

Report By Thomas Cox

Backward Society Education

(BASE)

The Development of a Grassroots

Movement

1994

By

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Author's Forward

I first went to Tulsipur (a town in the Dang valley of west Nepal, in September of 1989, as a consultant to monitor and evaluate a vegetable, Fruit and Cash Crops Project that was being implemented by the United States Agency for International Development. On this trip I met Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, a young Tharu (an ethnic group that will be described later in the report) man (of only 19) who told me about an organization that he had established to implement education, agriculture, cultural preservation, advocacy and leadership training programs in some Tharu Villages in Dang.

I spent a week interviewing Tharus in these villages; and it was from them that I first heard how most Dang valley Tharu had lost their land and were thus forced to leave Dang and live elsewhere, or stay in the valley and work as tenant farmers or bonded laborers for high caste landlords. (This whole process will be described later.)

During the course of dozens of interviews (conducted during three initial trips to Dang) the true dimensions of the Tharus' problems were slowly revealed. Their literacy rate, especially among women, was extremely low. The majority of Tharu were living below the poverty line, and they were persecuted in a variety of ways by politically dominant high-caste landlords. Many Tharu tenant farmers were denied the share of grain that was due to them under existing tenancy laws. On other occasions landlords used threats, or actual acts of violence, to force Tharus to work for them. Other Tharu were denied access to jobs, just because of their tribal affiliation, or were not encouraged to pursue their education.

Most serious of all the situation of bonded laborers, some of whom were being forced to work for only 10 rupees (about 20 cents) a day to pay off loans that were taken by their forefathers 3 or 4 generations ago. Given their extremely low remuneration most bonded laborers kept falling deeper and deeper into debt, as they were forced to keep borrowing money from the landlord for food, clothing, medicine and other basic needs.

But in the midst of all this suffering there was also tremendous hope, strength, resilience, courage and perhaps most importantly of all, determination among the Tharus. A determination to improve the quality of their lives and throw off the forces of oppression.

No where was this more evident than in Dilli Bahadur's efforts to build up his organization into a viable force to protect Tharu interests. Apart from determination I also saw in Dilli a brilliance for leadership and communication; charisma; devotion to his people and a powerful vision of what the Tharu needed to achieve, and how they had to achieve it.

Over the course of the next five years I made dozens of trips out to Dang. Some of these were for development or research projects I was working on. Other trips were made just to visit Dilli and other friends. Over the course of these visits my relationship with Dilli, and many other BASE members, has become closer. And it has been with a sense of awe and joy that I have seen BASE grow, from a ragtag band of 34 determined but inexperienced youths, into a dynamic, well organized, powerful grassroots movement, whose 85,000 members are transforming Tharu communities for the better in five districts of west Nepal.

The whole those of BASE is perhaps best represented in the literacy classes for girls that are held at night in over 600 villages. These classes are often held in Tharu houses. One walks into these houses to see Tharu girls sitting in a circle and that lie on the mid floor in front of them; illuminated in the soft glow of one or two kerosene lamps. It may be warm or chilly in that room (depending on the time of year). The seating arrangement may be slightly uncomfortable, and the light not quite as bright as one would like. But there is a tremendous intensity and sense of purpose that transcends all of these obstacles, that radiates from the intent, determined expressions of these girls who often stay up until late at night learning to read. (Hundreds of girls who started in these classes are now studying in government (or elite private) schools.) it is this strength and determination that is the driving force behind BASE, and what has made it the extremely dynamic and successful organization that it is.

Introduction

BASE is usually described by its members and supporters as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that implements development programs. Actually, BASE is much more than that. It is a powerful social movement that is transforming Tharu society and socio-political relation between Tharu and high caste Hindus in five districts (including Dang, Deukhari, Bardiya, Banke, Kailali and Kanchanpur) of west Nepal.

With more than 85,000 active members, and a staff of 742, BASE is, by far, the largest NGO in Nepal. It is also the most successful. No other NGO in Nepal has been able to mobilize as many people as BASE to actively and effectively implement development programs. BASE, especially in its early stages, also encountered intense opposition from certain members of the landed ruling class in all five targeted districts. BASE'S leadership has since used various strategies that have largely neutralized this opposition.

BASE'S success contains important lessons for both Nepali NGO staff members and expatriate development workers; especially those who are working with oppressed, impoverished ethnic minority groups. The primary reason for working this report is to pass these lessons on through a comprehensive account of BASE'S institutional development. A secondary reason is to raise awareness about some serious human rights problems (bonded labor primary among them) that exist in BASE'S five target district. Their reason is to generate interest about grassroots leadership in Nepal. This is very important aspect of Nepal's development, and yet surprisingly little has been written about it. There is much that development professionals can learn from BASE'S very effective leadership.

This report begins with a description of the Tharu, BASE'S primary target community. This section includes information on Tharu population, language, social organization and cultural/religious practices. These issues are discussed in some detail, to comprehend the problems that BASE' is addressing. It is first necessary to understand their socio-cultural context.

The second section describes how the influx of high caste Hindi settlers and subsequent loss of tribal land affected Dang valley Tharus. The third section examines why Dang Valley Tharu were (until BASE came along) unable to mount an effective unified response to oppression by high-caste landlords.

The fourth section is a short biography of Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, BASE's founder and current Project Chief, the man primarily responsible for the organization's success. This discussion explains how Dilli's family, educational and professional background contributed to the development of his leadership skills. (And how Dilli's leadership mobilized grassroots support for BASE.)

The fifth section discusses the opposition that Dilli and his supporters encountered when they first established BASE, and how this was overcome. The sixth focuses on how financial and popular support for BASE increased, and opposition decreased, after the revolution of 1990, and the impact of all this on the organization.

The seventh section examines; (1) BASE's administration, organization and staff and' (2) Education, bonded laborer, health, family planning, income generating and infrastructure programs. (The discussion includes descriptions of target groups and program policies, activities and goals.) The eight sections describe BASE's fund raising efforts and the reasons for their success. Success The ninth section is a summary of the most important points discussed in the report.

Tharu

Tharus are an ethnic group indigenous to, the terai (plains) region of southern Nepal. There are between 700,000 and 1,000,000 Tharus living in Nepal. They speak their own Indo-European language (the Tharu language is actually a cluster or related dialects which, in many cases, are mutually unintelligible) and have their own culture. (Tharu culture, like their language, differs significantly from one district to the next.)

Tharu have a syncretic religion which includes shamanistic, animistic and, to a lesser extent, Hindu traditions. The shamanistic and animistic traditions are indigenous. Hindu traditions come from the wider Nepali society; but Tharu have dealt with this Hinduism on their own terms. They have rejected many Hindu traditions and adopted other.

The upcoming sections on Tharu social organization, rituals and festivals are intended to show (1) The richness and distinctness of Tharu traditions and (2) how some of these traditions have been destroyed or changed by oppression and impoverishment.

DangValley Tharu Social Organization and Ritual Life :

Dang Valley Tharus are organized into two major clans and exogamous, patrilineal sub-clans. The two major clans include Gharguruwa (Shaman clan) and Barin (Householder clan). Men from the Gharguruwa clan are eligible to become shamans who perform the most important community and household rituals. Barin clan members are not allowed to preside over these rituals or initiate new shamans. They may only perform comparatively minor household rituals.

The Dang valley is divided into five separate territories, each of which has their own shaman leader or desbhandya guruwawa as they are called in Tharu. These include the Pachhilla Praganna, Patu Praganna, Chhilli Praganna, Pachhilla Sawari and Aghilla Sawari. The Desbhandya guruwa position is inherited partinineally, from father to son. The desbhandya guruwas' duties include performing certain territory-level rituals to drive away evil spirits, dangerous wild animals (including leopard, tigers, bear and venomous snakes), diseases and crop eating insects.

Dang valley Tharus also perform four annual rituals to worship village deities. These rituals include the Dhurra gurrai, Harrahi gurrai, Dusya rituals and Laula Guruwa. The Dhurra gurrai and harrahi gurrai rituals are performed to ask village deities for good maize and rice crops. Village deities are also worshiped during the Dasain festival. (This will be described during a later section of the festival itself.) All of these rituals are performed by the Mahaton (village headman).

The laula guruwa is performed to initiate Tharumen into shamanhood so they can perform various rituals. This ritual is performed on a full-moon night between September and December. During the Laula guruwa men gather in groups (consisting of brothers and, sometimes their patrilineal cousins) of 5 or 6 in the Dehurar (special ritual room) of village houses. An experienced head gharguruwa shaman-among with one assistant shaman and 4 or 5 drums or cymbal playing singers-bring the initiates into trance through ritual chanting and accompanying music. The entranced initiates are then believed to become possessed by the goddess Maiya. The head shaman then ask Maiya if she is happy with the initiates and rituals proceeding, Maiya, speaking through the entranced initiated, answers yes. Then the initiates, still entranced, make offerings of liquor to all the household gods. Then they lay down and sleep until the next morning, when they awaken from their trance. Later, ghargurwa initiates are given additional training in how to prepare incense and other ritual offerings. (This type of training is not necessary for Barin initiates).

Yet another village-level ritual is the dagar batana, which is performed to protect the villagers from infectious diseases and evil spirits. This ritual is performed by three people. The Mahaton, a gharguruwa shaman and kesauka (a shaman's assistant who also served as a spirit medium through which the ghargurwa can converse with a deity.) The gharguruwa shaman first constructs an altar on the very edge of the village. On this altar are placed various ritual objects including leaf cups (with rice grains and coin in each one), statues (of horses) representing the shaman's clan and household deities, leaf cup oil lamps, another leaf cup filled with clover and nutmeg (these are all ritual offerings to Daharcandi, a female deity who is believed to protect Tharu from diseases, evil spirits and wild animals) and a big iron nail which symbolizes Saura, the Tharu god of courage and power.

When everything is in place the shaman lights the lamps and then applies a streak of vermilion powder in front of each one. Then the shaman and his keusaka perform a ritual to communicate with Daharcandi. The ritual begins when the shaman tosses some rice over the keusaka's head. The keusaka then goes into a trance. The shaman then asks Daharcandi who will protect the village from infectious diseases, evil spirits and wild animals. The goddess answers that she will. Then the keusaka, still in trance, picks on the clay horses, the nail symbolizing Saura and the leaf cup containing the nutmeg and clover and walks into a nearby field and puts them down. He is followed by the shaman who carries a pot of blessed liquor, a leaf cup lamp and a live chick which is offered to the evil spirits. In return for the chick the spirits are supposed to remain outside the village. Later the shaman and keusak sacrifices seven chickens and a pig, and offer mild and liquor, to Daharcandi. After this, incense is lit at the site and sacrificed chickens and pig are taken back to the Mahaton's house and eaten.

Tharu also perform a variety of rituals to appease malevolent spirits or win the support of benevolent ones. For example, every year, in March and October, every Tharu family performs a ritual, rathlausai, in which they offer prayers, coins and blessed water to Rath; a malevolent spirit that is believed to attack children. Other malevolent spirits who are appeased through annual rituals include Raksa (who is associated with water buffalo) and Kalhu Masn (who is associated with mustard seed crushers).

Tharu also worship a variety of benevolent deities and spirits. These include Patanhi Bhawani, a goddess who is believed to have come from Devi Patan, a Tharu pilgrimage site on the Nepal-India border. The goddess is represented by a small half-buried stone which is placed in the courtyard in front of every Tharu home. Tharu also worship Bhagmarrawa and Ratana Purwa, who are ancestor deities and Baidawa. The ancestor spirits of revered traditional healer. Tharu also worship Lagubasu (who are ancestor deities, and Baidawa; the ancestor spirit of a revered traditional healer. Tharu also worship Lagubasu, (The name for Vasuki, a mythological deity from Hindu mythology.) They also worship Bagar and Dharai, two deities who are believed to protect livestock. Finally, Tharus also make daily ritual offerings to their three most important gods, Gurubaba, Maiya and Saura.

DangValley Tharu Festivals

1. Maghi

Maghi is the Tharu New Year Festival. It is celebrated in the second week of January and lasts for four days. Tharu spend the first two days of Maghi eating, drinking Chungi (homemade beer) and Rakshi (home made liquor) and performing a variety of traditional songs and dances.

On the early morning of the third day Tharu bathe in nearby river sand then go to their village shrine and, sometimes, even a local Hindu temple-and pay homage to major deities, bathe their own and those from the Hindu pantheon. After returning home all men place blessed offerings of grain and salt (known as kaharana) into a large pot. Later the men represent this kaharana to their sisters.

On the last day of Maghi all village household heads-including the mahaton-attend a meeting (known as a khel) where they discuss community problems and make specific plans to solve them. Indeed, it was in the such khel, in 1990, that Tharu in the village of Dumrigaun decided to abolish the practice of sister-exchange marriage. During the khel Tharu also arranged volunteer labor to renovate village shrines or help other villagers build houses.

2. Dasya

Dasya, is the Tharus version of Dusai, Nepal's most important festival which celebrates the god Ram's victory over Ravana, and Durga's victory over demons, in the Hindu epic of the Ramayana. The Tharu worship ancestor spirits and household and village deities. For Hindu caste Nepalese, however, Dasai is primarily a celebration of good over evil in the distant mythological past.

Dasya is celebrated for nine days. Tharus spend much of this time feasting and performing traditional songs and dances (which are completely distinct from those performed during Maghi).

Tharu also make many different kinds of ritual offerings during the Dasain. They distill a special kind of liquor, known as ad chaika, which is offered to the goddess Maiya, ghargurwa clan deities, all household Tharu also make another kind of liquor, pitarwa, which is offered to their ancestral deities (along with a small statue of a mythological animal, Kwara.). This statue is made from a fruit called kubhindo. During Dasain all household heads also sacrifice several roosters as offerings to some major deities including; Maiya, Raksa, Patani Bhawani and Ghargurwaa clan gods. On the final day of Dasain all household heads receive a blessing and tika (a spot of vermilion powder on the forehead) from the Mahaton.

3. Astimki :

This is a Tharu version of Krishna Astami, the Hindu god Krishna's birthday. It is celebrated in the month of Bhadau (August-September). It is a women's festival. All women, with the exception of very young girls, fast for the whole day (to earn religious merit). On the same day a mural depicting Hindu deities (and associated symbols) is painted on a wall in the mahaton's house. (The Astimki mural includes figures of the sun, moon, warriors, a bride and groom, Krishna, his mild maids, fish and monkeys.)

All of the fasting women go to the mahaton's house and place offerings of oil lamps, flowers, rice and fruits below the mural. Then they place tikas of vermilion powder on the deities' foreheads. After this all the women go to a room plastered with cow dung, where they make a fire, offer fruits and holy water to the fire god, and then break their fast with a meal of fruit and yoghurt. After the meal the women spend the whole night singing songs about Krishna.

4. Hori :

Hori is celebrated, on the full-moon day in the month of Fagun (March-April) to pay homage to Bwiyar, a protective deity who is believed to live just outside every Tharu village (usually under a large tree) and protects its inhabitants from disease, crop failure and evil spirits. During Hori some young Tharu men find a Semar Tree sapling and plant it near the deuthanwa (village deity shrine). Then all household heads in the village make a fire near the shrine on which they cook roti (a kind of bread). Later, after dark, the mahaton offers the Roti, cows milk and liquids as offerings to Bwiyar. In addition he also puts vermilion powder on the deuthanwa. Then the mahaton goes to the semar Sapling with liquor, places the roti on one of the branches and then burns the tree with a fire started from one of the leaf lamps.

A Short History of Dang Valley Tharu.

Tharu began settling in Dang approximately 600 years ago. Where they came from nobody really knows. Some people however, believe the Tharu came from India. (Where they had lived for thousands of years.) Tharu faced many challenges when they first came to Dang. They had to clear the jungle and begun cultivating rice (and other crops). They built houses on elevated wooden platforms to protect themselves from tigers, leopards, venomous snakes and other animals. The big forest threat to the Tharu however, was virulent strain of malaria. Many (if not most) of the Tharus who first settled in Dang were killed by malaria. The survivors however, possessed a natural immunity that protected them and their descendents from the disease.

In the early 1800's high caste Hindu began coming to Dang-from their homes in the middle hills-during the mosquito free winter months. While in Dang they farmed and hunted their numbers however, were limited, as were their land-holdings; and as soon as mosquitoes began appearing again they would leave Dang for the hills. Tharus remained the only permanent inhabitants of the Dang valley. All of this changed however, in the mid-1960 when foreign-aid supported programs eradicated malaria from the most of the southern Nepal, including Dang.

Beginning in the late 1960's high caste Hindus began pouring into Dang, and taking over the valley's rich agricultural land. Most of the Dang's remaining jungle was quickly cleared and claimed by these Hindu settlers. Then they began taking the Tharu's cultivated lands as well. In some cases the Hindus used threats or actual acts of violence to force Tharus off their land. In other cases they would take advantages of Tharu illiteracy by manipulating) often by adding a "few more zeros" to the loan amount after the form was signed) loan documents for which land had been used as collateral. Then the Tharu was unable to pay off the loan the land would be taken by the high caste Hindu money lender. In still other cases illiterate Tharu lost their land by signing land sale documents that were described to them as something else (such as receipts for the purchase of grain or livestock, a labor contract or an agreement concerning water for irrigation.

As a result of all this the vast majority of Dang valley Tharu lost their land. Indeed by 1980 over 80 of Dang's Tharu inhabitants had been forced to leave the valley and look for land elsewhere. (Most of these Tharu went south to the Deukhari area, or Kailali, and were eventually able to legally settle on land there). Most Tharu who remained in Dang were impoverished by the loss of the majority, if not all, of their land. As a result many of them were forced to work as tenant as farmers or bonded laborers for high caste landlords. Tenant farmers worked the landlord's fields in return for a percentage of the crop. This percentage varies from crop-to crop, but is regulated by laws that (to one extent or another) are usually followed by both tenants and landlords. (Most tenant farmers also own and cultivate some of their own lands as well, and thus are not, usually; totally dependent on the landlord they work for.

The situation of bonded laborers is much different. Bonded laborers are forced, by an unjust legal system, outright oppression and fraud, to work for landlords to pay off debts that were taken by 7 generations ago. This debt bondage is reinforced by Nepal's legal code which stimulated that if a man is unable to pay off a debt, it is automatically passed on to his son. If that man is unable to pay it off it is passed on to his, and son on.

In all cases the landlord is free to pay his bonded laborers as much as he wants. Currently, bonded laborers in Dang area each paid an equivalent average of only 19 rupees (20 US cents) a day in food grains (such as rice, corn or wheat.) Landlords deliberately keep the wages as low as possible, forcing bonded laborers to keep borrowing money from them. Thus, most of bonded laborers keep falling deeper into debt. This problem is often intensified by illiteracy, which enables landlords to manipulate the loan forms to make it seem as if the bonded laborer borrowed more money than he/she actually did.

Landlords who need labor often pay off the debt of some Tharu bonded laborers who are working for another landlord. Those Tharus must then go work for him to pay off the transferred debt. Every year thousand of Tharu are bought and sold in this way in the Dang-Deukhuri, Bardia, Kailali, Banke and Kanchanpur Districts of west Nepal. (The Total number of bonded laborers in these districts is estimated to be over 50,000). Thus, the bonded labor system is equivalent to a form of slavery that is designed to maintain a source of cheap labor for landlords.

The institution of bonded labor has been reinforced by the strong caste system that still exists in far west Nepal. Brahmins, Chetris and Tharus are all high caste, members of the top-ranking taghadari (twice-born) category in Nepal's caste system. Tharu however, as members of the mid-ranking matwali (liquor-drinking) category have significantly lower caste ranking. Many orthodox Brahmins, Chetris and Thakuris believe that they are superior to Tharus.

The caste based nature of the bonded labor system is reflected in the ethnic composition of bonded laborers and landlords. Every bonded laborer in far west Nepal is Tharu. Not so single one is high caste; whereas approximately 97 of the landlords are Brahmins, Chetris or Tharus. And the bonded labor system remains intact to the present day because many landlords who personally profit from it hold high positions in, or (at the very least) exert considerable influence over, Nepal's central government.

Loss of land, mass migration and poverty have all had a severe impact on Tharu culture, for example, many Tharu men who left Dang took with them their knowledge of local medicinal plants. And the shrinking numbers of guruwas (shamans) in Dang who still have this expertise are having difficulty finding young Tharu men who are seriously interested in learning about herbal medicine. As a result Dang valley Tharus' knowledge of herbal medicine is now in danger of being lost altogether.

In addition, several major festivals that were previously celebrated annually are now no longer celebrated at all, because of lack of economic resources. For example, Dang valley Tharu used to have a great summer festival, Barkanatch, which was celebrated for three weeks and distinguished by a variety of group dances, singing performances and rituals. But for over twenty years now Barkanatch has not been celebrated at all.

Two other major festivals, the Daljanatch and Taluwarnatch have met the same fate. Even Maghi, the Dang valley Tharus' most important festival, which is now celebrated for four days, used to be celebrated for nine.

The Initial Tharu Response to Loss of Their Land

It is difficult to imagine the trauma of losing one's home and community and being forced into exile. Indeed, the emotional, economic, social and cultural stress caused by such event is usually profound; so much so that people are often unable to find meaning in what has happened through existing cultural symbols. In such situations a whole new cultural movement often arises. These are known as millennial movements. They are usually characterized by a charismatic leader who claims to have visions of new traditions and beliefs which, if followed, will allow people to recapture their lost way of life.

In Nepal there have been at least two millennial movements. The most well-known of them, the Satya Hangma, occurred among the Limbu tribe of east Nepal after they had their tribal lands forcefully taken by high caste settlers. During the Satya Hangma the Limbu prophet Phalgunanda said that if Limbu strictly followed their original customs and religious beliefs they would become powerful enough to drive high caste settlers out of Illam and return to their original way of life. The events leading to the Satya Hangma movement were almost identical to those that drove Tharus out of the Dang valley, indeed, Limbu did not even lose as much of their tribal land (kipat) to high caste settlers as Dang valley Tharu did. And they were not impoverished or oppressed to the same extent either.

And yet, until BASE began in the mid-1980's not a single Tharu organization was formed in Dang (or anywhere else in west Nepal) to address Tharu problems. There were several reasons for this, (1) Nepal's repressive panchayat government usually crushed any attempts to form such an organization, as they were seen as a threat to Nepal's ruling class. (2) Until the early 1980's Dang-Deukhuri, and other districts, and almost no western ones, who knew how oppressed the Tharu people did not receive much encouragement from anybody else. (3) While there were several Tharus who held high positions in Nepal's panchayat government (these Tharu ministers) they did little to help other members of their tribe. One reason was that most of these officials became co-opted into Nepal's ruling class.

They were accepted, given all the privileges of power and as a result became closer to Nepal's high caste urban elite than their fellow Tharus. (Most of these Tharu officials also came from wealthy, socially prominent families that were not subject to persecution by high caste Nepalese. As a result they were never radicalized to the point of wanting to commit themselves to helping other Tharus.

A History of BASE

In January of 1985, during their annual new Year's (Maghi) Khel meeting, Tharu in Dumrigaon (a village lying just outside Tulsipur in the Dang valley) decided, at the urging of a 17 year old youth named Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, to establish a development organization for their community. This organization began with 34 members, most young Tharu men from Dumrigaon and neighboring villages. Within a month of its inception the Dumrigaon Organization established a literacy class for uneducated local Tharu villagers, organization members also made plans to implement an income generating program, and launch a political campaign against oppression by politically and economically dominant high caste Hindu Nepalese (and especially landlords). Money for these activities, initially, donated Tharus from Tulsipur and nearby villages.

In July of 1986 Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary, head of the Dumrigaon organization, was approached by Tika Pradhan and V.N. Chaudhary, employees of a Nepal consulting firm, Non-Frills, that was implementing a vegetable, Fruit and Cash Crops Development (VFC) project (for the United States Agency For International Development) in Dang. Tika Pradhan and V.N. Chaudhary offered Dilli a job organizing a local 4H Club where Tharu farmers could learn new agricultural skills, such as raising improved varieties of crops and livestock. Dilli Bahadur accepted the offer and immediately included 4H Club activities as one responsibility of the Dumrigaon organization. Indeed, almost all members of the 4H Club were also members of the Dumrigaon Organization.

In first year of the Vegetables, Fruits and Cash Project Non-Frills, with the help of the 4H Club, introduced a variety of new crops and livestock into the Dang valley Tharu community. These included vegetables, corn, potatoes, rabbits and pigs. No-Frills staff also supported literacy classes, donating pens, notebooks and kerosene lamps. That allowed the "Dumrigaon Organization" 4H Club to expand the literacy classes into four different Tharu villages.

Tharus who become involved in VFC, and members of the "Dumrigaon Organization" -4H Club were subjected to severe harassment from local Brahman, Chhetri and Thakuri landlords. Dang valley landlords believed that the VFC Program, and Dumrigaon organization and 4H club activities, threatened to empower Tharu and make them real threat to the landlords' economically and politically dominant position. In response to this threat many landlords attempted to force Tharus to drop out of literacy classes and other VFC supported activities.

These attempts took many forms including threats not to give Tharu tenant farmers food or medicine in times of need, efforts to convince them that literacy classes and other Dumrigaon organization -4H Club activities were useless, and most seriously, actual acts of violence against Dumrigaon organization members. This included the beating of a Tharu literacy class teacher, vandalism of a Dumrigaon organization -4H Club office and an attempted stoning of Tharus at a Dumrigaon Organization meeting.

Members of the Dumrigaon organization -4H Club were also persecuted by Nepali Government officials who : (1) refused to grant the organization an official charter on the pretext that its members were too political : (2) Refused to prosecute those landlords who were guilty of violence against Dumrigaon organization -4H Club members and : (3) Falsely accused the organization of planning terrorist activities the Nepali government.

Despite harassment by landlords Tharu membership in the Dumrigaon organization rose steadily from 34 to 350 within three years. This rise in membership was due to Dilli's success in combining Tharu that the Dumrigaon Organization would; (1) Raise their social economic status and; (2) Stop oppression by high caste landlords.

Early in 1987 there was an incident which greatly increased Tharus; confidence in the Dumrigaon Organization. With encouragement from the organization Tharus in the Dang valley village of Razura cleared and laid legal claim to 70 acres of unowned land near their village. One day, while clearing stones from the land, ten Razura Tharus were approached by a group of landlords who claimed that they Tharu had no right to the land. Several of the Tharus immediately ran to some nearby villages to bring Dumrigaon Organization members and supporters to help confront the landlords. Within two hours the landlords found themselves facing over 200 Tharus men. A very tense confrontation ensued, but the landlords, shaken by the Tharu's determination and unity, backed off, and never harassed them again.

In August of 1988 Dilli attended a tribal rights conference in Thailand. Dilli's trip was arranged by Badri Kayastha, Director of No-Frill, who obtained funding for Dilli's trip from the Asian Adivasi Committee, a very large, powerful pan-Asia tribal rights organization. During the week-long conference Dilli learned a lot about community

mobilization and the implementation of tribal rights programs, and also become friends with several leading tribal rights activities from India.

A month after conference was over Dilli went to Bombay and spent six weeks with activist friends from the Asian Adivasi Committee, visiting project sites and attending various meetings. On this trip Dilli continued to learn about leadership and development and made friends with several other successful tribal leaders. (Dilli has maintained close ties with several key members of the Asian Adivasi Committee. They have publicized the Tharu's land and human rights problems in some of their publications, have donated money to Dilli's organization and give him much moral support. Two Asian Adivasi Committee leaders even came to Dang to visit Dilli and his organization.)

At the same time the Chief District Officer (CDO) was putting increasing pressure on Dilli. The CDO, at first, sent several officials to try and convince Dilli to stop development – human rights activities and disband his organization. Significant in this regard was Parshu Narayan Chaudhary, Education Minister at the time, and a relative of Dilli's who nonetheless, at the request of the CDO, tried to convince Dilli to give up his struggle. When this did not work the CDO had Dilli thrown in jail twice under the public Security Act (a draconian panchayat government law which allowed officials to jail anybody who was thought, for any reason, to be a threat to national security. In this case the CDO saw Dilli's organization as a threat to high caste dominance in Dang).

At this time even some of Dilli's friends and family members began to try and convince him to stop his activism. Dilli and particularly serious problem with his older brother. These problems resulted in an estrangement between the two brothers that lasted almost a year.

The period from January to April 1990, was particularly desperate for Dilli and his organization. During this time Dilli had no moral or financial support from any outside organization (with the exception of the Asian Adivasi Committee who financial support consisted of a few hundred rupees a month), was under tremendous pressure from government officials and was almost destitute, having no income and receiving only food and shelter from his own rather poor family. And yet Dilli never gave up, and continued to work like a demon, walking from one village to the next, often until late at night, exhorting the Tharu to continue their struggle to liberate themselves from bonded labor, theft of land, discrimination (in schools and government offices) and other forms of oppression.

After the revolution and restoration of democracy in Nepal in April 1990, government repression of Dilli and his organization decreased sharply, while support for Dilli's work increased, coming from a number of different sources. This postrevolution support initially came from the British Volunteer Service, who donated kerosine and notebooks, textbooks and pens for the literacy classes run by Dilli's organization; which was renamed as Backward Society Education (BASE), by a group of British Volunteers, Peace Crop Volunteer and Nepalese.

Over the next several months support for Dilli's work began to trickle in from other sources. Arjun Gunaratna (a Sri Lankan anthropologist who was researching Tharu in Chitwan District) donated money to BASE. This was followed by more donations from Inge Salgid (of the Norwegian Church Service) and Asian Adivasi Committee. At this time the Tharu themselves also began to raise money for, an increase their membership in, BASE.

Throughout 1990 Dilli continued to build up a strong network of backers who gave BASE different kinds of invaluable support. For example, Arjun Gunaratna introduced Dilli to Roman Prasad Singh, a Tharu who was then Nepal's attorney general. Until meeting Ramanand Prasad Singh Dilli had made several unsuccessful attempts to get BASE registered as non-government organization with the CDO. The CDO refused to register BASE on the ground that it was too political. (The real reason for the CDO to refuse to register BASE was that he saw the organization as threat to high caste political and economic dominance in Dang.)

Dilli told Ramanand Prasad Singh about the CDO's refusal to register BASE. Ramanand Prasad Singh immediately called up the CDO and convinced him to register BASE. This registration was crucially important, for it gave BASE a legal sanction, and thus made the organization officially eligible for assistance from the government and development agencies.

In the fall of 1991 Dilli, with assistance of Inge Salgid and Save the Children-USA (who wrote the grant proposal), received a 113 thousand dollar grant from the Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA) to expand BASE's literacy classes, income generating activities, health education and other development activities. After receiving the DANIDA grant BASE program and membership expanded rapidly.

By January of 1995 (the time of this writing) BASE had ;

1. 85,000 members in five districts of west Nepal.
2. Established a new decentralized administrative/organization structure;
3. Established a community health program. (All of these programs will be discussed in the more detail in an upcoming section.
4. There are several reasons for the tremendous support that BASE has received from Tharus in west Nepal.
 1. Because of severe poverty and repression there was a tremendous pent-up need for the program offered by BASE. Literacy, economic self-sufficiency, organizational strength and a capacity for rational, well-executed political activism are well empowering. Dilli was able to communicate this to the Tharu.

- (Something that will be discussed in more detail below), and (with the generous help of man donors) has been able to implement programs that have given Tharus these resources.
2. Decentralization has given BASE members the authority to design and implement program that address the specific needs of their community (at the village, area and district level,) this policy fosters a sense of responsibility for, and pride in, BASE program among the organization's members.
 3. Participation in BASE programs in a real source of status for Tharus as it makes them appear progressive to Nepali society at large.
 4. As BASE's membership has grown (to the point that the majority of Tharus in hundreds of villages are BASE members) the peer pressure to join BASE activities has increased accordingly.
 5. Dilli's extraordinary personal qualities and leadership skills have motivated many Tharus to join BASE. Dilli has unshakable strength and commitment that has withstood beatings, imprisonment, destitution and extended periods of isolation. Dilli also has tremendous confidence and a certain regal bearing which along with his intelligence, political acumen and communication skills have won him the utter devotion of Tharus in west Nepal.

Dilli also has excellent interpersonal skills. He is always in complete control of his emotions (no matter how provoking the other person might be) and brings a remarkable combination of humility and assertiveness to his interactions with people. Dilli is strong enough to state what he believes in no matter how powerful the other person might be, and how much they might disagree with him, and year always treats people with courtesy and respect. I have never heard Dilli speak in a condescending manner to anyone. Dilli's brilliance for communication has been a major factor in maintaining the solidarity and spirit of political activism that has made the Tharus' grassroots movement so popular, powerful and dynamic. For, example, under Dilli's direction plays is performed several times a year in Tharu villages. These plays depict oppressive landlords, bonded laborers, theft of Tharu land and the subsequent mass migration of Tharu out of the Dang valley. These are powerful symbols which, through effective public portrayal, are recharged with meaning, reminding Tharus of what they are fighting for, and against, and thus maintaining the dynamism of their movement.

Dilli also brings his gifts of communication to one-on-one interaction with people. Dilli's network of supporters includes people from many different countries. And even his Nepali backers include people from a variety of ethnic and caste/class backgrounds. And yet Dilli is usually able to communicate with all of them with an equal degree of effectiveness. One thing Dilli does is not tell people a lot about what he has done, but emphasizes the showing of his achievements. Dilli does not verbally describe the literacy classes, income generating and health program activities, motivation of BASE members, or other aspects of his organization. He takes all his visitors out to the villages, shows them BASE programs in action and lets them decide for themselves what BASE has achieved. And when Dilli does describe his organization to people, he usually does so clearly and particularly. I have never heard Dilli put his foot in his mouth or misrepresent himself or BASE in any way.

Dilli is also very mature for a man of 25, and has remarkable moral fortitude. He has remained uncorrupted by power. Indeed, Dilli still leads a very traditional life-style and is in constant contact with the Tharu villagers who support BASE. Dilli shares all of the risks and rewards of working for BASE with them and this a major reason why Tharus in west Nepal remain so devoted to both BASE and Dilli, as Dilli himself says, "I must continue to live and work with the people we support. If I was to abandon their way of life or stay out with them for an extended period I would lose their trust and never regain it."

Dilli also has tremendous political acumen, which has manifested itself in a variety of ways. For example, Dilli has done a masterful job of building up a strong network of supporters (from several different countries and Nepal). These include officials (both expatriate and Nepali) from various development agencies, Nepali civil servants, including policemen, agricultural technician and engineers), scholars, lawyers, diplomats (including Bangladesh's ambassador to Nepal), social workers and tribal rights.

This diverse array of supporters provides Dilli with different kind of resources, including financial support, training, advice and legal-political clout and protection. Dilli also has an uncanny ability to accurately judge people's character and professional potential very soon after meeting them. This has enabled Dilli to consistently make good decisions about who to cultivate a professional relationship with, and who to avoid. As a result BASE has benefitted tremendously from those individuals who Dilli has recruited to provide the organization with technical, political and/or financial support.

Dilli, at 25, is an amazingly precocious leader. However, it is important to realize that Dilli's father was also a very successful, gifted leader who served as Padhan Panch (equivalent of Mayor) of Tulsipur, and later as a member of the Jilla Panchayat Samiti (District Governing Council). Dilli's father's reputation as a leader was so good that many people, including important government officials, used to come to him for advice. Dilli's whole childhood can be seen as a "Political apprenticeship" where he learned the Art of Leadership under the tutelage of his father."

BASE Program

BASE has implemented seven different programs in its target communities. These focus, respectively, on education, bonded labor, health, family planning, income generation, infrastructure and agriculture. BASE also has a staff development program to improve its overall management.

This chapter begins with a description of BASE's administrative structure.

It then turns to its staff development program. The final section describes specific BASE Programs and their policies objectives, accomplishments and target communities.

BASE Administration, Organization and Associated Policies

Village Committees

BASE's decentralization administrative structure consists of committees at the village, areas, district and central levels. There are a total of 520 village committees. Each committee has nine members who are elected by residents of their respective village to a five year term. Every village committee is usually made up of sub-committees with specific responsibilities.

Village committee are responsible for, (1) Finding houses where night classes can be held; (2) Providing lamps and kerosine, and ordering stationary and textbooks (from the central office)' (3) organizing local bonded labors into groups in order to identify their needs and formulate plans of action to address them; (4) Distributing BASE-subsidized potato and vegetable seeds to local farmers; (5) Organizing voluntary labor groups to construct schools, wells, roads and other facilities that benefit the entire community.(6) Collection of membership fees (all BASE members are required to give an annual membership fee of 3 rupees; (7) Formulate plans for local development activities and forward them to the area committee for further consideration ; (8) Managing a local fund (money) for this comes from fines for breaking community rules, income from cooperatively run enterprises (such as nurseries) and private donations).

Area Committees

BASE has 15 area committees; seven in Dang, two in Bardijya, one in Salyan, one in Banke, two in Kailali and two in Kanchanpur. Each committee has 11 members who are elected by all village committee members in their respective areas. Members meet once a month and are responsible for; (1) Reviewing requests and proposals from village committees and passing them on to the central committee with specific recommendations: (2) Supervising the use of village committee funds; (3) Collaborating with the area Program Manager to coordinate BASE activities that cover more than one village in the area.

District Committee

BASE has 4 district committees in Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur. (In Dang the central committee also functions as district committee.) Every district committee has eleven members. Their primary responsibility is to work in cooperation with a district manager to implement BASE activities.

Central Committee:

The central committee has 11 board members and a chairman, all of whom are elected by area committee members to a five year term. Central Committee members meet once every month to review proposals from area and district committees. Central committee members also manage a fund into which all BASE staff members are required to pay 10% of their salary.

Staff Developments

Over the last few years the number of impoverished, uneducated Tharus (and other needy people) requesting BASE program services has increased significantly. (Indeed, thousands of people approach BASE for assistance every year.) BASE has done its best to accommodate those people who are both needy and motivated to help themselves. This has necessitated a corresponding increase in the number of BASE staff. The total number of BASE staff members is now seven hundred and forty two. What follows is a list of different kinds of staff members and the program they work for.

PROGRAM STAFF EMPLOYED AT DIFFERENT LEVEL

1. CENTRAL LEVEL

2. 1.1. Project Chief's Office

- v Project Chief
- v Secretary
- v Administrator
- v Accountant (Education Programme)
- v Accountant (AIDS Program)
- v Accountant (Family Planning Programme)
- v Store Keeper
- v Computer typist
- v Peon (9)

1.2.Education Section

- v Section Manager
- v Education Assistant
- v Education Adviser (MS) (3)

1.3. Health Section

Section & Family Planning Manager
Office manager (Family Planning Programme)
2 paramedics (Family Planning Programme)
Peon (Family Planning Programme)

Programme Manager (AIDS Prévention programme)	
Assistant Manager (AIDS Prévention programme)	
Paramedic (AIDS Prévention programme)	
Peon (AIDS Prévention programme)	(9)
1.4 Income génération section	
Section Manager	
Assistant Manager	
Women Development Coordinator	(3)
1.5 Kamaiya Section	
Section Manager	
Assistant Manager	(2)
Subtotal	
2. DISTRICTLEVEL	
5 District & Education Managers	
Subtotal	
3. AREALEVEL	
9 Area & Education Managers	
30 Field Education Supervisors	
616 NFE facilitators	
12 Formal school teachers	
Staff Nurse (MS-Programme)	
Peon (MS-Programme)	
6 Health Supervisors (Family Planning Program)	
30 Field Workers (Family Planning Programme)	
6 Motivators (AID Prevention Program)	
Subtotal	(712)
.....	
Total	(742)
(Taken from DANIDA's second annual BASE report 1993:pp.11-12).	

Base looks for employees who are dedicated to the cause of community development (as well as to BASE itself.) Most current BASE employees initially worked for the organization as volunteers. Indeed, even now all literacy class teachers are required to teach for 3 to 6 months on a voluntary basis before they are hired as permanent paid staff. And all BASE staff members (as previously mentioned) must give 10% of their salary back to a BASE fund that is invested in development activities. (In 1992 alone BASE staff members contributed 600,000 rupees to this fund, out of which 413,000 rupees was used to buy land for a dormitory for BASE scholarship students from bonded laborer families.)

BASE's leadership would like to hire more Tharus (from target communities) to fill management positions, as their linguistic skills, and knowledge of social and economic conditions in Tharu communities, greatly facilitates their development work. However, there are not enough Tharus around with the necessary qualifications. As a result many BASE managers are relatively young inexperienced (albeit very motivated and intelligent) Tharus, or high caste Nepalis. (These high caste Nepalis tend to be very expensive (as they often have to be recruited from central or eastern Nepal) and their performance often suffers from a lack of knowledge about local socioeconomic conditions and their inability to speak Tharu). To make matters worse all of BASE's programs are expanding, causing a corresponding increase in the number of managerial positions that need to be filled.

BASE has begun to address this problem by putting young Tharu staff members through intensive trainings or internship (For example, two of BASE's Tharu women managers served as interns for 9 months on development projects implemented by Save The Children U.S.A.) that are specifically designed to prepare them for management positions. These trainings have focused on leadership, education, bonded laborers, management, accounting and agriculture. And they have been run by different agencies including; UNICEF, PACT. The Danish Volunteer services, Save The Children U.S.A., The University of Massachusetts, Price Waterhouse, Norfields Development Consultancy and many others.

In the last year alone over 80 BASE staff members participated in 14 different trainings. In addition, several staff members are studying in professional degree programs on BASE scholarships. One staff member is studying in a community health program and four others in a housing program. Two others are being trained as agricultural technicians, another as a civil engineer and one more in science education.

Despite BASE's efforts the number of staff members being trained is not keeping up with demand. BASE needs to send more Tharu staff members through professional training (and preferably degree) programs.

THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Before BASE was established there was a very low level of educational achievement among Tharus in the Dang-Deukhari, Bardiya, Kanchanpur and Kailali Districts of west Nepal. Indeed, until 1990 the literacy rate among Tharu women in BASE's target communities was less than 1% (and less than 24% among Tharu men). There were three major reasons for this. (1) Poverty forced most Tharu Children to start working at a very early age to support themselves and their parents. (2) Even if they did not have to work many Tharu children were still unable to attend school, as their parents could not afford the monthly fees, and uniform, stationary and textbook costs. (3) In many cases parents had enough money to educate one or two of their children, but not the rest. In this situation it was almost always the sons who went to school and not the daughters. (This because sons are expected to live with their parents and support them, whereas daughters are expected to get married and go live with their husband's family. Thus, parents are more inclined to invest in their son's education to qualify them for good jobs.)

BASE's Education Program has more participants, staff members and financial/logistical support than any other. It is by far BASE's largest and most important program. BASE members rightly believe that literacy is essential to initiate a self-empowerment process that will enable Tharus to improve their quality of life. In addition, BASE requires Tharus to be literate before they can participate in some development programs (such as the income generating component of The Women's Development Program, as it is necessary for this program's participants to learn written lessons, keep accounts and write work schedules.)

The objectives of the Education Program are; (1) To raise the literacy rate in Tharu communities (and especially among women and bonded laborers); (2) To increase the number of Tharus who attend government and private primary and secondary schools and; (3) To raise the members of Tharu college students. The Education Program has non-formal components, and several subcomponents as well. These are listed below;

Non – Formal Education Program :

- Basic Non – formal education for out – of – school children.
- Basic Non – formal education for adults.
- Advanced Non – formal education for adults.

Formal Education Program :

- Formal Night School.
- Female Education Support.
- SLC Coaching Support.
- Campus Support.

Basic Non – formal Education for out – of – School Children :

Children between the ages of 6 and 14 are eligible to enroll in BASE's non-formal education night classes. (The classes are held between 7 and 9 p.m because most participating children have to work during the day.) This courses is very intensive, lasts for exactly one year, and is designed to prepare students for fourth grade in government schools. Indeed, 1100 students have gone straight from this program into government schools on BASE scholarships. (These students constitute 40% of the total number of student who have participated in the program). There are currently 4, 155 children studying in the BASE non – formal education program.

Non –Formal Education for Adults:

The non – formal adults' education course lasts for twenty-one months. This being with a basic course that lasts for six months. At the end of this time students are given an exam to determine the status of their literacy and arithmetical skills. If they fail The exam they are given an extra two month course. After a 3 month summer break The second half of the course, advanced 1, begins and run for another six months.

At the end of this period students continue into advanced 2, the final 6 months stage of the course, During this last period students study literacy textbooks prepared specially for adults by the Ministry of Education, a UNICEF textbook and learners generated materials. Students are also taught about agriculture, health, science, the environment and a variety of the other subjects. There are currently 14,500 students in BASE's non – formal adult education course. Out of these 73% are women and 27% men. And 98% of participant students are Tharu.

Formal Night Class :

After children complete the intensive one – year literary course they are encouraged, by BASE, to enroll in fourth class in government primary schools. Not all children however, are able to do this, as many have to work during the day. This problem is particularly prevalent among bonded laborer children. To address this situation BASE has started 14 formal night classes; 12 in Dang and 2 in Bardiya, Currently there are over 470 students studying in these classes. The curriculum used in the formal night classes in the same as that used in Nepal government school. (BASE is also planning to offer formal night classes up to the lower secondary level.)

Female Education Support Program :

As previously mentioned there are more Tharu boys than girls enrolled in school. In fact the educational achievement of Tharu girls in Dang is so low that only three of them have even passed the school leaving Certificate Exam (SLC) (A test that Nepali students take during 19th class – their last year of high school – and which they must pass to be admitted into Nepali government colleges.) These are, one the other hand, well over 100 Tharu boys in Dang who have passed the SLC.

In response to this problem BASE has implemented a female education support program for Tharu girls from poor families. Under this program BASE has given primary and secondary school scholarships to 650 Tharu girls. These scholarships cover the girls school fees and uniform, textbook and stationary costs.

SLC Coaching Classes :

As a result of; (1) substandard education that is prevalent in many government schools in west Nepal; (2) The heavy outside worked (in the house and fields) that many Tharu children must bear and; (3) A lack of money for tutoring in difficult subjects like math and English, it is very difficult for Tharu students to adequately prepare for the very tough SLC Exam. As a result the SLC failure rate is much higher for Tharus than high caste Nepalese in west Nepal.

To alleviate this problem BASE offers special two-month preparatory classes for Tharu (and poor untouchable) students. The pass rate for students who have taken this course is far higher than among those who haven't. In 1992 forty-two out of fifty-six (75%) students who took this course passed the SLC. In 1993 forty-three out of eighty-three (52%) passed. (The national SLC pass rate during these years was less than 30%)

College Scholarship Program:

BASE also have a scholarship Program for Tharu students who have passed the SLC. To qualify for this program students must be from poor families and be recommended by an area or district committee. Students who live at home receive a scholarship stipend of 300 rupees a month, while those who live outside receive 500 rupees a month. During the program's first year three were 17 scholarship students. Now, in the program's second year, there are 57 scholarship students from Dang, Bardiya and Kailali.

Affiliated NGO Support :

In addition to its own Education Program BASE also give financial and technical support to non-formal education classes being run by other non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in target district. Students in these classes are, primarily, from impoverished untouchable or Tharu families. Currently BASE supports 63 classes (with a total of 1,820 students) that are being run by 6 different NGOs including the, (1) Batri Matri Yamir, (2) Society for social Development, (3) code, (4) Gabudubri, (5) Tharu Kalyan Samiti and, (6) Nepal Sudhar Sangh.

Bonded Laborer Program:

Introduction :

The goal of the bonded laborer (or Kamaiya as they are known in Nepali) program is to make them more self-sufficient so that they can free themselves from slavery. To accomplish this BASE has implemented comprehensive, long – term education, income enumerating and legal advocacy programs for bonded laborers in all five target districts.

Before implementing these programs, BASE conducted a baseline survey to determine the socio economic and educational status of bonded laborers in all target communities. The bonded laborers identified fell into three different economic categories and were prioritized for assistance accordingly. The three groups identified include;

1. Bonded laborers who;(1) Are in debt and ; (2) Members of families where everybody works the landlord and who live in house owned by him/her. (These individuals receive first priority for assistance from BASE.)
2. Bonded laborers who are in debt, but live in their own house and who are from families where some members work as kamaiyas and others as sharecroppers (on either an adiya or moheni basis). These individuals receive second priority for assistance from BASE.
3. Bonded laborers who are not ion debt and live in their own house.

After identifying these groups BASE staff members held a series of meetings with bonded laborers in all target areas to better understanding their problems and aspirations. The major problems identified included.

1. Absolute poverty resulting in economic dependence on landlords.
2. Lack of education
3. Operation of landlords. (For example, indebted bonded laborers are not allowed to move away and live somewhere else without the landlord's permissions. In addition, bonded laborers must work for as many hour (often up to 16 a day) as the landlord wants them to. Many Tharu girls are also sexually exploited by the landlords they work for.)

BASE realized that to effectively address these problems bonded laborers needed to;

1. Live in their own house on their own property.
2. Earn enough money to meet clothing, food and medical expenses.
3. Obtain the legal and political resources necessary to effectively counter oppression.
4. Receive more education, and especially to become literate, and learn more about their legal rights, health (and family planning) issues and community development and mobilization.

Education Programs for the children of Bonded Laborers:

Education is the key to liberating bonded laborers. One major reason why so many Tharus remain in bondage is that illiteracy has severely limited their income generating options. This makes it extremely difficult for bonded laborers to move off the landlord's property and find a decent job elsewhere. Some kamaiyas who have been

fortunate enough to receive a "good" (i.e. secondary or post-secondary) education by moving off the landlord's property and working (and residing) someplace else broken the generational cycle of indebtedness and bondage. With this in mind BASE has invested more in education than any other component of the bonded laborer program.

There are currently 2,639 Kamaiya children participating in the non – formal, formal and female education support components of BASE's Education Program. Another 851 are studying in government primary and secondary schools, and 10 more in a private boarding school, on BASE scholarships (that pay their fees, and uniform. Textbook and stationary costs).

Kamaiya Children Dormitories :

Many kamaiya children who can afford school still find it difficult to attend, as landlords often force them to drop out and work for him (or her). And even if kamaiya children can go to class they find it difficult to do homework in their small one or two room houses (that usually lack electricity and running water, and are crowded with family members). To address this problem BASE is planning to build 6 dormitories for kamaiya students. These dormitories will provide them with a comfortable, supportive environment where they can live and study in peace. The students will sleep, eat and study in the dormitories, which will be managed by two resident teachers.

Land for one dormitory has already been purchased with money donated by CARITAS (and supplemented by BASE). BASE is currently trying to raise money for the other five dormitories.

Kamaiya Saving Program :

BASE encourages poor bonded labourers (who do not own a house) to save enough money to buy land and build one. Bonded labourers are asked to set aside as much rice seed as they can. At the end of every month the kamaiya then brings the rice seed into the BASE office, BASE sells this rice and deposits the proceeds into an account in the kamaiya's name. BASE then matches their first year's saving by 300% the second year's by 200% and the third year's by 100%. When enough money has been accumulated the kamaiya withdraws it, buys land, builds a simple house, and in the process, becomes that much less dependent on the landlord. (In BASE's target districts the minimum amount of land required for a house costs around 4,000 rupees.) Two hundred and eighty Tharus are currently participating in the savings program, and 46 of them have already built homes.

Kamaiya Income Generating Program:

BASE also uses matching funds to encourage kamaiya to save money for income generating activities. When a kamaiya has saved enough for a small income generating enterprise, BASE matches him/her 100%. Through this program over 90 kamaiya families have begun steer, duck and pig husbandry enterprises. (Another 90 Tharu families have begun raising vegetables for sale with seed and agricultural training provided by BASE.) All participant farmers are encouraged to deposit any profits from these enterprises back into their savings account. (BASE has also trained 25 kamaiya men to become painters, barbers, fertilizer producers or plumbers.)

Began Education and Advocacy:

BASE holds monthly classes for bonded laborers, in all five target districts, to educate them about their legal rights, and action that can be taken if these rights are violated. In addition, kamaiya children study legal issues in their non – formal education classes. Altogether over 10,000 kamaiyas have received legal education from BASE.

BASE also provides legal assistance to kamaiya who have been persecuted by landlords. In some cases landlords have denied Tharu kamaiyas their rightful share of food grains. (Due to them under tenancy laws.) In many of these cases BASE staff members stepped in and convinces the landlord to give the grain, or had law enforcement officials do it.

In some other more serious cases, where bonded laborers (or other poor Tharus) have been victims of violence. BASE has either hired lawyers to take the cases to court or convinced the chief of leaders of political parties) to force the perpetrators to compensate the Tharu. In one case a kamaiya had his house burnt down by a landlord for no reason at all) severely injured a kamaiya man with a knife. The police took no action at all against the landlord. But after being threatened with legal action by BASE (and pressured by some local leaders) the landlord paid for the Tharu's medical treatment. BASE is planning to expand its legal education and advocacy program, and is currently in the process of hiring several new lawyers and formulating program policies and goals.

BASE's Health Program:

Most Tharu communities in West Nepal suffer from very poor health conditions. Gastrointestinal illness, worm, pneumonia, typhoid and high rates of child and maternal mortality are among the most serious problems. The Tharus' inability to prevent these problems has been due in part, to an unclean drinking water supply, general lack of hygiene, ignorance of many diseases (and what causes them) and lack of health care, facilities.

In response to these conditions BASE (since October of 1992) has been implementing a health program. The health program goals have been;

1. To reduce infant and maternal mortality rates;
2. To reduce malnutrition and;
3. To reduce the prevalence of communicable disease.

To reach these goals BASE has emphasized the prevention of health problems through hygiene, immunization and education. However, while BASE emphasizes the prevention of health problems, it also provides a wide range of treatment services. Indeed, Health Program activities often include a combination of education and treatment. What follows is a description of one such activity; mother and child clinics.

Mother and Child Clinics:

Every month BASE (in cooperation with the District Public and Health Office) runs 8 (mobile) and child clinics in different parts of the Dang valley. Every mother attending the clinic buys a registration card for 10 rupees. The card is valid for one year and registration fees are deposited in the Area Committee Development fund.

Every mother and child (children attending must be 5 or younger) attending the clinic is given a thorough checkup. In addition they are educated about nutrition and basic hygiene. Mothers are also taught how to make (1) Nutritious baby food from locally available ingredients and (2) An electrolyte solution of salt, sugar and water to treat diarrhea. Children are immunized against diphtheria, tuberculosis, Polio, measles and tetanus, and given Vitamin Supplements. (Others are given iron supplements.) Clinic staff also treats sick individuals for a variety of ailments (usually gastrointestinal illness, worms, pneumonia, skin diseases and eye infection.) Seriously ill people are referred to the nearest hospital for treatment.

BASE has also established a permanent clinic in the village of Madharia, which lies just outside Tulsipur. The clinic is staffed by BASE community health workers and nurse from the Danish Volunteer Service. A mother a child clinic is run twice a week in Madhuria, and provides all of the services of offered by the mobile clinics. In addition, clinic staff treats a variety of ailments, give community health training to non-formal education training to BASE field workers.

Health Staff Development:

BASE currently relies heavily on technical expertise provided by the Danish Volunteer Service, District Public Health Office, Save the Children USA and private doctors. However, BASE's long term goal is to have a health Program that is managed, primarily by Tharu professionals. To achieve this BASE, as previously mentioned, is putting 4 Tharu women staff members through nursing school. After graduating these women will resume working for BASE.

Health staff development efforts have also included training for Tharu traditional birth attendants (TBAs). In 1993 fifty TBAs were trained how to deliver children safely (ie. By protecting them from neonatal tetanus infection and their mothers from septicemia). Non-formal education class teachers and members of women's income generating groups, have also been trained as health educators. These trainings were given by BASE staff members and employees of the district public health office. Literacy class teachers and their students were also trained how to prevent, identify and treat certain ear ailments. (These trainings were given by staff members of eye hospitals in Dang and Kailali).

Emergency Health Teams:

During Nepal's three-to-four month bond monsoon epidemics of gastrointestinal illness and typhoid often occur in Tharu villages throughout west Nepal. In 1993 and 1994 cholera epidemic ravaged several Tharu villages in Dang. On both occasions BASE staff members, and employees of the District Public Health Office, collaborated to treat the sick and teach them, and others how to protect themselves from the disease.

Sexually Transmitted Disease Prevention Program.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STD) including syphilis, gonorrhoea and genital warts, are a significant problem in Ghorahi, Tulsipur and Srigain (three towns in the Dang valley), primarily because of the large number of commercial workers (CSWs) present there. In response to this BASE, in cooperation with Save the Children USA. Ran (in December of 1993) a week -long STD clinic near these three red light areas. Everyone attending was physically checked and if they wanted, tested by individuals suffering from STD were treated by clinic doctors. Clinic staff also ran STD (including AIDs) group education and condom demonstration sessions for men and women.

In June of 1994 BASE began implementing a AIDS prevention program for CSW's and their clients in Tulsipur, Ghorahi and Srigaun. BASE has established peer counselors and AIDS educators among CSWs and their clients, and supplies them (free of charge) with condoms. BASE also provides free confidential AIDs counseling services. And through non-formal education classes BASE has taught most community members about STD and how to prevent them. (BASE' AIDs prevention Program is funded by the American Foundation for AIDs Research).

As a results of BASE's efforts and those of some other organizations, doctors in Tulsipur, Ghorahi and Srigaun estimate that the number of new STD cases dropped 60 to 70% in the last eight months.

Family Planning Program:

In 1003 BASE began implementing a Family Planning Program in Dang's Tharu communities (with funding from the Asia Foundation). This program currently has a total of 38 staff members, including 6 health supervisors, two nurses and thirty motivators all of whom are Tharu women. The motivators go from house to house and tell people about the importance of family planning and the different kinds of birth control methods available. In addition, all students attending BASE literacy classes are taught about the benefits of family planning.

BASE's Family Planning Program has also run 10 vasectomy and 2 laparoscopy camps (in collaboration with the District Public Health Office). A total of 200 Tharu men and 700 women were sterilized at these camps.

Income Generating Program:

The goal of this program is to help the poorest Tharu establish income generating enterprises that will make them more self-sufficient. BASE first gives participants training in the technical skills needed to implement a specific income generating activity (such as goat husbandry, garment production or establishing and managing a shop). This is supplemented by additional trainings in management, leadership and accountancy. BASE also provides program participants with the financial support needed to start their income generating enterprises. The income generating program has two components, one focusing on women's development and the other on agriculture.

Women's Development

The Women's Development Program began in December of 1992, when BASE opened 4 shops in Dang Valley Tharu villages. These shops were managed by a group of 22 Tharu women who had studied for three years in BASE literacy classes and then received nine months of training in garment production. BASE gave these women a 400,000 rupee loan to stock their shops and 4 sewing machines for them to make clothes with.

Currently ten Tharu girls are managing six shops in Devipur, Madhariyaa and Luhadabara, three (predominantly Tharu) Dang valley villages. These shops are stocked with cloth, spices, tobacco, soap, rice shampoo, rice, lentils, candy, snack, foods, readymade garments, toys and cheap jewelry (The other twelve members of the original shop management group are all making garments and selling them out of their own homes).

In January of 1993 BASE began organizing poor Tharu women into savings groups. There are usually ten to twelve women in every saving group. Every member is required to pay a certain amount of money into the group fund every month. When a group has raised 2000 rupees they receive an equal amount in matching funds from BASE and can then begin distributing loans to group members for income generating activities. The size of the loan, interest rates, monthly loan payments (and the amount of money that is paid into the group fund) and all decided upon by group members.

To date a total of 306 Tharu women have organized themselves into 25 different groups. Out of these 6 groups (a total of 56 women) are bonded laborers. There are 22 saving groups in Dang and 4 in Bardiya district. Twenty six groups have raised 2,000 rupees and received an equal amount in matching funds.

Approximately half of all participating women have started income generating activities (these have included garment production, goat, pig and chicken husbandry and small shops). In addition, two women's saving groups in Chakhaura (a village in the Dang valley) and Srigaun (a village in Bardiya District) are managing nurseries (on village land) which produce fodder and fruit (mango, jackfruit and litchi) trees for sale.

All program participants are required to cooperate with fellow saving group members and attend leadership, accounting, women's development and health trainings (to date six such trainings have been held for Women's Development Program participants). In addition all program participants must have studied in BASE's literacy classes and be below a certain income level.

Agriculture:

Over ninety percent of the Tharus in BASE's target communities make their living from agriculture. However, due to their limited amount of land lack of irrigation, low producing local varieties of certain vegetables and grains, the depredations of insect pests, inadequate cultivation techniques and ignorance of or lack of access to certain crops or livestock that could be raised for a profit, many (if not most) Tharus are unable to make an adequate living from agriculture. To address the problems of these impoverished farmers, BASE has implemented an Agriculture Program.

Agriculture Technology:

BASE has provided different kinds of technology to help Tharus increase their agricultural productivity. In March of 1993 BASE purchased 66 pesticide sprayer tanks and sold them to different village committees at a 50% discount. Over 1920 Tharu households have benefited from these sprayers. BASE has also helped 196 Tharu farmers replace wooden plows with more effective iron ones (by paying half the cost of the new plows). Finally, BASE has also given loans to 4 village committees to buy diesel pumps for irrigation. A total of 912 Tharu families have seen their agricultural production rise significantly as a result of the irrigation provided by these pumps.

Infrastructure:

The primary objective of this program is to construct and maintain certain facilities that will improve sanitation and facilitate various community activities in impoverished Tharu villages. The Infrastructure program has four components, (1) Well construction, (2) Community building construction, (3) Pit latrine construction and (4) Road construction.

In addition, BASE requires that every village committee implementing an infrastructure development project must have a construction maintenance sub-committee to ensure that the project is completed and well-maintained.

Well construction :

In many Tharu villages the only sources of drinking water are contaminated with disease – causing pathogens (inducing viruses, bacteria and parasites). In some cases a large uncovered (which means that wind blows filth into the water) well is the only source of water. In other cases villagers rely on local streams (in which people bathe and both people and animals defecate.)

BASE is addressing this problem by constructing (1) New wells with cement covers and (2) Piped drinking water systems. (These usually consist of one or two outside taps where villagers can obtain potable water 24 hours a day. Previously, some villagers relied on streams that often dried up forcing them to walk long distances to alternative water sources.) To date BASE has constructed 148 village wells and 209 drinking water systems.

Pit Latrine Construction :

Most Tharu do not have latrines and defecate in the forests and fields around their villages. This practice has exacerbated the poor health conditions in most Tharu villages. When it rains the human waste is often washed into the local water supply. And flies often fly directly from this waste to food being served in nearby villages.

Through literacy classes however, an increasing number of Tharus are learning about the importance of latrines, and requesting BASE for the technical assistance needed to build them. In the village of Chakhaura 42 Tharu families constructed latrines under BASE's technical supervision. (BASE is currently making plans to supervise the construction of latrines in several other villages as well).

Community Building :

BASE members, on a volunteer basis, have also constructed 113 community buildings for use as area committee offices, literacy classes and meeting places. BASE purchased cement tiles to roof 13 of these buildings. (The roofing materials for the building was donated by local villages).

Road Construction :

BASE has recently initiated a road construction and maintenance project to facilitate transportation between some of the organization's administration centers. To date, BASE members, on a volunteer basis, have reconstructed motorable roads between (1) Tulsipur and Chakhaura and (2) Tulsipur and Lohadadobara.

Funding :

In 1990 (after being registered) BASE put considerable effort into identifying potential donor agencies in Kathmandu. Dilli (and, sometimes, other BASE members and or / supporters) then met with agency officials and discussed BASE programs and possible funding opportunities. If the agency was interested they would send officials out to see BASE's programs. If they were impressed the officials would invite BASE to submit a funding proposal. (Since these proposals have to be written in English BASE has often prepared them with help from expatriate friends.)

BASE's fund raising efforts have been very successful. To date BASE has received grants from the Banish Agency for International Development (DANIDA), American Foundation for ADIS Research, OXFAM, Asia Foundation, Save The Children U.S.A, CARITAS, Anti Slavery International and Reebok Foundation. (DANIDA is by far BASE's most important donor. They have given 3 large grants which constitute 75% of BASE total budget)

There are four major reasons for BASE's fund raising success.

1. BASE has more grassroots support for its programs than any other NGO in Nepal. No other NGO has mobilized so many people to participate in such a wide range of development activities.
2. Many donors are moved by the fact that Tharu (in BASE's target districts) are among the most exploited, uneducated, impoverished people in Nepal **26**
3. Oppression and poverty have threatened the survival of Dang's Tharu culture. This potential loss of a rich, distinctive, fascinating tribal culture makes the Tharus situation all the more poignant, and BASE programs all the more important, to potential donors.
4. BASE programs have generally been very successful. BASE's Education Program has raised literacy rates, among women under 30, from less than 1% to over 4%. As a result of BASE's family planning program the percentage of married Tharu women practicing birth control has risen from 16% to 34%. BASE's health program has substantially reduced the prevalence of many communicable diseases. And BASE's organizational strength and advocacy program have radically reduced the persecution of Tharu by landlords.

Summary :

This report began with a description of Tharu society, economy and ritual life. This was followed by an examination of major Dang valley Tharu festivals Maghi, Dasya, Astamki and Hori, and how these festivals represent and reinforce district Tharu traditions. The next section focused on Dang valley Tharu history, and more specifically, the impact that eradication of malaria – and the subsequent inflows of high – cast settlers – had, on the Tharu and their way of life. (And how the Tharu responded to the loss of their land, and threat to their way of life.) I then discussed BASE's history. This section described how the organization began and the reason for BASE's success in mobilizing the Tharu community. These included.

1. The tremendous pent – up need, for the resources that BASE was offering, created by oppression and poverty.
2. Dilli's brilliance for communication, his ability to convince Tharu that participation in BASE programs would give them the education, organizational strength and political/economic clout necessary to improve the quality of their lives.
3. The opportunity to raise their social status in the wider Nepali society.

4. The decentralization that has allowed BASE members to design and implement their own development programs.

The next section looked at BASE's administration, organization, program policies and institution building/staff development efforts. I concluded that BASE must continue sending young staff members (and especially Tharu employees) through professional training programs, to successfully meet the administrative and managerial demands of continued program expansion. The following six sections examined, respectively, BASE's Education, Bonded laborer, Income Generating, Health, Family Planning and Infrastructure programs. These section included descriptions program goals, strategies, target communities and specific activities. The final section discussed BASE's successful fund raising efforts, and concluded that donors have been attracted to BASE because of (1) Grassroots support for the organization, (2) The very need for development programs created by poverty and oppression, (3) The opportunity to save Dang valley Tharu's rich tribal culture and, (4) The very success of BASE Programs.) These include (among others) an increase in literacy rates, decrease in persecution of Tharu by landlords, decline in the prevalence of some communicable diseases, and a significant rise in the use of birth control by Tharu women.)

End Notes:

1. This discussion focus a cultural/religions practice among Dang valley Tharu as they constitute a higher proportion of BASE target community members than Tharus from any other district (and also because the author's expertise in limited to this one particular Tharu community.

1... Not all high – caste landlord's persecute Tharu. Indeed these was one high – caste (Thakuri) landlord, Janak Bahadur Shah, who – after inheriting his family's property after his father died – cancelled all of his bonded laborers debts, gave each of them enough land for a house, and financially supported the education of Tharu bonded laborer girl through teach class.

(It should also be mentioned that there are some Tharus who exploit other members of their ethnic group to the same extent as many high – caste landlords do.)

1... See Gunaratn (1994) for a brilliant, comprehensive analysis of Tharu ethnicity.

1... No discussion of Tharu society would be complete without some mention of their economy. Most Tharus are subsidence farmers who cultivate rice. Corn, wheat mustard, vegetables, and raise pigs, goats, water buffalo and cattle. Many Tharu also supplement their agriculture with some hunting (usually for quail, partridge and or rabbits and rats), fishing and gathering (of wild fruits, vegetables and snails). In addition many Tharu work as laborers and a few others – members of a small, very elite class of college educated Tharus – have higher professional level jobs in both the public and private sector. (See Sharma 1994 for data on the economic status of Tharus in west Nepal).

1... Most of the information of Dang valley Tharus rituals and festivals comes from Rajaure (1982)

1... Every ghaguruwa family also has a marrwa, a shrine where statues representing their clan deities are kept (Rajaure 1982'71.)

1... Ghaguruwa shamans also learn how to prepare a variety of medicines from local medicinal plants.

1... Ghaguruwa is a male diety believed to have created the earth and every living things on it. Maiya is a female diety who was created Ghaguruwa and later become wife. She is the diety to whom most shamanistic activities are directed (Rajaure 1982, - 64-66).

1... All of this information about the first Tharu settlers in Dang was told to my by several Tharus, who had been told the same stories by their parents and / or grandparents.

1... See Skerry, Moran and Calavan (1991).

1... Dang valley Tharus have ether adiya or moheni tenancy rights on an averages 1 bigha of the landlord's fields. Of these two moheni is by far the best. Tulsipur Tharus with moheni have the following rights, (1) Now matter how much rice is produced the landlord keep 52 kilograms of the moheni tenant gets all the rest. (2) All corn to the tenant. (3) Two third of the wheat, lentils, mustard and potatoes goes to the tenant, the rest to the landlord. (4) If the land is sold the tenant get one – third of the income. Adiya tenants have fewer benefits than moheni ones do. Under adiya tenancy rights, (1)The tenant gets help the wheatn lentils, mustard, potatoes and rice cultivated in the landlord's field. (2) The tenant gets all the corn. (3) If the land is sold the tenant gets none of the income.

1... BASE Bonded Laborer Survey Record (1994)

1... I know of one medicinal plant in Dang that is used to treat malaria. And I know of another that is used, primarily by Tharu women, to prevent pregnancy. (Indeed this plant is such an effective from of birth control that high – caste women in Dang are starting to use it as well.)

1... See Caplan (1970 and Box (1993)

1... These planned income generating activities consisted of raising and selling new, improved varieties of crops and livestock.

1... The expansion of programs into Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur and Banke and a corresponding increase in membership, has been politically beneficial for BASE, parliament representatives from west Nepal, knowing of BASE's influence over ten or thousands of potential Tharu voters, have been (generally) supportive of BASE. And landlords in west Nepal have radically decreased their persecution of BASE members precisely because they know BASE is assertive and powerful enough to counter social injustice.

1... Some of the best plays are performed during Maghi in 1993 15,000 people saw these Maghi plays, and there performances. And in 1994 the Maghi "Cultural Show" an audience of over 20,000 people.

1... Dilli's devotion to his work is due in large part to the fact that he was dedicated by the theft of his own family's land by a Brahman landlord. Indeed Dilli made his commitment to help other Tharus very soon after this incident.

Dilli's skill as a development worker is to a certain degree, a result of the fact that he grew up in Dang, at a time when it was the headquarters of a U.S.AID regional rural development program. From a very early age Dilli had extensive personal contact with development workers, and learned lot about their programs.

1... Information about BASE programs comes from DANIDA's second Annual Report on BASE (1993), BASE program records and interviews with BASE staff and target community members.

1... Leaders generated material is an important educational resources that has only been in use for the last ten years. It refers to texts (stories, essays, etc.) that are prepared by literacy sources graduated for beginning students from their own community. Learners generated materials contain examples from the students own cultural context. This is very important in an ethnically diverse country like Nepal where examples in government textbooks are often not understood by ethnic minority students in remote districts. BASE's learners generated materials contain examples contain examples from Tharu students own cultural context. Thus, through these materials BASE teachers have been able to use texts that are comprehensible and interesting to their literacy class students.

1... This program includes students in both two – year Intermediate and four year BA programs.

1... CARTTAS in an Danish NGO.

1... See Box (1993) for a discussion of caste – based prostitution in the Dang Valley.

1... BASE is selective about who they accept money from. They do not accept grants from donors who demand authority to manage. BASE programs, or who have red tape that seriously hinders program implementation. BASE has turned down grant offers from several agencies for these reasons.