

# Cultural Perspectives of Land and Livelihoods: A Case Study of Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in Far-western Nepal

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## Abstract

Recent debates on human displacement caused by conservation have increasingly questioned: firstly, its justification in the name of biodiversity conservation; and secondly, the effectiveness of compensation in preventing impoverishment. Land compensation is widely practiced and it is a crucial part of contemporary people-centred conservation resettlement strategies. In this article, using the case of the Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in Nepal, I argue that policy-makers' belief that the social impacts of dislocation can be properly mitigated by economic-focused resettlement programmes alone is a myth. They have ignored the close relationships between place, social networks and livelihoods. A study of a displaced indigenous community known as Rana Tharus in far-western Nepal shows that a strong sense of nostalgia and homesickness is evident in this community. Displaced Ranas continue to idealise their old abode as 'paradise on Earth' while experiencing their new home as only promoting poverty, helplessness and danger. Their anger is due to the fact that they no longer have the mutual help or support from their neighbours as they once did in their old abode. From the Ranas' point of view, the old land had both high economic and social value. The study demonstrates that the act of displacement is a violent disruption of a community's daily social contacts. The destruction of the Ranas' social networks has not only led to their dispossession and threatened their livelihoods, but has also made them vulnerable, because these traditional social webs provided important alternative livelihoods in a rural economy. As a consequence, it has further reinforced their sense of nostalgia. The cultural and social meanings of land must be obtained prior to implementing any resettlement policies. The study indicates that if displacement is truly unavoidable for conserving biodiversity, more comprehensive rehabilitation resettlement policies than those that currently exist are needed.

**Keywords:** Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, Nepal, conservation-led displacement, social impacts, nostalgia, livelihood

## INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, human displacement as a conservation strategy has been criticised by social scientists as a serious violation of human rights because protected areas have most often been created in areas where the most socially, economically and politically vulnerable groups reside (Agrawal & Redford 2009). Despite such damning criticism, conservation organisations are failing in their response to formulate coherent and systematic guidelines to address displacement caused by conservation (Agrawal & Redford 2009). The response reflects

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the fact that biodiversity conservation is perceived as an ethical necessity by conservationists; they contend that it is a global or national public good, and is essential for humanity's survival in the long-term.

However, social scientists are increasingly criticising as flawed the assumption that humanity is destroying the natural environment and compromising the conservation movement (Gajaseni & Gajaseni 1999; McSweeney 2005; West & Brockington 2006), on the grounds that sufficient scientific evidence to justify the claim is lacking. Agrawal & Redford (2009: 8) state that studies have not proved the correctness of this assumption nor the belief that the establishment of 'no human' protected areas has achieved the goal of biodiversity conservation. Instead of displacing people from their homes and lands, these scholars strongly urge that conservation organisations should make in-depth social impact assessments and cost-benefit analyses before implementing any involuntary resettlement programmes.

While it has been recognised that established protected areas do make an impact on local communities (Naughton-Treves *et al.* 2005), displacement and compensation-based resettlement policies remain the major taken-for-granted conservation strategy. Conservationists believe that the losses incurred by displaced communities can be compensated. This assumption is severely criticised by resettlement scholars. In a recent collection of articles published in *Can compensation prevent impoverishment?* (Cernea & Mathur 2008), scholars from diverse disciplines including anthropology, sociology, economics and ecology collectively question the long-held assumption that compensation itself is enough to improve the livelihoods of people who have been disrupted by displacement. They challenge the effectiveness of compensation policies in resettlement, and argue that factors such as weak governance, absence of rigorous analysis of loss and funding shortfalls make fair compensation policies ineffective in practice.

Similar criticisms have been made by Agrawal & Redford (2009). They argue that compensation is primarily economic in nature and it fails to address the symbolic or cultural significance of landscapes for park residents. Furthermore, while the analysis of social impacts is increasingly highlighted in involuntary resettlement policies, the relationships between these risks are not addressed. As Agrawal & Redford comment, although eight major risks<sup>1</sup> caused by displacement are identified by Michael Cernea (1997) in his influential 'Impoverishment, risks and reconstruction' model, how these social and economic costs interact with each other and result in impoverishment are not discussed. In this article, I argue that economic, social and cultural values of land have all played a significant role in the rural livelihood system. The destruction of place-based social networks caused by conservation-related displacement has damaged both the cultural and economic life of displaced communities. The interlocking relationships between social networks, livelihood and a particular place are thus explored in this article.

Nepal has abundant globally significant natural sanctuaries

but is also economically poor and densely populated, with 31% of its people still living below the national poverty line (World Bank 2010). Today, it has 16 protected areas (including 11 buffer zones), covering a total of 34,186.62 sq. km, which amounts to 23.23% of the total land area (DNPWC 2010). Despite a shift from a centralised and 'preservation-oriented' approach to a more 'people-oriented' approach involving community-based management (Mehta & Kellert 1998) in the 1980s, many studies indicate that all of Nepal's protected areas have management conflicts with local people (Henein & Mehta 1999).

Large-scale displacements continue to represent a major conservation strategy in the most highly populated Tarai region (Sah 2002; Lam 2003; McLean & Steffen 2003) where vulnerable ethnic groups reside, but where adequate compensation seldom occurs. This has happened in Shuklaphtanta Wildlife Reserve<sup>2</sup> where more than 1,600 households from 17 settlements were involuntarily resettled because of the park extension programme. Considering the large-scale turmoil that would have resulted from poorly implemented policy, the Nepalese government emphasised three principles: firstly, that all displaced families should be given land equivalent to that which they lost when the Shulaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR) was extended; secondly, all compensation land should be cultivable; and thirdly, the social and cultural composition of displaced villagers should be maintained in resettled areas (Bhattarai 2001: 270). However, the ethnographic data I will present in this paper clearly show that the resettlement policy based on compensation failed to restore livelihood and prevent impoverishment because it did not respond to the close relationship between socio-cultural and economic life in a particular place.

The ethnographic data show that the old area did not merely support the livelihoods of the indigenous Rana Tharus (hereafter referred to as Ranas), it also nurtured social networks which acted as 'informal security mechanisms'. Uprooting the Ranas thus implied the violent destruction of these place-based social networks and their means of livelihood, which they had previously enjoyed. As a result, a strong feeling of nostalgia is shared among the Ranas who continually idealise their previous life and perceive their present and future life as troublesome. The study indicates that an in-depth understanding of the social/cultural meanings of land is necessary before any displacement decisions are made. If displacement is unavoidable, comprehensive rehabilitation policies are needed to address displaced communities' economic and social losses.

Explorations of the relationships between social relations and a particular place have been widely discussed in recent studies on landscapes (e.g., Hirsch & Hanlon 1995; Lovell 1998). Ethnographic studies show that the meanings of place are socially constructed by people on the basis of their interactions with the land and also with other people living in the same place (Gow 1995; Subedi 1999; Gray 2000; Leach 2003). In his study regarding the belongingness of a village community, Subedi (1999) points out that what land means to its people transcends physical barriers to include human histories and daily life. These social ties and feelings have gradually established

people's sense of 'feeling at home' in a particular place (Fried 1963). In other words, the belongingness to a place as 'home' is the outcome of longstanding interactions between people and a place and also between people over a place. In this sense, conservation done by removing a community permanently from their land means effectively uprooting their histories and existing social ties. This will inevitably cause significant social and psychological disturbance.

Nostalgia is a psychological state commonly found among displaced communities. Although the symptoms of nostalgia and homesickness are common in refugees (Colson 1971; Loizos 1999) and people affected by development-caused displacement projects (Young & Willmott 1957), they are seldom addressed in conservation-induced displacement. For example, abundant case studies on refugees and development-related resettlement projects confirm that dislocation causes psychological turmoil and has negative social impacts for local residents. Most residents experience a sense of loss, depression and helplessness after being resettled. Moreover, these studies demonstrate that dislocation violates people's daily life routines and existing social networks such as loss of family support and nurturance (Colson 1971; Loizos 1999). These impacts are not temporary, and they do influence every aspect of life. Both Fried (1963) and Young & Willmott's (1957) work on relocation programmes have clearly demonstrated that new resettlement areas for displaced families do not offer the same cultural values to them as their old places. Therefore, relocated communities grieve for their lost homes. There is a tendency for people to idealise their lost home as a friendly, secure and cozy place because of closer social interactions attached to its memory.

Social science literature shows that the study of nostalgia is important because it offers us insights about people's feelings about life. Nostalgia is not only 'a yearning for something lost' but also a vehicle of knowledge to understand the ways that people feel about their past, present and future (Fried 1963; Davis 1979; Battaglia 1995). As Davis (1979) argues, nostalgia is people's psychological reaction to the experience of discontinuity in their present life. Later in this paper, a discussion of the Ranas' emotional reactions to their dislocation illustrates that nostalgia emerges as a phenomenon that links the past to the present. It is practiced as evasion (Battaglia 1995) and resistance to the present life (Davis 1979).

With these analyses in mind, it is unlikely that compensation-based conservation resettlement policies can be well justified and prevent impoverishment of displaced communities, unless conservation organisations better understand the social/cultural values of land. This paper aims to contribute to such a discussion. In the first part of this paper, using my anthropological study of the displaced Rana community, I will demonstrate that the value of land is more than just economic subsistence. Both economic and social/cultural values attached to the old land contributed to the secure livelihoods the Ranas once enjoyed. A study of displaced Ranas' feelings about new land in Dhokka Block and old land in Rauteli Bichawa show that their perception of the old and new land is dynamic and

integrated with their feelings of life experiences in the past and present, and their aspirations for the future. In the second part, I will discuss how the destruction of the Ranas' social networks has not only created psychological problems but has also led to dispossession and threatened livelihoods and left them feeling more vulnerable. The interlocking relationships between social networks, livelihoods and feelings of nostalgia and a particular place are the central themes of this paper.

## STUDY AREA AND RESEARCH METHODS

This anthropological study was based on fifteen months of fieldwork (from September 2004 to December 2005). It involved studying a group of displaced park residents known as Rana Tharus, who had, for many generations, inhabited the Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR) in far-western Nepal. Preliminary and post-fieldwork studies were conducted in January 2004 and October 2006 respectively. The post-fieldwork studies allowed me to verify and share most of my findings with local informants, who corroborated what I had recorded about the lives of the Ranas. The reserve was officially declared as the Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (hereafter referred to as the park) in 1976 with a total area of 155 sq. km in response to the increasingly and widely accepted view that conservation of the area was paramount. This particularly applied to the decline in forest in Kanchanpur district caused by a rising population and demand on agricultural land and forest resources.

The designation of the SWR is a typical fence-to-fence management model. The reserve falls under one of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and National Resources (IUCN) protected area categories, in which all settlements and human activities such as cultivation, fishing and hunting are outlawed. When the SWR was first established, a few settlements in the reserve area were thus resettled in Mahendranagar.<sup>3</sup> Although the SWR is small, it is ecologically important as it is home to the world's largest population of swamp deer (approximately 2,000), and its extensive grassland and swamp, along with the tropical and sub-tropical forests, supports some endangered species such as tigers, elephants and rhinoceros. Moreover, a total of 349 bird species, including six globally threatened species, have been recorded in the SWR (Upadhyaya & Yonzon 2003). Ongoing development of new settlements adjoining it and illegal settlements throughout the district had hindered preservation efforts in the SWR. Activities such as logging, grazing and poaching had seriously damaged the natural environment and wildlife habitats. The reserve was therefore considered too small for wildlife, and encroachment by humans was widespread (Bhattarai 2001). An extension of the reserve to include an additional area of 155 sq. km was proposed by the state government in 1981 to improve conservation of flora and fauna in the area (Bhattarai 2001). This time, a total of 17 existing blocks of five villages inside the proposed extension area were affected.

Although all displaced families were given landholdings of sizes similar to what they had lost due to the extension of

the SWR on the basis of land registration records, according to Bhattarai (2001), there was no appeal mechanism for these families against the decision made by the state. This caused serious problems for those indigenous cultivators, particularly the Ranas, who were illiterate, had no land documents and had weak social connections with government officials—who were mainly high-caste hill migrants. For example, in Dhokka Block, at least ten Rana households did not have official land documents and were thus categorised as illegal occupiers and were ineligible for compensation.

The implementation of a resettlement programme was delayed due to households' poor and inaccurate record keeping, delayed relocation of households and rapid encroachment in the resettlement sites, together with a corrupt bureaucracy and dramatic changes in the political environment after the 1990 People's Movement.<sup>4</sup> A total of 18 Commissions were established and 13 of them were set up after the 1990 People's Movement. These Commissions were headed by politicians and were short-lived due to the frequent change of government. Land was even distributed to unlisted households whom commissioners knew personally (Bhattarai 2001). Finally, the SWR's resettlement programme took twenty years to complete and was completed until only in May 2002 with the help of the army. All households inside the extension area were evicted. Today, there is no human settlement inside the SWR (Pandey & Yonzon 2003). The park is managed by state agencies, which include the Park Authority and the Nepalese army. Meanwhile, international non-governmental organisations such as the United Nations Development Program and World Wildlife Fund—Nepal and the leading national conservation—organisation King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation have become actively involved in the park's management. They have also promoted conservation and rural development projects in villages adjacent to the reserve.

One of the biggest park-affected villages in the extension programme was Rauteli Bichawa village. It is believed to have been the first human settlement in Kanchanpur district and more than 1,600 households have been relocated from there (a total of six out of nine wards). It is said that the Ranas originally settled in this particular forest frontier (KDDC 2002): despite the fact that written histories regarding the origin of Ranas in Kanchanpur are very few, their past has been recorded in local oral traditions. Rauteli Bichawa Ranas claim that they are descendants of the Rajputs (Thakuri) of Chittogarh in Rajasthan, India. According to local legend, when the Mughals invaded, the Rajput king and his twelve security guards fled Chittogarh. Some of them settled in BaraRana (meaning twelve Ranas, and the place is believed to be Garwal in India today), while others fled until they came to Sukala, which is now under Nepal's jurisdiction and has been officially renamed Shuklaphanta. The Ranas of this area used to rely heavily on agriculture and forest resources for their livelihoods. Before the 1950s, they were wealthy landowners and controlled extensive agricultural land. However, after the introduction of the land registration system and the massive hill migration, they lost substantial land to the new hill migrants.

Multiple fieldwork sites were adopted in this study, including both resettled (Ward 9, Rampur and Ward 9, Belandi, locally called Dhokka Block) and non-resettled (Ward 7, Iymilia and Ward 8, Jhimila) Rauteli Bichawa Ranas. Dhokka Block was the biggest resettlement area specifically designed for park-affected households from Rauteli Bichawa and at least 70 Rauteli Bichawa Rana households were resettled there. Most Ranas received the same size of land in the new settlement, except ten households who got only 0.33 hectares to build houses. The informants pointed out that they received as little as Nepalese Rupees (NPR) 2,000 (less than USD 30) from the government to help them move if they chose voluntary resettlement. The relocation times varied among Dhokka Block Ranas. Three groups were identified: 1) households that were completely moved out from the park before or during the early 1990s; 2) households that were moved to new settlements in the early 1990s but still occupying the old land until 2001; and 3) households that were moved out in 2001. The length of residency on new land and the nature of resettlement (involuntary or voluntary) did not cause any significant difference among those Ranas' feelings concerning their new land.

My research work consisted of household surveys, participant observations and in-depth interviews. The findings in this paper are based on these multiple sources. The household surveys were first conducted in four selected settlements where the Ranas lived. All surveys were written in English but assistants who could speak Nepali and the Rana local dialect were hired to translate. In each household, male and female members could respond to the structured questionnaire. The foci of the questionnaires distributed to these four settlements differed slightly. I was most concerned about the impact of resettlement on the Rana community, and asked the individuals displaced a series of questions regarding their feelings about the old and new places of settlement. A total of 72 Rana households were interviewed. The survey enabled me to understand the socio-economic background and activities that Rana households engage in. The household survey results further assisted me in identifying suitable sites and families to conduct my research. Suitable study targets were Rana families whose livelihoods are substantially affected by the establishment and dislocation programme of the park. I spent most of my fieldwork time between an old non-resettled Rana settlement (Iymilia) and a new resettled Rana settlement (Rampur).

During my stay with Rana families, besides formal and informal interviews<sup>5</sup>, participant observation was an important research tool. Through it, I came to understand the Rana livelihood system by looking at their everyday social life from both an insider and outsider perspective. I made observations of daily conversations, farming activities, festival celebrations, marriage ceremonies, rituals and forest resource collection, by participating in these activities. By observing these activities, I could construct relationships between conservation and Rana livelihoods, which most Ranas in fact could not directly talk to me about, particularly what they thought of conservation.

Most of them had little comprehension of the idea of conservation. When I designed my questions therefore, I preferred to ask the Ranas what they felt about forest and wild animal protection rather than the concept of conservation. I also had the opportunity to observe their daily difficulties, such as their lack of access to the reserve to collect fuelwood. For example, I followed a few Rana women who went into the park to collect fuelwood and grasses. We had to cross a small river and walk for approximately one hour to the army post where they had to obtain permission from security personnel. I assumed that they would extract as much forest resources as they could quickly, but this was not so. When we passed a historic temple, they decided to have a rest. One of the elderly women turned to me and said:

I don't really know what the name of the God is and where he has come from. However, since my grandparents' time, we would visit here whenever we were inside the park. Nowadays, we can't visit here very often. I feel very sad about this.

I later understood that the Ranas would also use this opportunity to simply visit the park without necessarily extracting fuelwood. This led me to believe that what the forest provided the Ranas went beyond mere subsistence. I therefore expanded my research focus to explore the social and cultural meanings of the park. In fact, the following findings clearly demonstrate that the park-induced dislocation project has disrupted the everyday social lives of the Ranas.

Despite the fact that the Maoist movement<sup>6</sup> has played a vital part in the daily lives of the Ranas and the management of conservation in the SWR, rather than elevating it as the central theme of this paper, I chose to consider it and other socio-economic and political factors on an equal basis. I believe this strategy can better reflect the ways in which the Ranas interpret and weigh social changes from a local perspective. Indeed, the Rana-Maoist interactions in my research areas were complicated (for details, see Lam 2009) and are beyond the scope of this paper; in keeping with the theme of the paper, only the impacts of the Maoist movement on daily social contacts and how this has influenced the Ranas' perception of land will be highlighted.

Meanings and histories of land are selected by Ranas on a subjective basis. In other words, Ranas practice their feelings of nostalgia and collective memories with a deliberate purpose. By listening to displaced Ranas' comments about their old and new homes, it becomes clear that their narratives are based on a mixture of perceptions, realities, imagination and selective histories. The (sometimes idealised) memory of their previous life has prevented them from accepting their new place. Consequently, their description of their past life may not be completely accurate, but my concern is why Ranas from different socio-economic backgrounds share a similar perception of their old land. Does this reflect their common feelings about their present life? To answer this, I have relied on the Rana informants' own perceptions about

the old and new land. Their sadness and feelings of nostalgia question the effectiveness of contemporary economic-focused conservation-induced resettlement.

Names in this paper are pseudonyms, and since the Rana language is an unwritten one, I have first translated what was said into the closest Nepali pronunciation and then into English (Turner 1997). The words 'land', 'place' and 'park' are used interchangeably in this paper and refer both to the SWR and old Rauteli Bichawa village.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### Rauteli Bichawa— 'Living inside [the park] is good' (*Sabai bhiri raamro chha*)

Most of the Ranas that I talked with were resettled after 2001, and all of them have grieved strongly for their old land. Economic differences were not a significant factor in generating different feelings amongst them; I often received the same responses from wealthy and poor Ranas. They all described their old way of life as being perfect. Their strong sense of belonging to the old land is easily understood on account of their people having long resided in this particular place for many generations. Despite the fact that they were physically separated from their old land for years, the image of the old land was still deeply embedded in their memories. The experience of Tikkrām Rana—a middle-aged man from a comparatively affluent family—provides a good example. Tikkrām Rana's family did not suffer great economic difficulties after having been relocated. However, he told me that he repeatedly saw his old land in his dreams:

I always have dreams that I am inside the park again. Particularly during the time when I had just moved here, I [would] see my old place in [my] daydreams and night dreams, where I used to have my old house and everything.

His words clearly implied that the old land was of great importance and its social meanings were irreplaceable. Bhagora Rana also pointed out his preference for the old place: "I don't like my new place because I still remember my old place. I want to go back there. I miss my land." In fact, because of these invisible but strong social and historical ties of the Ranas with their old land, some Dhokka Block Ranas even took the risk of visiting the park just to reminisce about the times when they still lived there. One Dhokka Block Rana told me that despite the fact that he was scared of the security forces, he twice went inside the park with friends because he missed his land. "I love my land so I always want to see it. When I am really inside the park, I see the forest and I remember my past life." Such feelings were commonly shared by other Dhokka Block Ranas. One said to me, "When I visited my old place, I didn't want to come back here. I really want to stay inside [the park]. I see my land become bush area or forest and I do not feel well." For those who never visited their old land again, the memories remained. "After moving out, I never visited my old

place. However, I do miss many things inside. I always see my place in dreams.” I repeatedly heard the following comment made by Dhokka Block Ranas:

I can never forget my [old] place. Because the environment is so nice, we have enough water; we can go to the forest with [our] animals every day. On the moving day, I felt worried because I didn’t know what would happen to me in the new place.

According to Fried (1963), belonging to a place is not simply built through residential relationships but also through familiarity with one’s old abode. His study on the impact of a redevelopment project of Boston’s West End area on residents has shown that the more people are familiar with every person and everything in the old place, the more they grieve for their lost home. This feeling has increased dislocated West End residents’ anger, resentment and resistance to the new place. The Dhokka Block Ranas had similar experiences. For example, Tharsa Rana’s family was relocated from Andaiya, which is located in the central part of the Shuklaphanta extension and only five kilometers from the forest. When they lived in Andaiya, he believed he had everything. But after having relocated to Dhokka Block, which is much further away from the *Sukala*, the unfamiliarity of his new surroundings and alienation from the park often made him feel like he has been exiled to India. The separation from his motherland and a comfortable life often depressed him. He said to me:

Living inside [the park] is very good (*Sabai bhitri dherai raamro chha*). We had forest and had enough food for survival. We had fish to eat. We could go to town very easily; [It was] only seven or eight kilometers [away]. Now the government has moved us to a place and it seems like it is the Indian border. I enjoyed the forests and wildlife. But now I can’t see wildlife here. What can I say to you? Even though before I was just walking there, I enjoyed [the environment]. I felt that the *Sukala* belonged to me, not the government. I always enjoyed the natural environment and wildlife. It seemed like it was ours. In the past, we could graze our animals inside [the park] easily and our life was easy as well. I felt very sad when the government set up the park because I enjoyed being there so much; why were we forced to move out? Many generations of my family have lived there; why did we need to move out?

This kind of feeling truly represents the collective memories of most Dhokka Block Ranas. While talking with them, they often recalled their previous life as abundant (*dherai raamro chha*). The Ranas had many positive memories of their lives before their displacement. The difference between what they felt they previously had and what they had lost after having been relocated became obvious when they expressed their sentiments.

When inside, we had chicken, *dalua* (local wine) and buffalo meat for festivals like *Holi*. However, now we don’t have any friends but have only high interest rates. We can’t celebrate any festivals anymore. Our wedding ceremonies become very small. I am getting poorer and poorer –Bhagara Rana, male, aged 50 years, a medium landholding farmer.

I really don’t like [it here] and I feel sad about the new place. My life inside was really better. I did not need to work hard when living inside. But now I need to go there to collect fuelwood and my husband needs to work somewhere [else]. Here, I never get any help. Before, if we had no food, we could easily get it from others. I feel very lonely during the day. At night, I sleep here, but my [mind] seems to be in my old place in my dreams. I’m not happy the government moved us here. I haven’t celebrated any festivals for three years now. I always worry about food. My family needs to limit our food; I have often had forgo eating dinner. Before, I used to go the market quite often. But I have not gone to the market for the last three years and haven’t bought any new clothes [either]. In the past, my grandfather managed our household and we had everything that we needed. After having moved out, we don’t have enough food and we have had to divide our family and the land. Today, everyone is working for their own survival” –Rabato Rana, female, aged 35 years, member of a big landholding family.

Inside [the park], everything was enough and everyone was happy. In here, everything is less. For example, we used to have a big festival celebration with lots of rice, fish and wild pigs. We sang and danced every day and we were so happy. Now, we can’t really dance and sing freely because we are afraid of the army and the Maoists –Balsukram Rana, male, aged 57 years, a big landholding farmer.

I miss many things inside so I don’t like it here. Before, we had big *Holi* celebrations. We had almost 20 kilos of rice for the whole family per day per meal. We would kill very fat pigs to eat. We could afford to spend 5,000 rupees for *Holi*. Today, we don’t have enough food—how can we celebrate festivals? Sometimes we may have one kilo of meat on *Holi* and that is all. I am very sad about my life –Buli Rana, male, aged 70 years, a medium landholding farmer.

Comments like these demonstrate the feelings of nostalgia or homesickness that are interlocked with the Ranas’ current experiences, and are indicative of how they think perceive their future. The unpleasant interactions with the new land have further exacerbated their sense of nostalgia. As a result, the old Rauteli Bichawa is often subjectively idealised as the perfect place to live for displaced Ranas, while the new place is culturally constructed as one fostering poverty, helplessness and loneliness.

**Dhokka Block - ‘Nobody will like it’ (*Kasaile pani mann paraaudaina*)**

I now turn the focus on how Dhokka Block Ranas culturally perceive their new home. In interviews with more than 50 displaced Rana households, almost none had anything good to say about their new homes. The new places were perceived as bad due to the poor quality of soil, lack of food and weak social relations, including interactions amongst fellow Ranas and with hill migrants.

**‘Not enough food here’ (*Yahaa khaana pugdaina*)**

Most Ranas experienced a significant decline in their standard of living after being displaced because they were denied access to the *Sukala* forest and the new land was poor in terms of productivity. The main focus of this paper is exploring the ways Ranas culturally perceive their new land which is built on their interpretations of what land means to them. Even though most displaced Ranas received equivalent sizes of land as compensation, when I asked them about their first impression of their new land, the most frequent complaint I heard was that their new land could not support subsistence livelihoods. They also pointed out that they suffered food shortages because of the poor soil quality. Their claim largely agrees with the household survey. Table 1 indicates that nearly 60% of Dhokka Block Rana households claimed to have less than nine months’ supply of food.

Although food security data prior to resettlement were not available, interviewed individuals categorically maintained that they could get enough food from their old land and food surpluses even allowed them to have big feasts during the *Holi* festival. Instead of using international and national food security calculation methods as a guideline<sup>7</sup>, the food security situation documented in this paper relies on the self-reporting by informants. The self-reported data were important because they not only reflects the Ranas’ perceptions of their food sufficiency after resettlement, but also indicated the understanding of what food sufficiency means in the local context. From the Ranas’ point of view, food insufficiency was not necessarily related to absolute food shortages; it could mean a reduction in food varieties, as I will discuss later. In view of the fact that interviewees may have tended to conceal and/or underestimate their real economic situation, I was reluctant to believe this completely. For this reason, I considered factors such as household size, landholding size

and its productivity, and Rana dietary consumption patterns in the larger scope of the project (Lam 2009). Furthermore, some Rana households’ food situation depended on tenancing rather than owning land. It may nonetheless explain why the Ranas viewed their poverty as a result of being on new land.

According to the Dhokka Block Ranas, the new lands’ soil had poor water storage capacity, which caused difficulties when rice had to be planted. I visited rice fields both in Rauteli Bichawa and Dhokka Block. Most Rauteli Bichawa Ranas mentioned that the soil could retain water for almost a week, so they had plenty of time to transplant rice seedlings. Yet, the Dhokka Block Ranas pointed out that after ploughing and irrigating, they had to carry out planting immediately because the soil would dry out again within a few hours. Local experience showed that the land productivity in Dhokka Block was less than half of that of their old lands in Rauteli Bichawa. In one *bigha* (0.67 hectare) of land, Dhokka Block Ranas could only obtain about 12 bags of husked rice (*dhan*)—70 kg in each bag, whereas they could get up to 25 bags of *dhan* per *bigha* when they lived and worked in the SWR.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Dhokka Block Ranas blamed their new land for generating food shortages (*khaana pugdaina*). Both the nostalgia for old land and current experiences of malnutrition contributed to their disappointment with their new land’s productivity.

Two important indicators were commonly used by Ranas to illustrate their increasing poverty. The first one concerned a change in their dietary habit. As the new land produced less rice, many of them had to adjust their diet by consuming more wheat products, since the new land could produce similar amounts of wheat as the old one. *Roti* (wheat-based bread) became part of the most Ranas’ diets, along with *dal bhat* (rice). Traditionally, the Ranas made a social distinction between rice and wheat consumption. Eating *roti* symbolised poverty and since the new land proved to be more suitable for planting wheat rather than rice, it was immediately perceived as a bad place (*Thaau raamro chhaina*).

The second indicator of poverty was the significant decline in festival celebrations. Most Dhokka Block Ranas pointed out that because their new land could not provide them with a food surplus, they could not afford to celebrate festivals such as *Holi* and *Dipalwaali*. Most people could not afford to go to the market to shop. The Pachan Rana family case study provides a good example of this situation.

Pachan Rana, who was a small landholding farmer in Andiaya (Ward 3), owned two *bighas* (1.34 hectares) of unregistered land before his family was displaced. At that time, the land provided his family with more than enough food and every year he could sell the agricultural surplus and earn on average about NPR 3,000. Besides working in the field, he would often drink *raksi* (local wine) with friends and could afford to eat meat and fish at least once a month. During the *Holi* festival, he could buy new clothes for his family and invite dance troupes to his home. However, since his displacement, he had to make significant changes to his lifestyle. With having to face severe food shortages, he had to develop new livelihood strategies in order to survive.

**Table 1**  
*Self-reporting data on food sufficiency of Dhokka Block Ranas*

Estimated food sufficiency (no. of months per year)	No. of households	Percentage
1–3	1	2.4
4–6	15	35.7
7–9	9	21.4
10–12	17	40.5
Total no. of households interviewed	42	100

Source: Household survey 2005

Essentially, he had to give up his old way of life. In the four years after moving to Dhokka Block, his family had never celebrated festivals or gone to the market. The frequency of meat consumption had declined to about once a year. Pachan himself seldom drank *raksi* after resettlement. He often said to me, “If I still drink *raksi* and celebrate festivals, how can I feed my family?”

### **‘The place is so narrow’ (*Thaau saaguro*)**

The new place was also perceived to be ‘narrow’ (*saaguro*) by many Dhokka Block Ranas. The term ‘*thaau saaguro*’ refers to barriers in social interactions rather than spatial limitations. I observed that the Rana settlement distribution in Dhokka Block was dense, but they seldom visited their nearby kinsmen or neighbours’ houses. According to my Rana informants, the place was perceived as narrow because interactions amongst the Dhokka Block Ranas were very limited. Instead of talking with other people, most Ranas chose to work in their fields through the day and stay at home in the evenings. As a result, most Ranas felt lonely in Dhokka Block: I have therefore interpreted their word *saaguro* as being similar in meaning to the English word ‘lonely’. This social outcome was not what the policy-makers had envisaged; they had intended the resettlement area to minimise the negative social impacts of displacement. One resettlement principle was that affected communities sharing the same cultural background should be resettled in the same area. This was particularly the case in the Rampur area<sup>9</sup> where Rana communities from Rauteli Bichawa were grouped together. While the aim was to maintain their community networks and cultures, something had obviously gone wrong.

Why did most Dhokka Block Ranas feel lonely in their new abode? In order to answer this question, a closer look at their social networks may be helpful. When I asked the displaced Ranas about their social interactions, half of them said that they did not have any relatives or friends living around them while others did. A higher percentage of people having relatives and friends living in close proximity was found in Rampur when compared to Beldandi. 12 Rana households in Beldandi did not have any relatives and friends living close to them and only five in Rampur were in a similar situation. Although the level of loss in social networks due to displacement among the Rampur and Beldandi Ranas differed, both shared the same sense of loneliness. Three factors contributed to their loneliness: heavy farming workload, distance and language problems.

In Dhokka Block, the Ranas complained that they needed to work harder in the fields because the soil was quite dry and hard. On average, they had to spend double the time ploughing the same size of land than before. The implication was that more farming work led to decreased opportunities and motivation for them to visit and talk with relatives and friends. The situation could be summed up by Mulchandra Rana’s sentiment:

I feel very lonely because no one here wants to talk. People are in fact friendly here but we all need to work hard, worry

about our own lives [and] so we don’t have a chance to talk each other.

Jilabati Rana had a few friends around but most of her friends had moved to other villages after the notification of the SWR. She said:

I am very unhappy because we Ranas are no [longer] living in the same place. If [my friends] are around me, I will feel better. Nowadays, I only stay on my land and seldom go outside. In my old place, I always spent time with my friends. Now I find it very hard to spend time in here.

Bhagora Rana, who did not have friends and relatives living close by, remarked, “Without any friends, most of the time I only work in the field and then stay at home. Life is lonely.” One of the effects of dislocation is that it can often change interpersonal interactions in a latent and silent way. Even having relatives and friends living closeby cannot guarantee the maintenance of community solidarity because after dislocation, the previous interaction patterns no longer exist.

The hardships were inflamed by some Ranas having to endure long separations from their family members. Long distances made it virtually impossible for them to visit each other. For example, when Roson Rana, a 65 year old man had to move out from Rauteli Bichawa in 2001 with his family, he was told that he would receive ten *kattas* (0.33 hectare) of land in Beldandi as compensation. But the government’s promise was not fulfilled. He now lives alone on his two *kattas* of land and his son’s family has moved to another village to tenant land in order to get work. Every night he feels extremely lonely without his family and friends. He said to me, “I had land, a big house and my family inside the park. I had never thought before that my life would become like this one day.” Similarly, Bann Rana, who lives alone in Beldandi, had relied completely on his grandson who worked in another village. He could never visit his grandson’s family because he could not afford to pay for the bus ticket. Only the grandson visited him once or twice a year to bring him some rice. It is clear that long distances made it difficult for Ranas to have frequent contact with family members.

Another problem the Beldandi Ranas faced was that they found it difficult to communicate with their new hill neighbours. The Rana population in Beladandi and Rampur were 4% and 25% respectively, compared to the high percentage (90%) in the old settlement, Iymila. Displaced Ranas could not speak Nepali fluently and this resulted in social isolation. When they felt depressed and worried about life, there was nobody they could share their problems with. One elderly Rana resident of Rampur often spoke about ‘*thaau saaguro*’. When he first moved to Dhokka Block, he felt very lonely because he did not have friends to talk to. Finally, he opened a small teashop just to have the opportunity to talk to people. I was told by most Dhokka Block Ranas that they kept their loneliness in their hearts.

### 'The place is so dangerous' (*Thaau khataraa chha*)

One immediate effect of the Ranas leading an inactive social life in Dhokka Block was that the place provided less security. This is because trust seldom existed between new resettlers and host residents. Most Ranas in fact described their place as dangerous (*khataraa chha*).

In contrast to the old Rauteli Bichawa settlement, the demographic composition and economic status of Dhokka Block was more complicated. It was a new settlement characterised by mixed ethnic population groups such as Ranas, Dangaura Tharus, twice-born castes and untouchable castes.<sup>10</sup> Some were big landowners while others were landless. In a strict sense, all of them were new migrants and their residencies were relatively short. Furthermore, due to the proximity to the Indian border, Dhokka Block residents had to endure the depredations of criminal outfits. Many small shop owners in Rampur and Beldandi experienced substantial losses from stealing. In order to minimise any losses, they had to sleep inside their shops at night. I was told by the locals that some local residents were even killed by these gangs.

During my stay in Dhokka Block, there were two incidents which clearly illustrated the impression the Ranas had of their new home and the people they had to live with. On the first occasion, I was invited to a marriage party of a high-caste Brahmin family in Beldandi, which was less than a kilometer away from my host family. The ceremony was held in the evening. Before I left for the party, my host family reminded me many times not to go because it was too dangerous. They said there were many 'bad people' out at night and they 'would do anything they liked' especially after getting drunk. On the second occasion—*Holi* festival time—I planned to attend *Holi* parties organised by Ranas from Bhursa and Darak in Dhokka Block (Figure 1). My host family, who were originally from Andaiya, told me that I should be very careful because many Bhursa and Darak Ranas were heavy drinkers (*Raksi dherai khaana manchhe*). This implies a type of social differentiation between different Rana groups. Andaiya Ranas perceive themselves to be wealthier than others. The repeated reminders from my host family also reflected their negative perceptions of other Ranas and other caste neighbours in their new place. Although such a generalisation cannot not be based on the example of my host family alone, in reality, Dhokka Block residents behaved and talked carefully when they were in public places because they were afraid of the Maoists or being identified as Maoist supporters.

The Maoists represented another major source of disturbance to the local people. Dhokka Block was a Maoist area and during my fieldwork it was not uncommon to see armed Maoists patrolling the villages. They would often ask locals for donations and food. Although of a generally subordinate position (second lower caste) in Nepalese society, the Ranas are perceived as one of the major targets for Maoist recruitment by the state.<sup>11</sup> However, the reality turns out to be much more complicated. From what I observed, the Ranas in my research area were not active supporters of the Maoist movement,



**Figure 1**  
*Bhursa Ranas celebrate Holi in Dhokka Block*

nor did they have any formal association with the Maoists. Most Maoist outfit members were not locals but came mainly from the neighbouring hill districts. Most Ranas in my study areas were scared of the Maoists to some extent, but they did not demonstrate an unfavourable attitude towards them. In fact, they supported the Maoists in several ways, including providing meeting places, accommodation and food. Although such logistical support might be voluntary or involuntary, according to my observations the Maoists' visits did not result in physical violence with the Ranas. At the same time, the Maoists showed sympathy for the Ranas' subordinate position in society; I was told by Rana informants that the Maoists 'approved' of their illegal forest resource collection activities in order to curry favour with the weak and poor groups.

The immediate effects of the Maoist insurgency on daily social life was that at night, almost all kinds of social activities became absent. In order to avoid the Maoists' attention on the one hand and being identified as Maoist supporters by security forces on the other, one old Dhokka Block Rana pointed out that they seldom visited their neighbours or had family meetings. A sense of danger and insecurity was widespread among Dhokka Block Ranas who were living in the middle of a civil war.

The longer I stayed with the Ranas, the more I noticed that they seldom spent time chatting with neighbours. Also, no help was expected from them because they considered themselves to be poor and could not afford to help others. I discussed this matter with Mantri Rana, who was from a wealthy family in Andaiya and was one of the few Ranas I met who actively advocated the importance of retaining the solidarity of the Rana community. For him, the old place nurtured close neighbourhood relations and mutual trust, which offered a feeling of security. He shared with me his thoughts of what had happened to community relations after their relocation:

Our relationship was closer inside the park than outside. When we lived inside, the Rana population was big and we had enough so we could always stay together and celebrate

festivals together. Now, Rauteli Bichawa Ranas [are] separated everywhere; some [live] in Beldandi, [some] near the highway and [some] have even disappeared. We are fewer people and have less food, so we are only looking after ourselves. We are not interested in celebrating festivals together and [sharing] food [anymore]. Of course, if we only look after ourselves, many changes will continuously happen in our community in the near future. Just like people living in towns, we don't know each other anymore.

**'No help is available' (*Sayaaga paaidaina*)**

*Sayaaga paaidaina* is another major reason why Dhokka Block Ranas find the new place unpalatable. Many Ranas have found it difficult to get assistance from neighbours and relatives when they have faced economic difficulties after having moved to Dhokka Block. Of the 42 Rana households interviewed in Dhokka Block, 17 said that they did not receive any help. While the rest did mention that they could sometimes get help from neighbours and relatives, this depended on the type of help they needed. If it involved money and food, however, it was virtually non-existent, the reason being that every Dhokka Block Rana household was getting poorer. One Rana said to me, "It is so hard to get help (*sayaaga*) because everyone is [in a situation] similar to ours." Another Rana remarked, "I cannot get help here when my food and money is running out. Inside [the park] it is better because everyone knows me and believes me. In here, new people [live] around me and it is hard for me to get help from them."

Instead of seeking help from relatives and friends, obtaining loans had become a new strategy for those Dhokka Block Ranas experiencing hardships. Previously, short loans were popular in overcoming temporary food shortages and contingency expenditures such as weddings and funerals. Following a harvest, the Ranas could quickly repay their debts, but since their relocation, the situation has changed. One Rana said to me, "Today, in the new place, a loan is a loan and hard for us to repay." According to my household survey (Table 2),<sup>17</sup> Dhokka Block Rana households had debts and most of them had started receiving loans after their displacement. The loan amounts varied from NPR 5,000 to 400,000. All loans involved cash rather than grain. In actuality, the figure might have been even higher because some interviewed households tended to hide their debt.<sup>12</sup> Half of the interviewed households used loans to purchase rice to fulfill their subsistence needs. The figure matched the Ranas' claim about increasing food shortages after the park-induced displacement commenced. Most of them pointed out that they got loans from high-caste hill migrants rather than wealthier Ranas.

The Ranas had no alternative but to rely on money lenders' loans, the interest rate of which was often higher than that of loans given by relatives and Rana neighbours. Levine (1988) has mapped the complex web of how the credit system works in rural Nepal. She sees credit as following the norms of kinship and as part of the local moral economy. This kind of loan

can be interest-free. Ranas are now victims of a vicious loan cycle. Both Caplan (1970) and Levine (1988) in their in-depth ethnographic studies have demonstrated that indebtedness is a critical factor in influencing social relations at the village level. Firstly, they argue that debtor-creditor relationships reflect the local power structure. Caplan finds that due to cash shortages, the tribal Limbus living in Eastern Nepal have started to obtain loans from high-caste Brahmins. As a result, a new form of dependent and exploitative relationship has been established between Limbus and Brahmins. Limbu debtors thus gradually became the subordinate group. Levine's careful observation on multi-ethnic villages in Humla district indicated that instead of caste status, indebtedness is the key issue in determining the character of power relations. She concludes that the rich people from either higher or lower castes who can control the credit wield the power in the village. Secondly, their studies also indicate that serious indebtedness is one of the major contributors to 'landlessization'. Levine (1988: 214) states that "the vicious cycle of debt may lead first to temporary mortgaging and then progress to permanent alienation of farmland." In the case of the Dhokka Block Ranas as well, they are under increasing pressure to sell their land to repay debts.

The story of Buli Rana, whose family moved to Dhokka Block five years before this study was conducted, clearly illustrates the relationship between impoverishment, indebtedness and landlessization. His family moved to Dhokka Block five years ago. The land that he received as compensation could only provide half a year's food supply for his family. He could not get a job in the village, nor could he get any help from the others. For another six months therefore, his family depended completely on loans to purchase food. Even though the interest rate had reached 60%, he had to accept to pay it because he could not borrow money from friends or relatives. The Ranas

**Table 2**  
*Debt situation of Dhokka Block Ranas*

	Loan amount* (NPR)	Requirement for loan
Household 1	10,000	Food purchase
Household 2	20,000–25,000	Business
Household 3	10,000	Funeral rites
Household 4	20,000	Wedding
Household 5	30,000	House repairs
Household 6	400,000	Agricultural loans
Household 7	10,000	Food purchase
Household 8	50,000	Food purchase
Household 9	30,000–40,000	Food purchase, marriage
Household 10	15,000	Food purchase
Household 11	4,000	Food purchase
Household 12	7,000	Food purchase
Household 13	10,000	Food purchase
Household 14	5,000	Food purchase
Household 15	Amount not disclosed	Food purchase
Household 16	10,000–15,000	Medical treatment
Household 17	22,000	Food purchase

\*The loan amount was high compared to village living expenses. In my research area, one meal cost less than NPR 30; the market price of 1 kg of rice was about NPR 15–16; daily salary for casual labour was NPR 60–150. (1 USD = NPR 68). Source: Household survey 2005.

also had to apply for loans because they could not manage the expenses associated with weddings, medical treatment, house repairs and funerals. Due to the accumulation of loans, some Ranas even needed to sell land in order to repay their debts.

Another example is that of Chanaru's family who had moved to Dhokka Block 16 years before this study. They were given three *bighas* of land as compensation which could only support half a year's food for the family. With no foreseeable alternative, Chanaru took out an agricultural loan from a bank. Without the means to service the debt, such as obtaining employment, the debt became more serious (approximately NPR 400,000). He also needed money for medical treatment and festival celebrations. As a result, he started to sell land within just three years of having moved to Dhokka Block in order to survive. He felt sad about his present life and remarked, "I don't know what I can do except sell land for the debt. Nowadays, my family has to control food very strictly. We never have meat and never celebrate festivals anymore!" The seriousness of indebtedness in the Rana society can be summarised by Pachan Rana's comment. He suffered regular food shortages after the dislocation, but unlike other Ranas, he was reluctant to get a loan. He often asked himself, "If I get a loan, how can I repay it back? Finally, I will have to sell my land and become poorer."

As a consequence of these reasons, Dhokka Block became a culturally unpleasant place for displaced Ranas. Many interviewed Ranas felt that every day consisted of worry and anxiety. One Rana said of the place that "nobody will like it" (*Kasaile pani mann paraudaina*). In fact, their resentment of the new place is reinforced by their memories and recreation of their old place—Rauteli Bichawa. One interviewee in Beldandi Rana said sadly, "Don't ask me about my life inside the park. I can only say [that] everything was so comfortable for me when [I was] living inside."

### IMPLICATIONS FOR LIVELIHOODS

In summary, although displaced Ranas culturally perceive their old and new land differently, the differences are not meaningful without taking into account the most important concern for Ranas—their livelihood. The cultural values of land and rural livelihoods had for generations formed an indissoluble relationship. Farm work and various kinds of social interactions between the Ranas had nurtured their perceptions of their land. They therefore felt alienated in their new land, and this implied dramatic changes in their economic experiences and situations. The Ranas were resentful of their new homes because they faced severe problems in earning a living. Food shortages became a chronic problem for the Dhokka Block Ranas. Most of the time they were too busy trying to earn a living and so appeared to have no time or motivation for social activities. The consequence was that the Ranas socially isolated themselves from each other. Close neighbourhood and social networks were not developed in the new place. This explained their feelings of anger, danger, loneliness and helplessness in their new land. In this sense, dislocation not only caused

psychological problems for the Ranas, but the breaking up of their traditional social networks was also precipitated by their economic hardships. Gupta (1987) emphasises that social networks act as forms of 'informal security mechanisms' in rural communities because they can offer alternatives in coping with sudden and seasonal livelihood shocks. She states:

The support available from sources such as kin and patrons helps the poor in times of need. It can take the form of smoothing out small fluctuations in income by such means as small short-term loans of rice or money. Far more important, it can take the form of help in the event of major contingencies, thereby providing a source of insurance against being reduced to destitution (1987: 114).

Several case studies in Asia and Africa have confirmed that the community-based social security system is an important strategy for the poor (Agarwal 1991, 1997; Platteau 1991; Streefland 1996). The forms of help from social networks can be very diverse, such as: using inter-household transfers of food, livestock and loans (Jodha 1978, 1981; Rahmato 1987); borrowing grain from kin (Watts 1983); exchanging goods and services with neighbours and relatives (Rahmato 1987); and credit arrangements with relatives (Rahmato 1987; Agarwal 1992). However, these social security mechanisms have gradually declined in traditional societies due to social and economic changes, as suggested by Dirks (1980) and Richards (1990). In order to help the rural poor, Richards (1990: 275) argues that rather than undermine local livelihood capacities, it is more important to develop strategies that strengthen traditional security mechanisms. The impacts of changes in social relations and disconnection of social networks caused by displacement on the park residents' long-term livelihood should be seriously considered in future conservation resettlement programmes.

### CONCLUSION

It is now too late to withdraw the dislocation programme of the SWR and mitigate social losses that the Ranas have suffered. However, the Rana experience shows that it is time for conservation policy makers to seriously consider the substantial social dangers caused by dislocation. The Ranas' story illustrates the need for an in-depth understanding of the interlocking relationships between place, livelihood, social network and feelings of nostalgia. Nostalgia is not merely a psychological reaction of displaced communities towards their homeland; economic hardship and social isolation after resettlement often further trigger feelings of nostalgia among such communities. The outcome is that displacement impoverishes the material and spiritual life of displaced communities. Instead of introducing dislocation as an essential conservation strategy, I strongly urge that comprehensive scientific studies must first be conducted to justify the need for wildlife conservation. Furthermore, a critical review of compensation-based resettlement policies is needed: Can the

present economic-based compensation schemes mitigate social loss and effectively prevent impoverishment of vulnerable communities while resettlement is unavoidable?

In this paper, my ethnographic data have clearly shown that the Ranas' old lands provided them with a sense of well-being. Well-being refers to both material and spiritual satisfaction. Having been moved out from the park, most displaced Ranas started to realise that the new place was alien to them. They then suffered depression and developed symptoms of nostalgia. The more hardship they experienced in their present situation, the more they idealised their lost home. The result was that their disappointment of the new place increased.

On closer examination of the reasons for the Ranas' feelings of loneliness and danger in the new place, I noted that the breakup of social networks was a major factor. The reality was that although having friends and relatives around was welcome, there was no guarantee they could get support in times of need or distress. Most Ranas complained that they could hardly obtain help from friends and kinfolk either in the form of food or money after the displacement because all Ranas were becoming poorer. The close neighbourhood and community relationships were further undermined with the Ranas ceasing to participate in social activities. This outcome is demonstrated by subtle changes in the relationships between the place and people's socio-cultural relations. Stronger social networks were often attached to a particular place where people had resided for a long time and had frequent contact with each other. Dramatic changes in livelihood therefore significantly influence interactions between people. It became clear that weak social networks would ruin this compromise as a critical livelihood or economic security mechanism for Rana community.

This detailed exploration of the Ranas' cultural ties to their land has confirmed that the designation of a particular place for a distinct cultural group and land compensation did not guarantee that the same community dynamic and sustainable livelihoods could be maintained. This conclusion reflects the policy-makers' ignorance of the complexities of human-place relationships. Senses of belonging and community solidarity are gradually established through people's long contact with a particular territory and interactions between people in and around that place. In this case, dislocation did not only physically separate the Ranas from their home, it also took away their previous social networks, and this resulted in their further impoverishment. Land compensation schemes alone are no panacea to the conflicts between wildlife conservation and local livelihoods unless more complex and careful evaluation of the relationships between land, social networks and livelihoods is done before any displacement occurs.

The Ranas' story clearly indicates that without taking into consideration the cultural and social values of land, resettlement based on compensation has failed to restore livelihood and prevent impoverishment. Instead of suffering deep nostalgia, the Ranas might have recovered from social and economic turmoil if rehabilitation strategies such as community

reconstruction, counseling services and employment training were offered. Only when the local social and economic life is secured, is it more likely that the modern park management approach can successfully achieve 'double sustainability': the sustainability of people's livelihoods and sustainability of biodiversity (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau 2006). A well-designed and comprehensive rehabilitation programme must therefore be integrated in current resettlement policies when the act of displacement is justified as the only effective path for conserving biodiversity.

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## Notes

1. These risks are landlessness, joblessness, homeless, marginalisation, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of access to common property and services and social disarticulation.
2. After the downfall of the monarchy in 2006, all protected areas in Nepal have deleted the 'Royal' in their names.
3. The data for the exact number of these resettled families were not available during my fieldwork. According to my local informants, it was estimated that due to the establishment and expansion of the SWR, more than 3,000 local families were displaced.
4. The 1990 People's Movement (Nepali: *Jana Andolan*) was a multi-party movement in Nepal. It brought an end to the absolute monarchy and eliminated the Panchayat system. It marked the beginning of constitutional democracy (see Hutt 2004). In 2006, following the restoration of absolute monarchy in Nepal, the *Loktantra Andolan* was launched, which once again illustrated a unity between various political parties that led some to brand it *Jana Andolan II*.
5. A Nepali research assistant was hired throughout the fieldwork period.
6. The Maoists (the Communist Party of Nepal) declared the People's War on February 13, 1996, with the aim of overthrowing the Nepalese monarchy. The armed conflict lasted for 10 years and it is believed that 13,000 people were killed in this civil war. It ended with a Comprehensive Peace Accord signed on November 21, 2006 which is now monitored by the United Nations Mission in Nepal.
7. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has established a detailed database and index regarding the issue of food security such as Minimum Energy Requirement (kcal/personal/day). A profile of Nepal is also available (see [http://www.fao.org/faostat/foodsecurity/index\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/faostat/foodsecurity/index_en.htm)).
8. The estimate for rice productivity was based on the normal agricultural year that did not include serious crop failure caused by natural disasters such as floods and drought.
9. The situation in Beldandi was different in that this area was mainly designated for resettling affected landless families including Ranas and other caste groups. There was no consideration of cultural factors. As a result, a few Rana households were sparsely settled and they were surrounded by the hill population.
10. Under the Muluki Ain (national legal code), people were categorised into four groups. Twice-born caste groups (Brahmans and Chhetris) were considered higher castes and granted greater social prestige, while Ranas were categorised as the second lowest caste Masinya Matwali (literally

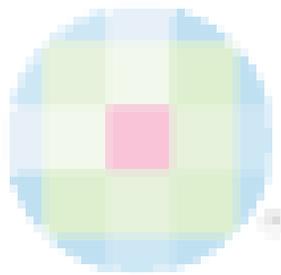
translated as 'enslavable alcohol-drinkers'). The untouchable castes were perceived as being 'impure' and shared the lower social status.

11. During my first trip to Kanchanpur in 2004, some park management personnel believed that the Ranas were supporters of the Maoist insurgency.
12. Levine (1988: 218–219), in her study of indebtedness in rural Nepal, describes the difficulties in obtaining accurate data of indebtedness because both debtors and creditors engage in deception. However, she insists that indebtedness is a prevalent and traditional social phenomenon in rural Nepal. See also Jodha (1981) and Richards (1990) for a discussion on the role of traditional credit systems in Africa.

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