not be sustained over upper Mustang.

Water Allocation and Distribution:

Water is distributed here according to the fixed rotational turn system. Only 12 households of *Dhongbas* have been given the turn. The turns are arranged on the basis of local social hierarchy in which Raja's own man and rich *Dhongbas* have their first turn. Relatively poor and disempowered *Dhongbas* have the later turns. The 11 households of *Morangbos* and *Forangs* have no turn. They have to use their *Dhongba's* turn to irrigate their nominal piece of land. The fixation of water turn to irrigate their land is arranged on the basis of local socio-political system. The dominant and large land holders have the first turn while the disempowered have the last. Such distributional norms are framed by the *Raja*, his men and chieftain. The turn system of water arranged in Dhee village is not arranged on the basis of the location of land (i.e from head to the tail). As irrigation water is also the main source of drinking water, there is no any bar and exclusion in drinking purpose. But in the case of irrigating their land, the *Morangbos/Forangs* do not have legal rights. Each *Dhongba* has three day's turn.

Resource Mobilization:

Very uneven and unjust labor contribution system is prevailing in this king-dominated socio-political structure at the local level. The inhabitants of Dhee have to go for canal maintenance not on the basis of landholding size. More specifically, local households have to contribute the labor for canal maintenance regardless of their possession or non-possession of land. All members from each household from the age of 13 to 59 (except students and old people) are required to contribute labor to canal maintenance. In this system, two persons from the bigger households with large landholding size and four persons from the landless households are required to contribute the labor. This kind of system is made and

enforced by local king, his men, village politicians, and *Dhongbas*. Those who do not go for the canal maintenance have to pay fine. Each year, due to the heat of the sun in the summer, Mustang stream increases and brings the misery for the inhabitants of Dhee by ruining their dam and filling the canal with sandstones. During June/July, the local farmers harvest the naked barely and plant the buckwheat for which water is required. During that time, they have to participate regularly for one month for the canal maintenance. Due to the increasing volume of water in the river every year in the summer, the river gorge is deepening every year.

State has always become indifferent towards Mustang and has never paid attention to build an ecologically sustainable canal. The direct result is the uncertainty, water scarcity and overburden of labor contribution by the poorer sections of the communities. But these poorer people have followed these exploitative rules by calling them as the traditional rules. Their violation results in the payment of the fines. The cash, kind, and fine are collected by village chieftain for operating the canal on a sustained basis.

Fine (*Tshepa*) System:

As indicated above, non-attendance for the canal maintenance results in the payment of the fines which is decided by the village chieftain, rich men and politicians. But the rate of fine is different. If the *Dhongba* becomes absent, then he should pay either one *Pathi* naked barley or 100 Rs. cash and if *Morangbo /Forang* is absent, then he/she should pay either half *Pathi* naked barley or Rs. 50 cash. The interesting aspect of the fine system here is that he or she has to pay fine in absence even if he or she is not at home. For instance, if somebody is in India or America, he or she has to pay fine for being absent on canal maintenance. But students and ill people are waived of this obligation. All cash and fine is collected by village chieftain and consumed on God's worshiping activities and village parties are organized to legitimize their social differentiation. All labor contributors and villagers attend the village gatherings and parties. So they consume all collected resource communally and do the work communally for canal maintenance.

Process of Rule Making :

Water rules existing in Dhee are made, amended and enforced by the allies of village politician, king and his henchmen. During the village meeting, important decisions are made by the local elites but the *Forangs/Morangbos* are only passive listeners. The monopoly use of water in the past by rich and powerful men has also changed due to the resistance of later turn's *Dhongbas*. This resulted in the allocation of three day's turn to per household.

Role in Village Meeting:

In Dhee village, most of the village meetings are conducted for water purposes, primarily for canal maintenance. Canal maintenance more than one month in the summer season is the routine work. Although meetings are held for other purposes too, decisions on water-related tasks dominate the others. If household head is present at home, then mostly he has to participate at the meeting. In the absence of male (household head), the women attend the meeting. In the case of meeting for the canal maintenance, the poor *Morangbo's/Forang's* presence is also mandatory but their participation is not necessary in the decision-making process. In a village meeting, rich and powerful *Dhongbas* tend to speak more. Women, poor *Dhongbas* and *Morang's/Forangs* attend mere physically. They never speak even a single word in front of their rich *Dhongbas*, village politicians, chief and king's men. Their role indicates that they are only the passive listeners who agree and clap on discussed, passed, articulated and manipulated agenda due to the nexus of the village headman, politician, *Dhongba* and the king's man. Thus, the have-not segment of *Morangbos/Forangs* only participates at village meeting physically.

Conclusions:

The unequal rights to water existing in Dhee village are the manifestations of local king-initiated social sanctions, institutions, social hierarchy and power relations which were not isolated from the state monarchical and broader social systems. They are protected and sustained on the ground of broader social relation. So indigenously managed or farmer-managed

irrigation systems are built and sustained on the foundations of power relation and social differentiation. So water rules, rights prevailing in indigenously or community-managed irrigation system, are exclusively power-ridden. In a hierarchically ordered class-based society, equal and equitable rights for all cannot be imagined. Water rules, rights existing in Dhee are just the manifestations of access to land and *bikas*, village head system, local king system, polyandry, property inheritance system, production and reproduction of illegitimate children, social sanctions, daily life world, every day interactions, state monarchical system and the *modus operandi* of INGOs and government officials. In this king-dominated socio-political system, rights or access to and control over water are king and his ally-centered. At the village level, village head, politician and king's men are not unlike the king. At the household level, elder brother is like the king. So the local elites have access to and control over precious, scarce and non-substitutable resource, that is, water. Ultimately, the local king and his men are the creators of existing social institutions and rules. So community or indigenously-managed irrigation system which is perceived as decentralized one is centralized up to local nobles/elites in Dhee-upper Mustang. In such system, neglecting unequal social, political, economic and cultural aspects of irrigation water reinforces existing social hierarchy making the rich richer and the poor poorer. So there is a pressing need to develop a more judicious, egalitarian and decentralized watershed development strategy.

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Glossary

Amtsi:	Traditional doctor
Aani:	Nun
Bikas:	Green garden comprising of trees and fruits
Chhyang:	Barley beer
Dhongba:	Eldest and property holder brother
Dhujang:	A kind of leisure party
Forang:	Propertyless and isolated brother
Ghemo:	Separated old women from their own son and in-laws
Ghempa:	Village head or chieftain
Ghenchang:	Common term for separated old man and woman
Ghepo:	Separated old man from their own son and in-laws
Lakpi:	Communal labor exchange
Lama:	Monk
Manepeme:	God's worshipping
Morangbo:	Isolated unmarried sister
Ngyalu:	Illegitimate boy having no own father
Ngyamu:	Illegitimate girl having no own father
Para:	Name of a kind of gambling
Pata khane:	Contract party
Tshepa:	A kind of fine in the case of absence on canal
ACAP	Annapurna Conservation Area Project
DDC	District Development Committee
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MRMG	Mountain Resource Management Group
NGO	Non-Government Organization
VDC	Village Development Committee

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