

Reciprocity practices of nomadic hunter-gatherer Rāute of Nepal

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Abstract: This paper focuses on reciprocity among the nomadic hunter-gatherer Rāute and sedentary groups, ie farmers and artisans. The Rāute's reciprocal relation depends on social contracts, trust, territorial relations and residential propinquity. These facets of reciprocity can be accepted, denied or even cancelled. I argue that the Rāute are economically prosperous because of their regular exchange of woodenwares for grains and other necessary items, though they refrain from storing resources, earning cash incomes, and eschew agricultural production and animal husbandry. Sharing, exchange, gift and counter-gift engagements are obligatory or compulsory, free and voluntary, ensuring their reciprocity with neighbouring populations – which has been regulated by seasonality, foraging and population density around the vicinities of their camps. Qualitative research was employed, with informal interviews, observations, personal accounts, audio and video recording, as well as field diaries.

Keywords: reciprocity, gift giving, sharing, reciprocity and obligation

1. Introduction

This article examines reciprocal practices among a nomadic hunting and gathering group of Rāute of Nepal and argues that reciprocity is integral to their desire for maintaining autonomy and resisting integration into the nation-state. Furthermore, I argue that issues and debates surrounding classical definitions and current revisions about reciprocity need to attend to the unique tactics and cultural imaginations of contemporary nomadic Rāute. They maintain their identity with limited hunting-gathering, valued woodenwares and exchange practices with farmers.

Reciprocity includes the processes of transfer, exchange, gift giving and the bartering of goods. It also deals with instrumental and communicative or symbolic values. The instrumental value fulfils human desires and communicative or symbolic value strengthens their social capital and integration (Molm

et al 2007). These values develop interethnic relationships for economic benefits between farmers and foragers as seen between the Agata and Palanan (Peterson 1978) and Aka Pygmies and their Bantu neighbours (Bahuchet & Guillaume 1982). Hunting and sharing involve large game: reciprocity, nepotism and long-term political goals (Wiessner 2002). Generally, hunter-gatherers are resilient in the face of environmental and social pressures and persist in their ancestral occupation (Minter 2010). For purposes of this article, I engage with Marshall Sahlins's tripartite models of reciprocity, Marcel Mauss's ideas on the gift, and Lévi-Strauss's notion of exchange to treat my ethnographic material on the Rāute hunter-gatherers of South Asia.

Studies among the Rāute began in 1970, embracing different perspectives, including various dimensions of their life, cultural dynamics (Reinhard 1974; Bista 1976 & Shāhu 2013), folklore (Nepāl 1997[1983]), ethnobotany (Singh 1997), identity (Fortier 2003 & Shāhu 2011), verbal art (Fortier 2002), traditional life and change (Shāhu 2011; Inamura 2016 et al), language (Bandhu 1987), and reciprocity and sharing (Fortier 2000; 2001); however, few studies focus primarily on reciprocity.

Previous research discussed non-monetary topics, non-commoditisation, and ceremonial exchanges, drawing little attention to reciprocity. Within this context, I also examine non-material phenomena that sustain the Rāute's everyday life. Rāute refrain from adopting modern gadgetry and new technologies, ignore modern agricultural practices, and show little interest in saving or storing commodities. They successfully keep a number of goods in circulation through a traditional system of reciprocity. As such, they continue to forage, and have exchanged with farmers over many generations.

This article notes the dyadic relation of the Rāute with farmers, artisans and herders in the scope of their foraging range. This relation is unlike the relation between patron–client, landlord–serf and investor–debtor. By tracing social networks, customary practices, cultural ethos and local beliefs, I examine these dyadic relations and their relation to reciprocity. I argue that reciprocity produces and reproduces social relations. In these terms, I examine an economy largely based on exchange, gift giving, social networks and moral obligations that differ from the transactions and relations of a market based economy.

I highlight three main points in this text: first, how Rāute reciprocity is associated with a social matrix including rituals, kinship, beliefs and ideologies. Second, gift economy, or reciprocity, has been connected to self-desire and expectation rather than humanitarian issues. Third, this entails balance and imbalance, as well as symmetrical and asymmetrical relations, examined through Marcel Mauss's theory of 'The Gift' and Marshall Sahlins's categories of the forms of reciprocity.

2. Perspectives on hunter-gatherer reciprocity and exchange

Western economic theories have not satisfactorily explained the different structures of traditional economic organisations (Dalton 1961; Herskovits 1974[1940]). These theories discuss the division of labour and self-regulating markets and consumerism, often distorting traditional economic practices and values. Marcel Mauss (1924) discussed the obligation to give, receive and repay as associated with transactions. He showed the correlation between ‘total social phenomena’ and the individual. In return for the individual making an offer to society, there is a return payment given as an obligation of reciprocation influenced by prestige and honour. The supra-economic practice such as the Potlatch is not present among the Rāute as they do not destroy their wealth in the name of prestige and honour.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969) argued that the system of exchange includes material objects, social values and women. The form of exchange has no economic value; rather, it encompasses the social phenomena with material and symbolic significance. Kinship and marriage practices build social contracts between two social groups under the universal principle of reciprocity, integrating the self and others in the management of scarce resources. Hunter-gatherer economic practices, including gifting, exchange and sharing, occur both within and outside their cultural boundaries. Sharing operates on three successive levels:

1. within the task group
2. within the family group, along kinship lines, and
3. within the consumer group. (Bahuchet 1990: 31)

The sharing mechanism carries both social and economic importance. Among the Hadza, food sharing is a social process where children learn through observation, imitation, participation, reinforcement, play and teaching (Crittenden 2016).

In contrast to western economic theories, the Rāute economy goes beyond cooperation, competition and self-sustaining growth; rather, it is based on contract, negotiation and even threat. In the case of reciprocity, the actor is responding to friendly or hostile actions, even if no economic gains can be expected (Fehr & Fischbacher 2005:153). Hunter-gatherer economies depend on the hunting of animals and the gathering of wild food resources, and their way of life is generally a precarious and arduous struggle for existence (Lee 1968:30). In this article, I view reciprocity in the context of production, circulation and distribution with a sedentary population, ie farmers, artisans and pastoralists.

This is simply a process of exchange, sharing and gifting that binds social actors with moral obligation, prestige, customs and ethos.

Hunter-gatherer relationships with neighbouring villagers are symbiotic, competitive and structured and can be studied through historical and contemporary approaches. Historical perspectives explain the reconstruction of interactions and changing relations, while the contemporary approach explains the political and economic framework (Ikeya & Hitchcock 2016). The relationship between hunter-gatherers, farmers and pastoralists is influenced through material and social exchanges and engages with issues of class and power as they co-exist with each other (Spielmann & Eder 1994). The Rāute differ little from hunter-gatherers of the past in terms of behaviour, adaptive technologies and economic relations with agro-pastoralists. Recently, however, some of them prefer to visit markets for exchanges and the purchasing of goods, to collect donations from different organisations, watch films, listen to radio broadcasts, visit restaurants and accept gifts from outsiders.

A few years back their notion towards currency completely changed. In the past, touching money was considered sinful; however, nowadays it has become necessary for survival. Their trade relations have broadened, occasionally extending beyond the boundary of their agro-pastoral trade relations.

In many respects, the Rāute's economy is similar to the Hadza, mainly through exchange and begging, to meet their everyday needs (Woodburn 1982). Their exchange system depends on the availability of resources and cultural beliefs that maintain biodiversity and symbiotic relationships with non-foragers. Rāute engage in hunting rhesus monkeys, carve woodenwares and trade them, in addition to foraging for edible fruits and roots from the forest to obtain food and medicine. They produce limited woodenwares for trade through the utilisation of local forest resources that meet their desires and expectations. These exchange relationships among the Rāute are influenced by their nomadic life and their knowledge of regional ecosystems, environmental variability and availability of resources – which often determines their migratory routes and symbiotic relation with sedentary groups.

Karl Polanyi noted that 'primitive' economies are embedded in kinship networks which are integrated through 'reciprocity' and 'redistribution' as such economies engage in non-market and non-bartering transactions. Redistribution is different than reciprocity, as it is more concerned with centrality. Influential families, aristocrats and bureaucrats represent the redistributive authority in this centrality and collect and store goods and services, ie land, craft products, fines, taxes, gifts and offerings, and later redistribute them to other parties. People mutually adjust, no individual economic motives are prioritised,

and personal effort is counted; however, it is not necessary to redistribute goods and services on a proportional basis (2001[1944]).

These economies are based on social relations, contracts, negotiation and exchange, intersecting with notions of honour, prestige, social obligation and compulsion. The Rāute are only partly immersed in a market system and they are less interested in storing agricultural products because of their frequent migration and immediate exchange.

There is a *miteri* relation that bonds Rāute society (Bista 1976; Fortier 2000; Shāhu 2011).¹ The *miteri* relation is established beyond the rules of blood and marriage and bonds people within different castes and ethnic groups. Among the Maasai, Okiek and Baka, such fictive ties make the interethnic exchange between hunter-gathers and agriculturists popular (see Spielmann & Eder 1994). The Rāute have hundreds of *mits* accruing long-term trust; cooperation gives additional benefits, expands trade and protects them from further jeopardising their trade routes. The economic activities of Rāute depend on local agro-pastoralists, all running under socially prescribed rules and regulations and depends on social networking with regional sedentary populations. This economic practice is loaded with sentiment, emotion, attachment, kinship, prestige, moral relations and harmony (Dahal 1981). The moral component of exchanges incurs an obligation of sharing and exchange with one another. The notion of morality prevails beyond self-interest and contributes to forming egalitarian relations. Here, as witnessed in most egalitarian societies, exchanges and relations are negotiated through consensus rather than personal dealings, and hierarchal decision making is eschewed. And as Boehm (1993) observed, reverse dominance can serve as a levelling mechanism if overbearing leadership emerges. Reciprocal practices in Rāute society are not denied or cancelled and are balanced returns, based on communal ideologies, beliefs, taboos and giver-receiver relations.

3. People and study area

The Rāute are Tibeto-Burman nomadic hunter-gatherers who hunt rhesus monkeys (*Macaca mulatta*) and carve woodenwares. Local, settled villagers

1 *Miteri* or *miterātā* is a form of fictive kinship which refers to friendship. This is popular in Nepal and in northern India (see Okada 1957; Messerschmidt 1982) creating close ties between people. The fictive friend is known as *mit* (fem *Mitani*), and such a relation is built through certain ritual performances, bonding two families, between same sex individuals.

call them *ban rājā* (kings of the forest), *rajwār* (rulers), *Jangali* (forest dwellers), *rāutiyā* and *rāutelā*. The *ban rājā* and *rajwār* refers to King, Lord and ruling aristocrats. They claim to be *Thakuri* (a ruling clan belonging to the Chhetri caste) particularly the patriclan of Rāskoti. The words *Jangali*, *rāutiyā* and *rāutelā* are the pejorative exonyms used to abuse and dominate them, if they engage in any misconduct. They follow customary rules to continue their exchange of woodenwares such as *koshi* (carved wooden bowl) and *madhus* (wooden storage box) for grains, cloths, tobacco and food, with regional farmers. The Rāute also forage for wild fruits and roots (Nepāl 1997[1983], Luintel 1998; Fortier 2001; 2009). The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) data of 2011 reported a total population of 618 Rāute, among which only 145 are nomadic. They strategically avoid counting their population. If they conceal their population figures, they can request extra incentives from donors and state organisations; however, the issue of population became public due to social security allowances.

The route of the nomadic Rāute is found in the Chure and Māhābhārat ranges of mid-western and far-western Nepal, where they prefer to ensconce

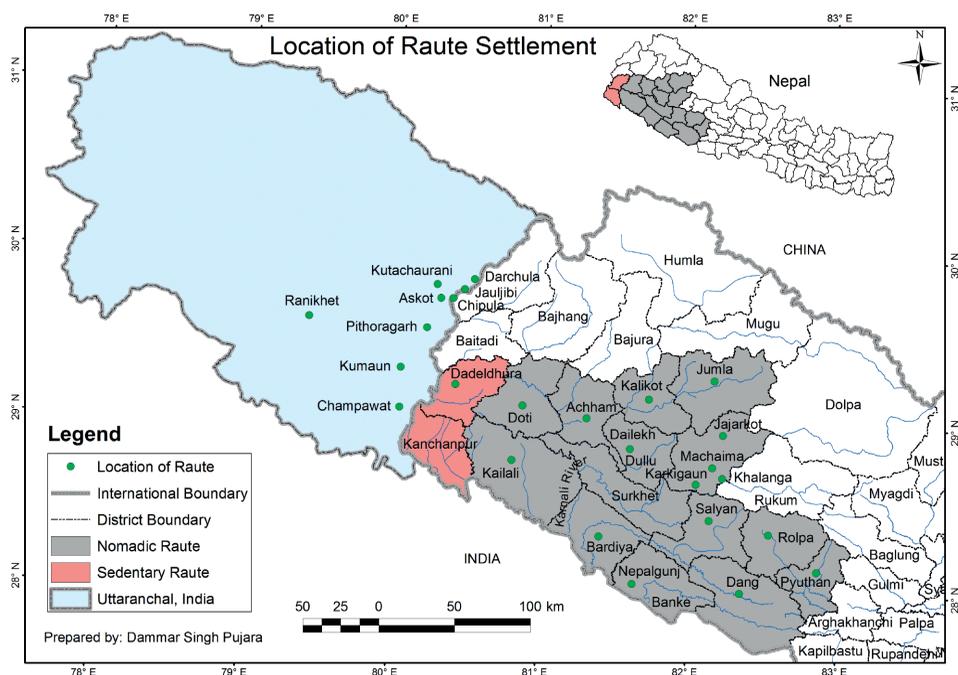


Figure 1 Distribution of Rāute settlements
Prepared by Dammar Singh Pujara

themselves in deep forests and along the banks of the Bheri, Karnāli and Seti rivers (see Figure 1).

The Rāute alternate their residence between higher to lower elevations seasonally. In the winter season, from October to March, they live in the lower Nepali districts of Surkhet, Dāng, Bānke, Bardiyā and Kailāli. In the summer months, from April to September, they live in the higher elevation districts of Jājarkot, Dailekh, Achham, Kālikot, Jumlā and Doti. Their seasonal mobility from north to south is based on environmental conditions, available forest resources, death of community members and relations with other villagers. Hunter-gatherer mobility frequently depends on particular environments (Kelly 1983) and in one year the Rāute moved from six to twelve different places for hunting, food collection and trading woodenwares. Their economy depends on forest resources, adaptive strategies, exchange systems and state incentives. They consume both domestic (goat) and wild animals (monkeys and langurs) as their major source of protein. The practices of meat sharing, gift giving, child or sibling care practices in Rāute society are similar to the !Kung in the Nyae Nyae area in Namibia (Marshall 1998). The practices of meat and food sharing within the band, ritual gift giving, caring for the disabled, sick and widowed are an integral part of their everyday exchanges. It is advantageous for hunter-gatherers to maintain relations with sedentary groups such as farmers, artisans, fishermen and pastoralists (cf Köhler & Lewis 2002; Milton 1985; Headland & Reid 1989). They are not isolated from sedentary groups, and there is interethnic contact through the exchange of goods with other peoples to sustain their livelihoods. The Rāute exchange woodenware for beads, clothes, tobacco and vegetables based on their social hierarchy, ie age, gender and kinship.

In October–November 2008, my first leg of fieldwork was conducted among the nomadic groups in Kālekānda Village Development Committee (VDC) of Achham Districts on the banks of Karnāli River, leading to further research in the same community. Additionally, I consulted with journalists, local people and government officials to obtain information on Rāute mobility and exchange. A second period of fieldwork was carried out in January 2014 at Dobilā Kholā, 7 km from Surkhet district headquarters where the Rāute had been living for one and a half months (see Figure 2). Similarly, I had also conducted fieldwork on the sedentary Rāute during the months of April and October 2011.

Dobilā Kholā is *tribeni* (junction of three places), namely, Jarbutā, Sātākhāni and Ratu VDCs and *dovān* (confluence of two rivers). On the first day of fieldwork, I met two Rāute who were on their way to exchange woodenware. They stopped me and asked for chewing tobacco. I told them that I did not have any.

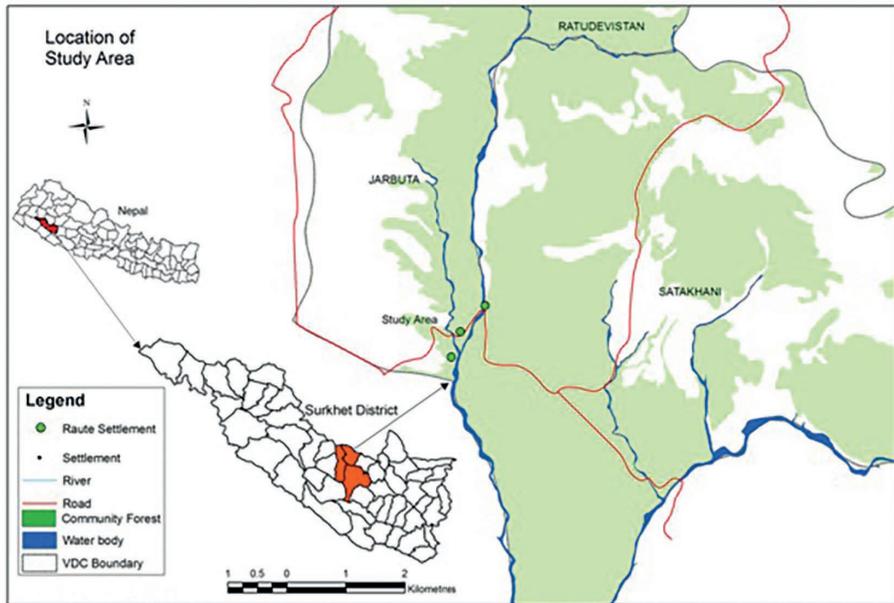


Figure 2 Study area
Prepared by Dammar Singh Pujara

They replied, ‘*Sir ji*, if you do not mind, give us money to buy chewing tobacco’. I said, ‘Oh! It’s not good for your health’. Cunningly, they replied, *Surti Bhayena bhane hāmro gibroo latinchha* – ‘without chewing tobacco we can’t speak’. I then realised tobacco was one of their preferred gifts from outsiders. In this way Rāute would comply with my fieldwork. On the same day, I observed some Rāute migrating from the banks of Dobilā Kholā of Sātākhāni VDC to the terrace of Ratu VDC which was less than 500 m away from their previous campsite. This area had abundant forest resources to produce woodenwares from *kukāth* such as *chap* (*Michelia Champaca* L), *katus* (*Quercuss* p), *githi* (*Boehmeria Rugulosa* Wedd), *tuni* (*Toona Ciliata* M Roem), and *khirro* (*Sapium Insigne* (Royale)). They made two to four huts in each terrace according to special criteria. The Rāute choose new campsites based on availability of prey, trade routes, markets and access to resources such as wood, wild fruits and roots. They construct their huts through the use of leaves, saplings, grass, twigs, wooden logs and tattered clothes, often near a water source and a navigable road.

In the beginning of my fieldwork, I consulted with Surya Nārāyan Shāhi Rāute Mukhiyā, a local ‘leader’, to obtain permission to study his community;

however, he demanded incentives for the community such as *khashi* (castrated goat), rice and blankets. I told him that since my research was a partial fulfilment of my university degree that I was unable to give any support with the meagre funds of a student. Nonetheless, I persisted and requested permission to access their campsites to learn about their culture. He coyly answered, 'We just hunt the monkeys, Hanuman langurs, and dig out the wild roots and fruits. Everyone knows about our culture. Why do you need it again? The hunting-gathering practice makes us different. *Ke Kām chha hāmi sangā* (What is your concern with us?)', he asked. He added, 'If you frequently came into our camp our children and women would be afraid of you'. This is an indirect negotiation for economic benefit from villagers or newcomers who have an interest in their culture. Nonetheless, they still allowed me to work with them, regardless of no payment.

His query addresses the concern the Rāute have in guarding cultural secrecy and hiding prey from evil eyes. Evil eyes pollute their prey; thus, the Rāute often ban outsiders from entering their temporary camps. During hunting seasons, they bar outsiders from entering their hunting zones. Still, they share game with neighbouring villagers if they encounter them within their hunting area, though they never consume it. I inquired why they share game with the villagers and they told me that, 'this is our custom, a gesture of goodwill and it makes God happy'. They share without any interest or expectation from the villagers. This custom can be taken as practice through the generations.

Rāute public narratives, myths, legends and stories show the farmer–forager relation that traces out their identity, social history and reciprocity. Dhan Bāhādur, senior member of Rāute community, retold a Rāute origin myth:

Our forefathers were two brothers. God assigned elder brother as a farmer who engaged in agriculture. The younger brother was sent to the jungle as a forager to hunt monkeys and langurs, and since then he foraged for wild fruits and roots and traded woodenwares with his elder brother. One day the elder brother wanted to visit his younger brother Rāute, but was unable to meet him because his brother's camp was encircled by wild animals like snakes, tigers and bears, so he turned back and returned home. Rāute never suffer from wild animals because God has given us the special power to fight against them.

Their legend indicates their origin, affiliation, clan nexus, foraging strategies, supernatural power and bartering strategies. They believe in a supernatural power which influences economic behaviour, ie exchange, trading and begging, and are willing to share ethnic histories, origin and nomadic life. In their recounting of myths, the Rāute also mention that they had interethnic relations

with the Kusundā, a former hunter-gatherer group of Nepal known for its expert archery. The Rāute had to pay *ālok* (tax) to the Kusundā every year; if they were unable to pay *ālok* after twelve years, the Kusundā would plunder their materials (Nepāl 1997[1983]:47).

As the Rāute claim:

we are the kings of the forest; we never pay taxes to others. Do you think kings pay the tax to the people? Of course not. The practice of taxing only occurs among farmers and capitalistic society. Villagers spread baseless rumors against our ethnic identity, and we have been refusing modernity and sedentary life ways, so why should we pay taxes?

In this regard, there is lack of evidence regarding taxes and its forms of application (ie in kind or cash) among their predecessors. At the same time, the Rāute refuse to engage in patron–client relations because of their nomadism and trade relations with all castes and ethnic groups encountered in neighbouring villages. Their economy is based on ideologies of sacred and profane, purity and danger (cf Durkheim 1912; Douglas 1966) winners and losers, all of which are regulated through the principles of caste, ethnicity and religion.

4. Gift exchange practices of nomadic Rāute

The Rāute mention *koseli*, *nāso* and *chino* which refer to gifts, representing both intra and inter group exchanges that transpire in festivals, rituals and special occasions, bereft of selfishness, greed and price. The intra-group *koseli* refers to the welfare and livelihood of the disabled and widowed of their society, whereas the inter-group *koseli* represents long-term economic benefits.

In 2008, Rāute Mukhiyā Myan Bāhādūr requested of me, ‘Please take this *koseli* to Kathmandu’, to which I replied, ‘No, it’s useless for me’. But his response persuaded me, ‘you can keep breads, flour and spices in your kitchen or decorate your room in our memory’. I thought it was free, thus, I accepted it; however, my expectation was wrong as he charged me 200 (Nepalese rupee) and, in turn, gave me *āsik* (a blessing) for durability, prosperity and wealth.

The Rāute distribute such *koseli* in their special visits to city centres and hand them over to powerful state authorities, ie prime ministers and presidents. There is a self-interest behind the distribution of *koseli*, such as the expectation of donations, incentives and ownership over the forest. *Koseli* creates ties between giver and receiver in terms of sentiments, emotion and sharing throughout their

lifetimes. The Rāute feel that their economic relations will provide for a secure and prosperous life. They negotiate with receivers before handing over *koseli* to ensure future trading. In these situations, they shift to a diplomatic discourse to convince villagers, with such inquiries as, 'If you do not mind I would like to ask one question of you'. The trading partner is never offended, only polite words are exchanged, and they foment kinship ties through this negotiation.

The sharing mechanism is conditional, contextual and situationally based, ie in the special occasions where they share foods and liquor with each other in their camp, and before marriage. In the latter case, matchmakers give *Dahi* (curd), *bhāle* (cock) and *jā'd* (fermented liquor) as a bride price, since these items are prerequisite *koseli* for the marriage agreement. The newlyweds receive tarpaulins, utensils and woodenware from the families of the bridegroom and bride; however, such practices are hardly observed in other contexts. They can lend cash or in-kind currencies without charging interest, to assist in daily problems. Immaterial entities are also shared, such as thoughts, happiness, secrets, and fear (cf Bird-David 2005:204), including pain and sorrow within their own groups. They also perform song and dance on the occasion of birth and marriage rituals; similarly, when people are in critical condition they show their sympathy, empathy and support.

A gift, simply understood, is an item voluntarily given without any charge or compensation; however, anthropological perspectives also point out that there are expectations that arise from gifting with implicit obligations attached (Mauss 1924). 'The foraging decisions people make are affected by obligations to give to others and expectations of receiving from others' Minnegal (1997:25). Gifting varies by religion, culture and area. For example, Hindu devotees offer gifts to their temples while performing *pujā* on the occasion of different festivals and rituals. They offer the *pinda* (a ball of rice) to the dead ancestor and give cows to the Brahmin. Buddhists offer gifts to monasteries for the welfare of the monks and nuns; likewise, Christians offer gifts for the service of the church. The gift giver and receiver are not alienated from their production in terms of labour and emotion, which are embodied with customary rules. 'Economy becomes a category of culture rather than behaviour, in a class with politics or religion rather than rationality or prudence: not the need-serving activities of individuals, but the material life process of society' (Sahlins 1972:xii). The gift produces and reproduces social ties (Godelier 1999:1). As Mauss (1924) pointed out, 'There is no free gift'. This notion seems contradictory as gifts can be voluntarily given to the poor and charities, where there are fewer chances of returning the favour. Thus in some instances, the charitable gift afflicts the people accepting it (Mauss 1924). The charitable gift contains theological,

religious and altruistic virtue, where moral obligation is predominant. In Hindu society, receiving a gift free of cost is considered to be *pāp* (a sin), a feeling to be regretted, looked down upon, and often humiliating and painful.

While this particular example appears antithetical to my argument it has a bonding quality, although seemingly negative, for as Sherry points out, 'Gift giving is a form of reciprocity or exchange and integrates a society' (1983:157). This builds harmony, generates social power, solves economic problems and extends kinship relations. A gift has theological virtue-moral values, including *mokcha* (salvation), a perspective that in Hinduism and Buddhism is largely connected with prestige and dignity. Gifting is partly a material phenomenon; in all societies, people promote their social and economic interests by means of trade, sharing, gifts, loans and mutual aid (Nettle & Dunbar 1997:93). This process of distribution, in many tribes, is thus set in a non-economic matrix which takes the form of gifts and ceremonial exchanges (Herskovits 1974[1940]:155). The process of gift giving includes symbols and symbolic phenomena – containing shared values, morality, human nature and behaviour. In these terms, there are three obligations: giving, receiving, and returning (Mauss 1924). The forms of gift exchange include joyful compulsion, hostility and anger between the gift giver and receiver. This depends on 'a gift for a gift' regulated by obligation, contract and ethics. In the Maussian sense, a 'gift' is much broader; it includes all things transacted as part of social life and as distinct from the more purely monetary relations, including labour and immaterial things such as names and ideas as well as physical objects (Carrier 1995:19). A '[g]ift is partly a material phenomenon; in all societies, people promote their social and economic interests by means of trade, sharing, gift, loans and mutual aid' (Nettle & Dunbar 1997:93).

For her part, Nurit Bird-David (1990:191) contrasted two metaphors 'forest is parent' and 'nature is ancestor' as:

In relation to the material dimension of the relation between people and the environment, 'forest is parent' entails a view of the environment as giving, like a parent, while 'nature is ancestor' entails a perception of the environment as reciprocating, like an ancestor.

Gifts associated with social hierarchy, prestige, moral obligation and compulsion may be occasional, ceremonial, compulsory and free. Among the Rāute, this process is limited to physical objects, geographical terrain and socio-cultural practices. And as Lévi-Strauss (1987[1950]:46) noted: 'That would in any case be impossible, since the goods in question are not physical objects, but also dignities, responsibilities and privileges – whose sociological role is nonetheless the same as that of material goods'.

The Rāute engage in specific rituals and ceremonies to extend gifts to their relatives, societal members, peer groups, neighbouring farmers and artisans for subsistence and long-term memories. Reiterating Sherry's point (1983:157), gift giving is a form of reciprocity or exchange and integrates a society, creating harmony, while generating social power, solving economic necessities and extending kinship networks. Reciprocity is a symmetrical form of exchange between persons or groups of equal footing. In Nepal, lower castes are not generally expected to return gifts that they received from their patrons; giving the gift from dominant caste to the lower caste is expected to transfer evil and the auspicious, such as illness, death and misfortune, from donor to recipient (Yan 2005:252). In this case, gift giving involves spirits and evil doing. 'Where we have the spirit, reciprocity is denied; where there is reciprocity there is not much evidence of spirit' (Parry 1986:463).

In this vein, I explore the rules of obligations and generosity among the Rāute, where there is a relationship of interdependence and the ability to interchange. This relationship intersects with power, hierarchy, gender and lineage. Rāute material exchanges have symbolic and material significance as seen in payments and retributions. The Rāute's *nāso* (gift) is unique as they receive food stuffs as payment for their productive commodities instead of receiving similar items in return. A Rāute proverb, *Mit Sanga Mitai Bhanuwlā tara Koshi Ko Mol Liunlā*, addresses this point, ie 'a fictive friend is respected as a fictive friend, but does not leave to take price of *koshi*'. In Hindu society, *mit* refers to 'close and respected friend'; nonetheless, they are not exempt from paying the price for the *koshi* and they are not interested in providing goods free of cost. They anticipate an immediate return for their gift to the villagers and are not interested in sharing 'free of cost', particularly with neighbouring groups. The moral obligation forces them to give and reciprocate commodities. The transaction of goods in Rāute society exists as a form of gift that is measured in economic value, egocentric and temporary. They do not charge the extra price of added value of their woodenwares. Currently, monetary value seems to be predominant where purchasing power depends on the size and quality of goods; however, that does not influence their moral values.

The *mit* relation carries multiple meanings, ie gift exchange, dyadic relations, price, trade, moral obligations and generosity. Whereas Mauss diminished the importance of pure and free gifts, he placed a special emphasis on the obligatory gift where there would be an expectation of a just return between receiver and giver (see Venkatesan 2011). The traditional concept of unconditional, voluntary contributions of gift givers to their recipients is a faulty notion. The ceremonial exchange in primitive societies is regulated on the basis of

customs and traditions in their trade routes where they exchange their gifts and other objects (Mauss 2012[1950]; Malinowski 1922; 1926; Laidlaw 2000). The processes of giving, receiving and reciprocating bear a relation to exchange, particularly production, as well as distribution and consumption. This process minimises the risk of food shortage, storage and cash reserves, distinguishing itself from credit, debt and a monetised economy. The bride's family gives dowry to the bridegroom and his family as a gift. Such gifts are wooden products such as *Koshi*, *madhus* and *jhumā*. Similarly they also receive gifts from influential people such as state bureaucrats and political leaders on the occasion of their visit to the city and also demand grains and goats of them.

Reciprocity circulates goods and knowledge in Rāute society, including proverbs and *āsik* (blessings). The *āsik* promotes durability and the economic prosperity of exchange partners. As such, they demand extra items such as vegetables, chickens and money if their exchange partner forces sharing through more blessings and proverbs. This practice occurs at the final moment of their exchange. They perform this act to foment ties with their trading partners and enhance the durability of woodenware.

Here I have also examined the latent meaning of social relationships between gift giver and gift-receiver. Gift exchange practices among the Rāute take place between Rāute and non-Rāute partners, bound by an obligation to reciprocate at a price equivalent to their commodities. They produce goods as a gift and build social relations through them, with economic significance, giving continuity to their traditions. They are less interested in free sharing. The free or pure gift does not make any sense in terms of the socioeconomic relations with local villagers. For their part, the villagers' *dān* (donation) to their own priests maintains interethnic relations in Nepali society, as there is no obligation to return to the giver, yet a priest receives a *dān* for his services, which is also a form of reciprocal relationship. The free gift incurs a form of humiliation and suffering for those who accept gifts such as utensils, clothes and land.

Traditionally, the Rāute have been able to maintain relations with agro-pastoral Hindu communities through the manufacturing of woodenwares and trading them with villagers. The gift exchange has a close connection with *dharmā* (religion), *karma* (work) and *bhāgya* (luck), which are influenced by beliefs, taboos, rituals, norms and values. 'Vice-versa movements' may include sharing and counter-sharing of unprocessed food, informal hospitality, ceremonial affinal exchanges, loaning and repaying, compensation of specialised or ceremonial services, the transfer seals of peace agreements, impersonal haggling, and so on (see Sahlins 1972:192). Other reasons behind reciprocity among the Rāute include impermanence in their settlements, limits on storage items and the

logistical challenges in transporting their products. The sharing of food and meat within their own group is taken as ongoing debt where receivers have a moral obligation to pay back, engaging them with notions of prestige, honour and relatedness. Sharers are seen as altruistic, reducing the risk of hunger, and receivers have the obligation to repay, thus supporting household subsistence (Hawkes et al 2001).

With this general ethnographic description of Rāute exchanges, I now turn to reexamining the Marshal Sahlins's tripartite model of reciprocity to better contextualise their concepts of reciprocity.

5. Generalised reciprocity

In generalised reciprocity a gift is given without expectation of any return, ie giving any good from parent to child, senior to junior and husband to wife. 'Generalised exchange establishes a system of operations conducted 'on credit'. A surrenders a daughter or a sister to *B*, who surrenders one to *C*, who, in turn, will surrender one to *A*' (Lévi-Strauss 1969:265). Lévi-Strauss also discussed a restricted exchange between two groups, which is controlled through taboos. It concerns two parties, *A* and *B*. The generalised reciprocity refers to transactions that are putatively altruistic, transactions in line with assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned (Sahlins 1972:193–194). Rāute share items within kin groups, friends and close relatives, receiving nothing, without the expectation of reciprocal actions or delayed returns. This practice occurs within kin groups, family and community members, where the giver contributes indefinite resources and time to them. Items are shared if there is a surplus and of little production value to solve the current problems of the receiver. Meat is widely shared among them as are foraged items and *jā'd* with visitors, clan members and kin groups visiting from other camps. The sharer receives long-term credibility, interest and benefits closely tied to moral obligations. There is no certainty of a two-way transaction of the same thing of equal value; therefore, many critics argued that the sharing mechanism cannot be considered reciprocity, properly speaking (Woodburn 1998; Widlok 2013) replacing the reciprocal exchange (Bird-David 2005). The value of sharing an item is measured through its market price, size, quality and, largely, its significance in critical circumstances. Among the Ju/'hoansi and Nayaka, meat sharing between camps, family members and kin networks builds closeness, belonging, and connections among them, in addition to reproducing their social

relationships (Wiessner 2002; Bird-David 2005). There is a complex interaction in the different modes of sharing.

The material flows and transactions unilaterally shared in accordance with a hierarchal order, such as grandfather–father–son, and denoted as A giving to B, and likewise B giving to A. In ‘extended generalised reciprocity’, material flows as per generation base, grandfather–fatherson and is denoted as A giving to B, and similarly B giving to C.

The flow of commodities from one group to another or one generation to the next would not be in a state of equilibrium. In Figure 3, the first two cases show the uneven and unequal flow of commodities. It is not necessary that the first generation strongly supports their descendants. The third case

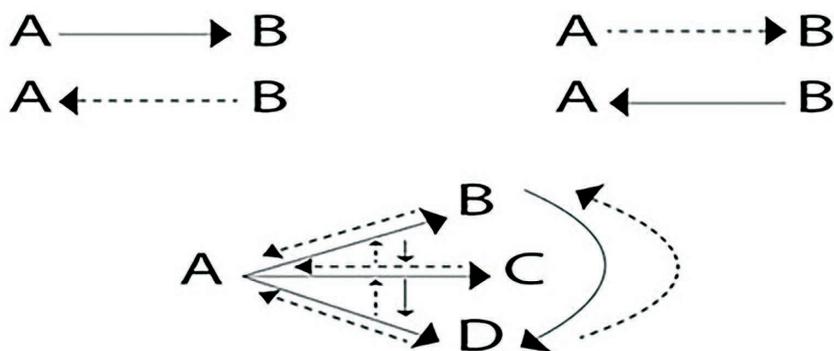


Figure 3 Generalised reciprocity

shows the intra-generational reciprocity, where there is an equal chance that both generations could contribute strong or weak assistance within different generations. This practice differs from community to community, family to family, and person to person in Nepal. The strong bond is seen within the different generations in generalised reciprocity. There are no specific rates and measurement units to count their investment. One provides assistance to another without the expectation of a return. I observed foods and commodities shared among the Rāute, particularly in rituals and religious ceremonies. They avoid financial debt; however, the social debt is strong. In these terms, there is an unequal and asymmetrical relation, where goods and services are repaid as counter-reciprocity. As Kolm (1992:5) observed: ‘A gift bestowed not to a specific agent, but to society we call a “general gift”. With an individualistic conception, this means that the giver cannot trace, or does not care for, what individuals exactly receive the benefits from his gift’. The flow of materials moves one way

to their loved ones, closest kin or offspring, and lineage groups for a long period of time (Sahlins 1972). The delayed repayments rarely balance out. The sense of belonging is the dominant factor that encompasses cooperation, hospitality, sharing and morality. The ethical obligation works strongly within the context of giver and recipient. In this regard, generalised reciprocity describes transfers in a social context where people are all more or less in debt with each other (Narotzky 1997:46). The Rāute provide finished woodenwares in terms of lineage and clan-based altruism. They accept the gift as a physical object along with emotion, sentiment and memory. For instance, the groom's family receives dowry from the bride's family and her relatives, such as *koshi* and *madhus*, and *jhumā* from her parents. Myan Bāhādur says:

We do not have jewels, property and land to give as dowry like the villagers do. Thus, we give away woodenwares as marital gifts. We need sufficient woodenwares and trade them in the villages to arrange the marriage. If we are unable to produce sufficient woodenwares at the time of marriage, we seek support from other families.

Rāute social relations were observed in the material transactions between people. They wait for the return of their investment at certain points of their life. Males share their goods with the disabled, elderly and widows, whom they called *garib* (poor), and in these cases there is no expectation of return. They share woodenwares and game with them on special occasions. Sometimes sharing can incur humiliation and a sense of inferiority in their society. For example, these sentiments can be observed by the receiver when an individual gives a monkey's tail or leftover food to widows. Rāute cultural values encourage stigmatising widows because they are blamed for their husbands' deaths. They chide widows saying *nun khāne bhai poi toki hai* – 'you killed your husband, how can you eat salt'. As they are blamed for the deaths of their husbands such a perspective keeps their women in an inferior position. Ahin Bāhādur says: 'we love and care for widows, the disabled and the poor'. Their leader has prime responsibility in looking after them. The sharing and gift giving items are not expected to be returned by the receiver. This is an intra-group social behaviour (Fortier 2000:114). The gifts that they provide for widows and disabled people are voluntary, with no further expectation. The closer the kinship network among the Rāute, the more they will share money, materials and game with their relatives. Generalised reciprocity in Rāute society has connections with both social and economic capital. Rāute leaders have a connection with ideologies of altruism, sharing and faith. In return, they regularly receive material and moral support from community members on the different occasions. I observed

a young Rāute assist Myan Bāhādur Shāhi because of his contributions over a period of thirty years. Myan says,

People respect me because of my sharing and caring all-around. I trust them and dedicate my works to ensure maximum satisfaction of my people. I share the received money and foods on an equal basis, in response, they honour me. This is the wealth of my life.

Rāute ideologies of reciprocity within their own community are no different than those of the dominant Hindu communities bordering their nomadic zone. The sharing of materials is influenced by nepotism and favouritism. The unilateral flow of commodities from one generation to another, and from one person to the next, strengthens social harmony and integrity among the Rāute, and contributes towards maintaining their egalitarian relations. In fact, the long memory of recipients compels Rāute to reciprocate in different modes and dimensions.

6. Balanced reciprocity

Balanced reciprocity refers to direct exchange (Sahlins 1972:194). Two parties directly engage in exchange and compute the balance between giver and receiver, where both are equally benefitted. Balanced reciprocity is less personal. There are two ways material flows, with no altruism or equivalence in commodities. There is interethnic farmer–forager relationship when they exchange commodities with grains. The mutual agreement and negotiation between transactors is necessary to meet their everyday needs and desires. There is an informal contract between exchange partners; such a contract is related to giving, receiving and returning, or repayment for the articles. This contract runs under obligatory rules and generosity. For instance, if A gives to B, B reciprocates to A immediately.

Figure 4 shows the balanced relationship between gift giver and receiver through the exchange process. The balanced reciprocity is observed in their customary exchange practices. There are no fixed units of measurement to receive necessary items from the villagers. They exchange manufactured items without delay in fulfilling their desires and expectations immediately. This practice is similar to Marshall Sahlins's theoretical notion of balanced reciprocity, which occurs between the Rāute and non-Rāute. Their exchange partners are not fixed, thus they foster fictive kinship ties with their trading partners for the economic benefit. The demanded items differ based on their



Figure 4 Balanced reciprocity

current necessity, such as food, grains, goats, hens and clothes. There is an informal agreement between trading partners, motivated by the idea of self-centred interests. They demand grain according to size of woodenwares at the local level, where giver and receiver negotiate for personal benefit rather than mutually assisting one another.

The *tele kwa tele* practice of Sandawe is an example of balanced reciprocity. *Tele* means ‘full’, so *tele kwa tele* is exchanging one full container for another full container (Yatsuka 2016:95). The exchange of goods might involve debts or loans paid in cash or in kind in the short term, mainly within their kin groups, colleagues and relatives to overcome recent problems. The exchange items within their own society might be woodenwares, food and game, which are based on kinship, social bonds and prestige. The balanced relation would be measured on the basis of invested labour, time and resources, where contract partners engage according to their choice and interest.

The concept of gift exchange in Rāute society is different from that of other Nepali societies. They give in order to get back immediately and frequently say, ‘Give from one hand, return back from another’. This indicates a balanced economic relationship. This intra-group gift giving process runs according to honour, morality, kinship and obligation. For instance, they share a monkey’s thigh with a shaman for his healing service (see Fortier 2001); likewise, they share a slain monkey’s head with the hunter who struck first; and accordingly, share the monkey’s tail with the widows.

They exchange gifts between wife–giver and wife–receiver in their marriage practices. The dyadic relation between gift giver and recipient maintains a balanced relationship in terms of economy. They practice exogamy through inter-clan marriages, such as those between the Kalāyāl, Rāskoti and Samal. Balanced reciprocity is reflected in intra-group marriage relations and they prefer to not engage in inter-caste marriage, mainly with agriculturalists and agro-pastoralists, for fear of incurring social disorder. Normally, Rāute women

are not allowed to speak to outside males and are prohibited from exchanging woodenware; however, Rāute widows exchange received woodenwares along with their male relatives and family members.

In balanced reciprocity, two parties need to be satisfied and reach an agreement through negotiation. There are two important components of gift exchange among the Rāute: first, they exchange woodenwares such as *koshi*, *madhus* and *jhumā* with the villagers for food items. There is normally an asymmetrical relation in the process of commodities passing from one person to another. The investment of their time and labour in felling trees, carving woodenwares and trading them is measured while they negotiate for an exchange on an equivalent basis. The exchange practice makes them affluent without cash income, agricultural production, animal herding or employment. The bartering objects have social, cultural and economic relations. Sharing slain monkeys and woodenwares within their groups builds the symmetrical relations. The Rāute's asymmetrical relation with the villagers depends on negotiation for trade. Female Rāute often purchase ornaments from the local Dalits, such as *lohār*, *bādi* and *sunār*, by selling firewood in the local market. Young Rāute women purchase cosmetic items and flat bangles made of aluminium, brass, silver and iron; however, they limit their negotiation unlike their male counterpart does. The exchange relationship extends their social networks to fulfil needs and desires which are governed through societal norms and values. As such, the Rāute's gift is a means of social existence that contributes to make their life prosperous.

The refusal of gifts from the Rāute does not mean to quit the social relation; however, if anyone refuses to take the gift after the negotiation, then they break their woodenware and return back to camp. They consider such attitudes as arrogant and demeaning to their profession. Nowadays, they calculate the value of their commodities in cash, which might not be equivalent to their labour efforts or wage equivalence. They charge prices based on the quality of wood and the time and energy invested in manufacturing woodenwares.² I observed that the Rāute exchange the high quality *koshi* for chickens. The selling of woodenwares for cash with neighbouring villagers distorts the rules of balanced reciprocity and customary practices among the Rāute. The actual price of chicken was much lower than the price of a *koshi*. These transactions show the imbalance between the price of commodities and chicken. Yet, the balanced

2 During the time of my 2013 fieldwork, they charged a price of NPR 50–100 for a *koshi* and NPR 100–800 for a *madhus*.

reciprocity steadily erodes as a result of the extra stress and burdens put upon them by the impacts of the modern world.

The Rāute's ancestors practiced silent trade, which has the features of balanced reciprocity. The so-called silent trade is a specialised form of barter economy wherein goods are exchanged without direct encounters between the trading parties (Herskovits 1974[1940]:185). In silent trade, hunter-gatherers avoid a face-to-face contact, verbal communication or the use of gestures with farmers. As such, there can be some level of distrust, fear and traders may even hide from one another while exchanging their articles (Woodburn 2016:476). On this note, Herodotus (440 BC) wrote about silent trade, particularly between the Carthaginians and peoples living on the west coast of Africa (ibid). This form of trade was also present in an early form of commodity transaction process among a non-pecuniary Rāute community (Fortier 2000; Shāhu 2011 field notes). This transaction occurred between farmers and foragers without negotiation, direct contact or bargaining. A Rāute would manufacture goods at a crossroad near the house or courtyard of the person with whom he expected to exchange goods while their trading partners kept grain according to the size of woodenwares. This practice is motivated by beliefs, commitments and obligations.

Silent trade changed due to their frequent assimilation with non-foragers and modernisation. This practice is simply understood as a refusal to exchange through negotiation and physical contact with villagers. The younger Rāute generation is unfamiliar with silent trade. Rāute economy is neither based on isolation nor completely diluted by agro-pastoral people. Bhakta Bāhādur told me, 'fifty years ago we engaged in silent trade. We kept woodenware in the courtyard or crossroad of the villagers at night, in response, the villagers kept grains in the woodenware, all the activities carried out without negotiation'. Silent trade persists among the Rāute of Dārchulā, yet they spent their sedentary life in Dadeldhurā (Shāhu field notes 2011). I asked the reason to be silent and they emphasised that it was to maintain their sacred culture, language and religion. They have fear of assimilation with other cultural groups. A few years ago, their economy was non-monetary but now the value of money has penetrated their everyday life. They did not sell their commodities for cash and traded the produced commodities for grains such as un-husked rice, millet, wheat, carrots and green vegetables equivalent to the size of the woodenwares. The demands of Rāute increased beyond grains, ie clothes, food, money and tobacco, which are impossible to acquire through silent trade and there is a lesser chance of being deceived (cf Luintel 1998). The increasing demands of the Rāute force them to adopt a negotiation for the exchange. The non-monetary

economic trade is on the wane and commodity exchange practices have been taken over by market forces at the local level. This has eroded their silent trade and initiated new strategies and methods in reciprocity. The economic market of the Rāute has changed little and their trading sphere has extended beyond the boundaries of the courtyards of farmers to local shops and urbanised centres.

7. Negative reciprocity

Sipālu mānche sipālu hunchha makhani mānche makhani hunchha

(Skilful people are skilful and beggar people are beggars)

– Ahin Bāhādur Rāute

This proverb denotes the survival strategies of Rāute and carries multiple meanings, ie the art of negotiation, social behaviour, ethnic identity and the moral lessons of their predecessors. For them, receiving any commodity free of cost is a crime, poisonous, uncongenial and hostile. The Rāute fulfil their demands from sedentary groups such as *brāhmin*, *chettri* and *dalit*, who engage with them in patron–client relations. They keep the intercultural relationship with them in order to trade their products. During the exchange, they normally build fictive kinship relations with the villagers, which facilitate obtaining chewing tobacco, cigarettes, vegetables, grains, tea, snacks and clothes. They build such relations to live in the village and ask for food, money, tobacco, liquor and vegetables from the villagers. Sharing, hoarding and theft are other forms of economic management in the Rāute community (see Fortier 2001). During the last few years, the Rāute started begging for money, clothes, tents, tobacco and ornaments from villagers. Yet, they moved into city areas and demanded special privileges from the state and non-state agencies to celebrate their special occasions such as *Māghi*.³ For example, in 2014 they collected rice and *Khashi* from Nepali film star, Rekhā Thāpā, to celebrate *Māghi*, blankets from the Red Cross society, and shoes from a Christian missionary. Therefore, begging is a part of their livelihood strategy. They never view themselves as beggars and thieves; however, they claim that such acts are their special privilege and right.

Fighting and hostile relations are rare between the Rāute and non-Rāute. There are instances where they have stolen farm goods from kitchen gardens

³ According to Lunar calendar, the *Māghi* festival is observed on the first day of *Māgh*, which is popular among the different castes and ethnic groups of Nepal.

and farmland. These acts can be considered immoral, going beyond the normal negotiation and contract with farmers. In this case, they are motivated through individual interests and self-benefits. Farmers normally forgive, but can abuse them and curse their misconduct. This transgression reciprocity itself contains a lack of contract, haggle, exchange, morality and obligation. They frequently say, 'no one can punish and charge penalties to the Rāute against our misconduct'. Rāute widows can wander into villages to scrounge and feign dire need by claiming, 'I am a widow, no one looks after me and my kids, I have been hungry for the last few days, God has taken my husband, thus it is difficult to sustain my life'. The Rāute state that only widows wander into villages to scrounge for vegetables, grains and chickens but, in fact, some women may pretend to be widowed and beg for food. The begging and theft are their alternative source to manage their everyday problems. By and large, Rāute maintain the secrecy of the women and do not share their marital status and name; for example, they would say *Jani ko nām hundai* (the women have no name). Similarly, the young Rāute girls beg for cosmetic items such as *tikā* (the sect of mark placed on forehead), bangles and *pote* (beaded necklace) from young ladies of the village.

The sharing of game among the Rāute can be taken as an example of 'tolerated theft', where widows and disabled people beg for a portion of game meat as they are normally unable to engage in hunting. Widows are free to capture the hunted prey and, as they return to their camp late in the evening, they hide their meat from would-be thieves. Nonetheless, the Rāute often spontaneously share game meat with widows, disabled and elderly people, as an altruistic gesture. They also transfer grains and foods for prestige, to maintain a balance in food resources, and to protect people from loss and injury. The hunter shares game with those who didn't participate in the hunt, particularly widows and disabled people, to avoid the cost of fights (Blurton-Jones 1984; 1987). This reduces the risk of food shortages and helps maintain their egalitarian society in terms of property, house and food consumption. Parents share their goods with children until they are capable of working; in response, children look after their parents in critical times, which they rarely count.

They have also been involved in stealing farm products such as green vegetables, maize, chicken and fruits from the villagers. Sometimes, the Rāute forcefully collected the vegetables and fruits from villager kitchen gardens. There has been little transformation in the traditional concept of bartering with non-traders. They can demand without giving any items, and try to get commodities free of cost. They forge relations with villagers through their begging practices. They receive money without investment, work or exchange with the local people. Yet this practice is against their cultural value of 'give with

one hand, get return from another’, and ‘service for service’ is gradually eroded. Their self-interest, desires and needs are fulfilled through negotiation, including verbal arts, giving false assurances and displaying prostrate submission by placing their turban on their feet. When anyone agrees to meet the first demand, then the second and subsequent demands are made. If they stop giving, then the Rāute engage in trickery, by pretending to be busy at manufacturing woodenwares, rearing children and cooking food at their camps. They demand *khashi*, money, clothes and food items from outsiders. Their demand is based on informal rules and regulations, for instance, through sharing proverbs, songs and the *Paisāri* dance. This is not ‘classical’ reciprocity as theorised by Sahlins and Mauss. It is a demand for recognition of their nomadic hunting-gathering identity game. Townsend Middleton (2015) discusses ‘demands of recognition’ of Gorkha in Darjeeling, where they negotiate for cultural representation, political demand and institutionalise their tribal identities. The Rāute have a nuanced understanding of what outsiders possess and how to get the goods they want. They demand items while there are possibilities to gain trading goods; otherwise, there is a limited engagement with non-Rāute.

Figure 5 shows Rāutes (B, C and D) begging, snatching and stealing commodities from a villager (A). The flow or transaction of commodities is found to be greater on one side; however, there is uncertainty or minimum return from others after a long period of time. Both giving and receiving processes occur through a long and sinuous process. There are disputes, suspicion, confrontations, physical attacks and overbearing behaviour while they engage in

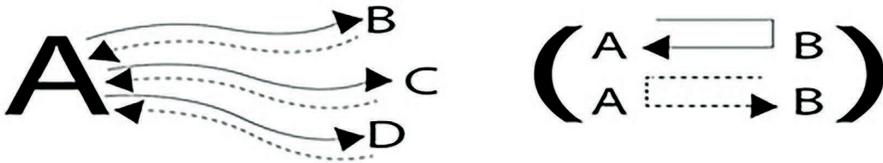


Figure 5 Negative reciprocity

exchange. This exchange might be between individual to individual or group to group. The diagram on the right is adapted from the Sahlins model of negative reciprocity where there is a negative relation between the two groups (A and B). There is a high chance of loss to the gift givers because the recipient acts according to selfish motivations. This action occurs either publicly or secretly in their trade route. Nowadays, begging and theft in the Rāute society has become

an art of living, which they claim as their special privilege and right. They might engage in a minor dispute with the villagers if the villagers refuse to buy their commodities after negotiation. They also demonstrate their fierce nature as a form of vengeance. Rāute may shame, fear, curse and antagonise to get benefits and force people to accept their woodenwares, frequently expecting something from recipients.

8. Conclusion

The Rāute's economy depends on giving, receiving and returning processes based on production, circulation and consumption. Moral obligations, sharing, caring, trust and cooperation issues comprise their reciprocity. These components integrate their society and are the basis for maintaining egalitarian relations. The Rāute's economic activities are individualistic when they reciprocate with other communities; however, the nature of altruism is seen when they share with the disabled and widows. The reciprocity processes fulfil material desires influenced by kinship, clans, marriage, sentiments, power and prestige. Material transactions include the economic and social values observed in the process of begging, negotiation and trading. Their economy consists of a social matrix that includes norms, values, ethos, beliefs, traditions, verbal art and customs. The generalised reciprocity among the Rāute is observed in kinship bonds, community cohesion, friends and family members, where one member invests in another for a long period of time. There might be delays and uneven exchanges before they pay back the commodities, yet still motivated through altruism, belonging and emotion. Through balanced reciprocity, gift givers demand immediate returns on an equal basis. For its part, negative reciprocity depends on misconduct, ie begging, sleight of hand, stealing, pilfering and cheating to meet their limited desires. There is complex relation between farmer–forager, ie friendly, tenuous alliance, hostility, subordinated, even merged, conjugality and compressed while trading their products with farm products (Forline 2016). My view on reciprocity is different in terms of their methods of circulation, distribution and consumption between recipients and givers – it entails both symmetrical and asymmetrical relations, balanced and unbalanced exchanges, and positive and negative returns. The regional environment and natural resources, adaptive mechanisms and nomadic life intermingle in forming their economic practices, conducted through certain institutional processes such as rituals, social values and communal understanding, both ceremonial and non-ceremonial. Finally, reciprocity helps to overcome food deficits and reduces the burden of transporting goods. Exchange

relations between hunter-gatherers and their neighbours are transformed by market economies, government aid, national policies, interactions and asserted relations, political conditions and contact with agriculturalists and pastoralists (cf Yatsuka 2016; Inamura et al 2016).

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