

# Resistance and reproduction of knowledge in the post-nomadic life of foraging Raute

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Man Bahadur Shahu

Department of Anthropology, Padmakanya Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Bagbazar, Kathmandu, Nepal  
mbshahu16@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the imposition of modern education upon the foraging Raute people and the ways in which this project has been both reluctantly accepted and actively resisted by the Raute. The Nepalese government established schools for Raute children as part of the nation-state development policy. However, it has refused to incorporate their cultural values, traditions, customs and language into the school curriculum. This paper argues that in attempting to create forms of domination through the educational process the state fosters inequality. Such an arrangement is met with everyday forms of resistance through non-collective and unorganised behaviour of Raute children at school. The Raute's silent reaction against the government policies typifies the cultural disposition and ethos of the Raute community. This paper is based on research methods that include observation, interviews, informal discussions and document analysis, and outlines the interconnections between family, social class, students and state agency as they relate to education. In particular, it explores the Raute's own narratives, perspectives and reactions with regard to their educational processes. This case study is presented in an effort to better understand the relations between resistance and reproduction of knowledge in foraging societies.

**Keywords:** Raute, education, foraging, reproduction and resistance

## Introduction

Nepal is an ethnically diverse country with several distinct linguistic and religious groups within its geographical terrain: Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burmese, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian civilisations interface with one another. In far western Nepal a small group of sedentary Raute (from the Tibeto-Burman family) have been living in Jogbuda valley in two different communities, Ampani and Rajyoda. Although they have been the focus of a fair amount

of ethnographic and linguistic study, there has been little attention on the influence of formal education in the life of the Raute.

This article focuses on understanding the role of modern education in Raute society with a main focus on the sedentarised Raute; the foraging Raute do not participate in school at all. I highlight the Raute's perception of modern education, the transformation of knowledge from one generation to next and the process of knowledge reproduction through the modern education system. The field data shows that the exclusion of cultural values in education promotes inequality and interferes with their learning process. I argue that the state has been reproducing the national values and dominant culture through its strategies; as a consequence, ethnic minorities are refusing the imposition of these values at school. I have shown that social structure, including caste and ethnicity, fosters bullying, social stigma and discrimination at school, and finally impedes their learning. Although education is considered to be an important component of civilisation, it has proven to be a burden for the Raute (Fortier 2002, 2009; Singh 1997; Shahu 2014). The government's imposition of a narrow, nationalistic form of modern education on the Raute children has failed to include their language, myths, legends, tales, proverbs and beliefs, and has largely kept them in an inferior position. This paper discusses the sedentary Raute and their connection with the modern education system.

The fertile land, moderate climate and humid temperature of this area attract people from different parts of far western Nepal in search of a better life. This area thus has a high level of socio-cultural diversity in terms of caste, ethnicity and religion. The government forcibly relocated the Raute in the 1980s under its modernity project, forcing them to leave their nomadic life based on hunting and gathering. They are digging canals for the irrigation of farms for other people, for payment. The relocation project for the Raute has had the mission to improve the life of the Raute but has been accomplished against their will.

I conducted fieldwork in July and October 2011 in the Jogbuda valley, a far western region of Nepal. This study was conducted at multicultural schools, known as BP Primary and Samaiji Lower Secondary schools. I applied ethnographic methods including observation, in-depth interviews and informal discussion with Raute students, teachers, parents and non-Raute to understand their perception and attitudes towards the formal education. I analyse the literature to contextualise the historical trends of education in Nepal and compare the educational attitude of other ethnic groups with those of the Raute. The following sections will provide an overview of Raute educational policies and practices in Nepal and describe the everyday resistance of the

Raute in schools, such as bullying practices, domination of certain groups and reproduction of knowledge through education in a foraging society.

## The Raute: an overview

The Central Bureau of Statistics (2011) reports that there are around 125 ethnic groups in Nepal, almost all of whom speak distinctive languages. The Raute are one of the smallest groups numerically. They are an endangered foraging ethnic group residing mainly in western Nepal, with a few small groups also living in India near the Nepalese border. The total population of Raute in Nepal was 618 in 2011 (CBS 2011) of which only 150 still live a fully nomadic lifestyle. The Raute speak Tibeto-Burman language known as *Khamchi* and they are culturally close to Raji of western Nepal (Bandhu 1987; Fortier 2000, 2009, 2019).

The sedentary and the nomadic Raute differ in terms of their origin, language, ritual practices, hunting choices and economic practices. The sedentary Raute are descended from the Paal from Darchula district and have affinal relation with other Raute groups living in India. The nomadic Raute claim their descent from Raskoti Shahi of Kalikot district (Nepal 1997 [1983]; Luintel 1998). They live in the forests ranging from mid-west to far western Nepal and practise hunting and gathering and trading with farmers (they have been well described in the ethnographic literature, eg Bista 1976; Fortier 2001, 2002, 2009; Inamura et al 2016; Reinhard 1974; Shahu 2011, 2014, 2019). The languages spoken by these two groups is quite distinct in term of lexicon and accent although they are closely related, and both groups use Nepali or a regional language as lingua franca to communicate with non-Raute.

The two groups also have different responses to schooling. In general, the nomadic Raute reject school completely while the sedentary groups participate in a limited way. My fieldwork was primarily among sedentary Raute, and this paper describes their interactions with the school. Prior to the 1980s, these Raute lived a nomadic lifestyle in the different districts of far western part of Nepal (Darchula, Baitadi and Dadeldhura), trading wooden products, digging irrigation canals and constructing houses for non-Raute. After the sedentarisation process, their economic and social relations expanded. They maintain limited relations with neighbouring villagers for the purposes of exchange; they have adopted agriculture and animal husbandry; they work as wage labourers for their neighbours; and some are employed in both government and non-government agencies. In addition, they have their traditional occupations of woodcarving

and trade of carved items. Historically, woodcarving was important; sedentary Raute manufacture woodenwares such as *Paalaa* (wooden balls) and *halaana* (ploughs) and exchange them for grains. This has allowed them to remain independent, use local resources and to fulfil the demands of their own society and that of neighbouring villagers. However, woodcarving is an endangered art due to declining demand in the neighbouring villages, restrictions on the use of community forest resources and increased imports of non-wooden materials. The sedentary Raute today engage in agriculture production and seek alternative sources of income, leading to further decline in woodcarving.

Both nomadic and sedentary groups hunt and gather wild fruits, roots and tubers and other wild products for their own consumption. The Raute living in Nepal and India use about 48 species of animals and 188 species of plants (Singh 1997:50–64); however, the animals that they choose to hunt differ somewhat. For instance, the nomadic Raute hunt Hanuman *langur* (presbytis) and macaque monkey (macaca) whereas sedentary Raute hunt *dumsi* (porcupine).

The major difference between the two groups, however, is that the nomadic Raute are still practising their foraging and nomadic way of life. They do not accept education and Nepali citizenship, in large part because they recognise that these are steps towards sedentarisation (Shahu 2014). The nomadic Raute consider hunting, gathering and trapping practices as their education and as characteristics that contribute to maintaining their distinct foraging identity. This contrasts with the sedentary Raute, who live in a fixed place, accept citizenship and send their children to school. However, their experiences in school do not meet the expectations.

The Raute have their own language, culture and methods of teaching and learning. Their traditional ecological knowledge – planting, hunting, trapping, gathering and plant identification – has been passed down through generations, without the use of graphic symbols, pictographs or an alphabet. Instead, they learn their culture through face-to-face contact and communication. It is still communicated through intergenerational transmission, sharing and in different social contexts such as rituals, feasts and the process of hunting and gathering. Adults share folktales, proverbs, legends, riddles, myths and stories in the private sphere around the hearth at home, as well as while farming, hunting and foraging. Children acquire knowledge and skills – including those related to hunting, gathering, fishing, trapping and crafting – through imitation and social contact. To some extent, they transform such a knowledge through informal mechanisms such as song, dance and play.

These stories also teach norms and values such as those regarding sharing and exchange. In this way, the Raute produce and reproduce knowledge through

oral tradition. For instance, Dhaul Sing Raut from Rajyoda of Jogbuda valley told me; *Jahan phal pake uhhan chadi nache* 'bird began to dance where fruits are ripe'. This proverb illustrates the Raute's connection with nature and the relationship between men, birds and forest. In Raute society, oral traditions are informally passed down from one generation to the next. Such oral traditions are normally associated with nature, emotional attachment, ethnic sentiment, identity, dignity, occupation and origin. Their proverbs contain wit, knowledge and symbolic meanings.

Social learning among the Raute is gender-based; boys carve bowls and ploughs, pin rollers, wooden chests, flat dishes and spouts; they also hunt, fish and trap wild animals. Similarly, girls learn to gather wild fruits, roots, vegetables and medicinal plants for family consumption from the forest. They use simple tools, such as chisels, hand axes and planers to manufacture woodenwares. Similarly, girls prepare food and forage for wild products and learn to nourish children, collect firewood and fodder. Watching and listening to adults are the main processes through which they acquire their cultural knowledge, including singing, dancing, playing and storytelling. Shanti Devi Rawat, a women leader from the Raute community, told me in an interview in her own home;

We teach our daughters to forage for wild roots and fruits, such as *tarul* (*Dioscorea sagittata* Royle, *Dioscorea hamiltonii* Hook.f., *Dioscorea wallichii* Hook. f.), *githaa* (*Dioscorea bulbifera* L.), *bhayakur* (*Dioscorea deltoidea* Wall), *Kaphal* (*Myrica esculenta* Buch.- ham. Ex D.Don), *Chutro* (*Berberis aristata* DC.) and *anselu* (*Rubus ellipticus* Smith), and *bayar* (*Zizyphus mauritiana* Lam.). Likewise, we teach our son to hunt *dumsi* and trap birds, catch the fish and plough their farm.

In 1980, The Nepali government relocated the Raute from Deuthala of the Darchula district to the Jogbuda valley of the Dadeldhura district. In this process, these Raute communities were sedenterised and they began to domesticate animals and plants, and to subsist on annual crops, such as wheat, maize, millet and vegetables. His majesty's government of Nepal relocated them under 'modernity projects' designed with the specific goal of sedentarising them. For example, the government provided one and half *bigha* land to each family and opened schools and health posts.<sup>1</sup>

These changes, including the schools, happened without prior consultation with the Raute, and without recognition of their culture. Furthermore, the relocation distorted their foraging, crafting, exchange and sharing practices.

1. *Bigha* refers to a customary land measurement unit popular in Nepal which is equivalent to 6,772.63 m<sup>2</sup> or 72,900 sq ft.

The forceful imposition of this modernity project caused some Raute families to flee from their newly settled area and return to their original lands, from which they were relocated. Modern development projects like education and settlement are considered by the Raute to be invasive. This paper will further discuss the implications of this, and examine the reactions of the Raute. The next section provides an historical overview of educational policies in Nepal and illustrates the impact of political changes on educational approaches as they affect the Raute.

## Educational policies and practices in Nepal

From 1854 formal education has been inequitably distributed among the population. The connection between education and the power structure in Nepal has been called an 'elite enterprise' (Snellinger 2018:44). Brahmanism<sup>2</sup> and *Muluki Ain*<sup>3</sup> influence education in Nepal, and create inequality and discrimination among its people. During the Rana regime, (1846–1951) education was only accessible to the Rana children and their relatives.<sup>4</sup> Thus, prior to the mid twentieth century in Nepal, education was guided by caste and ethnic ideologies that were legitimised by religious faiths, in which people receive knowledge under the guidance and instruction of ancestors and religious teachers. Instead of meritocracy, the success of an individual depended on birth and fate.

Modern education in Nepal began with the political transformation from 1951. In Nepal today, like in most modern nations, education is supposed to be 'universal'. Children are trained following the nationalistic values in order to make them competent citizens for a job market that seeks progress, self-sustainability, equality, equity and social justice. When education became a national institution, the state opened the several public schools across the country,

2. Brahmanism is a Hindu ideology in which Brahmin (a priestly caste) have privileges to perform and implement Vedic ideology in different rites, rituals, sacrifice and worship in temples. There is supremacy of Brahmin, who claimed themselves as the highest and purest group (Bronkhorst 2017).

3. Muluki Ain is a national code or legal code of Nepal. The Muluki Ain is derived from Arabic words *muluk* (country) and *ain* or *a'in* (law). This was promulgated in 1854 by Jang Bahadur Rana (Sharma 2005). Muluki Ain is a policy that categorised people, their position and responsibilities.

4. The Rana were the autocratic rulers of Nepal, actively ruling over the country for 104 years. They seized all political power from the king, and Rana prime ministers became the *de facto* rulers of the country in 1846, beginning with the hereditary prime ministership of Jang Bahadur Rana. During this period, development activities centered on Rana families and other people were deprived from all sorts of opportunities.

intended to be accessible to all segments of the population. One result was a drastic increase in the literacy rate, from 5.3% in 1952/54 to 65.9% overall (57.4% among women), in 2011 (CBS 2011:4; Singh Malla 2018). The first five-year plan for education (1956–1961) addressed the issue of primary education and since then there has been a remarkable change, particularly an increase in schools in the remote areas. The National Education Planning Commission (NEPC) 1956 report's main goal was 'universal primary education by 1985' (see Bhatta 2009; Wood 1965). Parajuli notes that the Nepali education plans of 1956 and 1971 emphasised the connection between education and development (2014:106).

During the Panchayat Period (1960–1990), the education system was centralised and the state followed assimilative policies and neglected the languages and cultural values of minorities in education. Teaching in the national language gradually threatened the use of mother-tongue languages and dialects. In 1990, democracy was restored and the Nepali government initiated some important policies such as the 1992–1999 Basic Primary Education Project and Education for All (2004–2009). Government adopted liberal policies on the education sectors and addressed the issue of ethnic and linguistic diversity. The 1990 constitution recognised other languages as national languages. Post-1990 there was influence of donors in the education sectors. Shields and Rappleye (2008:269) write

The international donor community became a powerful force in shaping educational policy in the post-Panchayat years, contributing resources for printing mother-tongue instruction materials, providing scholarships for girls and lower-caste groups, and actively promoting the recruitment of female teachers, as well as funding and advising on much more ambitious projects such as the Basic Primary Education Project (1992–99), Nepal's primary response to the World Conference on Education for All. (1990)

Before the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006), the Maoists submitted 40-point demands to the government, including mother-tongue education up to the higher levels, free and scientific education, and the end of commercialisation in education (See Hutt 2004; Shields and & Rappleye 2008). During the insurgency period (1996–2006) schools were battlegrounds in the Maoist affected areas. The Maoists made the schools their shelter, burnt the Sanskrit texts books and abducted school students and forced them to join their armed forces. In 2006 a second people's movement in Nepal ended the monarchy and Nepal was declared a democratic republic state. This movement brought several changes in the education system which included the rules of equity and social inclusion as well as local ownership through the reservation quotas

and scholarships for the marginal groups, including *dalit*,<sup>5</sup> ethnic minorities, disabled people and *madeshi*.<sup>6</sup>

The interim constitution of 2007 and the constitution adopted in 2015 enshrined the right to use mother tongues as languages of instruction at primary level (GoN 2007, 2015). Despite the government's attempt to provide inclusive language education, however, textbooks have been prepared and published in only 24 languages (out of 123 in Nepal) for school education grades 1–5 up to 2017 (MoEST 2017:6). The rest of the schools are unable to provide education in the mother tongue due to the lack of textbooks in local languages, of trained teachers and other educational staff and the general lack of government commitment. Furthermore, as Seel et al point out, due to these constraints of resource and capacity, the textbooks that do exist 'were essentially developed centrally through the direct translation of the existing Nepali language textbooks, without a process of local adaptation or validation' (2015:38).

Historically, the Raute are one of the most excluded minority groups in Nepal, and they have limited social, economic and political access and are thus alienated from opportunities. Their exclusion from the education system is primarily reflected in their enrolment as they advance through the system. Although they do enrol in primary school, there is usually no high school in their locality. Raute children therefore have two options after their primary level – either go to high school in a distant location or leave school forever. The long distance to schools, problems for new students adjusting to a new school, the opportunity to earn money as a wage labourer and migration to India for employment are all reasons that Raute enrolment is very low after their primary education. The low representation of the foraging groups in education is a sign of state negligence and the systematic exclusion from an important state institution.

With each political transformation there were fundamental changes seen in the education system. The dominant groups' ideologies have been imposed, and the knowledge, values and ideologies of ethnic minorities have been excluded from the education system in Nepal. The governing technologies have continuously restricted minority groups like *Dalit* and Muslims, as well

5. Also sometimes referred to as 'untouchables', Dalit are bottom at the Hindu caste hierarchy system and are considered as impure (Höfer 2005:9–10). Historically, they were involved in caste-based occupations, and banned to engage the occupations of other high-castes groups ie Brahmin, Chhetri and Vaisya.

6. Madeshi are the inhabitants of the Madhes (southern plain of Nepal), they speak northern Indian dialects for the communication.



as women, from mainstream and formal education. The education patronised central policies, elites and social hierarchy under the cultural ethos. Politically elite high-castes imposed a hierarchy on the resident ethnic groups (Stash & Hannunm 2009:23). As Caddel (2007:252) points out, 'each shift in political regime has been followed by a revision of the education system as the incoming regime attempted to reinforce its own vision of the idea of the Nepali nation-state by re-articulating the relationship between the state, schools and "the people"'. The state policies on education do not address the interests of the students from the marginalised groups and never initiated an avenue for pupil choice.

### **Attitudes towards their own traditional values and culture**

There are several factors that hinder the everyday learning process of Raute when they are at school with non-Raute children. One is their inclination towards their traditional culture and beliefs. Although the Raute are generally seen by others as 'inferior', they and see themselves as 'kings', especially 'kings of the forest' (Fortier 2009). This dynamic characterises their school experience, creating difficulties for them. It is further complicated by the effect of various vertical social divisions within Hindu society, based on caste, ethnicity and religion. Historically, these divisions dichotomise the society into pure/impure and touchable/untouchable, systematically excluding some caste/ethnic groups. For instance, Brahmin learn the Sanskrit language and recite ritual texts; this is prohibited for other caste/ethnic groups. Although such restrictions are unlawful they are still practised. Although education is supposed to be equal by law, discrimination by ethnic group still happens. The Raute are in some ways a victim of this discrimination, but they also invert it by rejecting the system and refusing to see themselves as beneath the other students.

During my fieldwork in 2011, I conducted several interviews with teachers at BP Primary School about the participation of Raute children and their relations with non-Raute. Kalabati Pandeya, a female teacher, told me that Raute children are not interested in sharing their stories, and do not tolerate discrimination from the non-Raute children because they claim that they are 'rulers' and superior to neighbouring villagers. Connected to this is a strong cultural value placed upon secrecy; sharing of their stories goes against their faith, sacred culture and identity. Bir Bahadur Bohara has more than 15 years' experience with Raute children at BP Primary School and I interviewed him several times during my fieldwork. He said that when he started teaching in

BP Primary School, the Raute children did not respect their teachers because the Raute claim themselves as *Thakuri*,<sup>7</sup> *Rajwar*<sup>8</sup> and *bankaa Raja* – ‘kings of the forest’. They feel proud to be of royal decent; thus, they perceive themselves as superior to the *balin* (landlords). According to Bir Bahadur Bohara, Raute children exhibit actions, behaviours and practices in the learning process that are consistent with their cultural values and ethos.

The Raute themselves present it somewhat differently. A female Raute activist Saru Devi Rawat told me in an interview in Jogbuda Bazar, ‘education is not our priority... children are free to play at home, and parents rarely ask about their homework assignments’. She said *hami jasta jungali lai sikchaya ko ke kam* – ‘there is no value in education to wild beings like us’. Although this seems to be self-deprecating, it is in fact a clever way of dealing with the state. It is a form of resistance to the domination and control by the state. On the one hand, they accept the scholarships offered by NGOs and they take what the school has to offer them, but when it is finished, they drop out. They then defend this decision by using the words that others use against them, claiming that their world is the forest and their occupation as hunter-gatherers. In reality, they are not backward, barbaric and isolated as they are defined by the state. This foraging group have interconnections with villagers for trade and exchange for their livelihood, they are integrated into the society, but they maintain their autonomy by claiming to be outside of it.

The Raute confirm this through their statements and their actions. The older generation of Raute believe that education pollutes their culture and creates tension and dissatisfaction. For example, one respected elder, Bhan Dev Raute, told me:

After the school enrolment boys simultaneously gave up hunting *dumshi* and manufacturing *halaana*, *paalaa* and digging canals; likewise, girls gave up grinding, threshing and foraging *gita*, *tarul* and *bhayakur*, and kitchen chores, which brings the crisis in our livelihood strategies.

Some parents from the sedentary Raute expressed in interviews that they are not willing to send their children to school; they do not believe that education provides them with what they need for daily life and survival. For example, Kiran Raute told me

Our parents spent their lives in the forest foraging for wild fruits and roots, they never went to school. Although they were illiterate they survived with joy and

7. Thakuri is a clan of high-class Chhetri who had special privileges of ruling the country.

8. Best of kings.

bliss. Even if we went to school, nothing would be different between our two generations. Raute parents have low aspiration to educate their children.

Only a few young Raute that I interviewed consider education to be a part of their life, a means for survival and a tool to reduce inequality. They said that illiteracy is the main cause of marginality and stagnation. There is thus a discrepancy in opinions regarding education, which brings about intergenerational tensions. The older generation of Raute society expressed concern about the continuity of their culture and identity and attached strong value to their kin groups, which are associated with hunting and gathering practices. The attitude of some of the younger generation of Raute towards education seems to be more progressive, probably due to the influence of non-Raute and awareness of literacy from both state and non-state agencies. For some of them, education became a focus of pride, prestige and honour.

### Responses to learning in the dominant language and culture

Nomadic Raute and sedentary Raute have different perspectives regarding the use and sharing of their languages within and beyond their ethnic boundary. Nomadic Raute consider their language to be sacred and secret; thus, they are not interested in sharing their language with the non-Raute. In 2018 Myan Bahadur Shahi, a former chieftain of a nomadic Raute group, told me in an interview in Gangate (Surkhet district) 'we are not interested in sharing our language with outsiders. If we share our language we lose our culture and there will no more Raute alive'. Nomadic Raute strongly discourage their children and members of their society from sharing the languages with other groups. Despite these restrictions, some scholars have recorded the language of nomadic Raute (Bista 1976, Luintel 1998, Fortier & Rastogi 2004; Fortier 2019).

Sedentary Raute, in contrast, are worried about the protection of their language, and demand textbooks in their own language. The sedentary Raute are open to sharing of their language with others; therefore, linguists have been able to conduct the linguistic surveys necessary for their language documentation (see Bandhu et al 2017). I have also recorded the counting system from the sedentary Raute in 2011.<sup>9</sup> Sedentary Raute children use their own language

9. Sedentary Raute have their own counting system: One = *daa*, two = *ni*, three = *khung*, four = *padi*, five = *punga*, six = *turki*, seven = *hate*, eight = *athe*, nine = *nauwa*, and ten = *dase*. These numbers have no special symbols like Arabic. There are no similarities with Arabic numeric; however, from eight to ten, there is a little similarities with Arabic number in its pronunciation. The Raute counting system does not go beyond ten.

and the regional language called Doteli for communication, but the medium of instruction in schools is Nepali and English. Raute children thus often have difficulties understanding the language of instruction in the classroom. Saru Devi Rawat, the activist, is worried about the possibility of extinction of their language:

who cares about our *boto boli*,<sup>10</sup> it is excluded from the mainstream. If text books are produced in Raute language, then our children get chance to learn in our own language, which help to protect our language.

The recognition of home language and indigenous knowledge is an important factor that connects with various dimensions of the learning process. Raute children are forced to learn the national language with non-Raute children. This not only hinders the adjustment of Raute in school and puts them at a disadvantage, it also creates cultural discrimination against the Raute by their peers and the teaching staff. According to the teachers, the Raute children do not want to learn Nepali and English, as the non-Raute do.

Some sedentary Raute parents, influenced by high-caste groups such as Brahmin and Chettri, send their children to English-medium schools. People have positive attitudes towards these private schools in terms of management and quality of education, and parents feel pride if they able to provide such education for their children. According to Madan Sing Raute, a Raute father:

I enrolled my son at an English-medium private school in Jogbuda Bazar, where school teachers individually care for the students. I had first enrolled him in the public school where he was unable to talk with outsiders, dropped his regular classes and was frequently absent. I changed his school from public to private, and today, he can talk without any hesitation. He learn many good things – he speaks the English language, he became neat and clean, he regularly attends the classes, and participates in extra-curricular activities. I used the social security allowance to buy his educational materials. He has no time for hunting, fishing, swimming and collecting wild roots and fruits from the jungle. At the beginning, I paid NPR 300 tuition fee later, the school principal waived his tuition fee because he is the only child from the Raute community.

In Nepal, in both rural and urban areas, the state is unable to provide education in all of the languages spoken. Children from different linguistic groups are admitted at the same school and state authorities fail to provide separate classes for the distinct language groups – this amounts to a failure to implement the language transferability policy. However, combining different

10. Sedentary Raute themselves called their language *boto boli*.

language, ethnic and caste groups in the same classes can also have advantages. Bir Bahadur Bohara described the problems and opportunities of the students in the multicultural school as follows:

Heterogeneous and multilingual groups such as Raute, Brahmin/Chhetri and Magar<sup>11</sup> in the classroom together can cause difficulties with teaching in their own languages, which is increased by discrimination and domination of the minority-language groups. However, in the multilingual school children from different linguistic and cultural background are studying together which also increases social mobility; for instance, literate Raute are involved in the school management committee, NGOs meeting, party politics, government jobs and the Nepal police force.

Educational projects in Nepal are centralised; thus important decisions regarding curriculum design and the allocation of resources for the schools fall under a complex bureaucratic system. Large sectors of society are excluded from policy-making processes, resulting in a failure to incorporate cultural diversity in terms of culture, art, language and identity. Furthermore, through this process, the dominant groups gradually impose their cultures through the inclusion of their perspectives, values, languages and practices in the school system. The rights and choices of dominated groups, such as the Raute, are rarely considered. Thus their knowledge and capacities are undermined as they are forced to adopt the value-laden curriculum through school texts, under the state policies. Manmati Rawat, a female student from Samaiji Lower Secondary School, shared her experiences of ill-treatment and bias towards Raute children at multicultural school:

The school doesn't really care about what we love to learn; instead they force us to adopt the national ideologies and languages. The teachers give preferential treatment to students on the basis of origin, caste, ethnicity, and gender... They follow a system of rote learning and corporal punishment to get better results from students. We find education creates an illusion and establishes the dominance of certain groups. Some school authorities treat us as *jungali*, which humiliates us at school, and that does not create a conducive environment to learn. In our understanding, teachers are knowledgeable ... but they label us as *pichadiyeko* (backward).

Manmati Rawat emphasised feelings of cultural exclusion, enacted through unequal treatment in the name of caste and ethnicity. The combination of

11. The Magar are one of the larger indigenous groups of Nepal, living in the south-western part of Nepal and northern India. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language that is related to, but not mutually intelligible with, that of the Raute.

cultural misunderstanding and dominance of particular groups towards the Raute creates a situation that hinders peer learning in the multilingual school. The national curriculum reflects the knowledge, moral lessons and national identity of the dominant groups, in effect forcing the ethnic nationalities to be uprooted, leading towards their extinction. Raute students do not always accept this and often skip their classes in favour of learning their cultural traditions, including seasonal migration patterns and knowledge needed for traditional occupations.

### Community relationship with school and schooling

State and non-state agencies, bureaucrats, teachers, officials and political leaders' effort to educate the Raute have included various programmes. These include scholarships, special recruitment programmes,<sup>12</sup> and counselling at the time of admission. In an interview, Bir Bahadur Thagunna, a local inhabitant of the area where I conducted my fieldwork, pointed out that there is a good representation of Raute members in school bodies, including management committees, parents' committees and parent-teacher committees. This representation from a marginal communities illustrates the implementation of the 2007 interim constitution. Donor agencies also now require the inclusion of marginal groups in any institutions that they fund; therefore, the participation of the Raute thus contributes to extra grants from NGOs and INGOs, for scholarships, clothes, books and stationery. Raute school management committee representatives have therefore been chosen in the benefit of school teachers and political leaders. Raute parents attend the meetings and receive an allowance, but they remain silent at the meetings and do not play a decisive role in the major decision-making process.

According to my interviews and observations, this amounts to 'pseudo representation'. It does not seem to enhance the education quality, increase Raute children's enrolment, minimise school dropping-out or ensure their empowerment and unable to contribute towards quality education. During my study, teachers pointed out to me the problems of Raute dropping out of school – especially from secondary school. Reasons they gave included poverty, menstruation (for girls), migration for work, cultural differences, language problems, ethnic discrimination and the remoteness of secondary schools. Bir

12. The *ghar dailo* (door-to-door) programme encourage children from marginal groups (including girls, dalit and ethnic minorities) to attend school.

Bahadur Bohara, the teacher described above, expresses a common perspective among teachers towards sedentary Raute students:

I have been facing several problems at school since 1997... In my previous school, I have experience with many students from different castes and ethnic backgrounds. They were different from the Raute children. Raute children are like wild animals and difficult to socialise. My efforts bring little change in their behaviour, or their attitude toward education... They are as complicated as a floating river and *dauno goru* (ox ready to plough). Raute students evade most education because of their most cherished possession: the forest. Raute students are not interested in continuing with school after completion of the primary level at local schools. When I request them to join another school after their primary level, their parents respond with: *Tui pheri padhawana sakdaini laa?* [Can't you teach them again?], *Tui kati class padheko hai?* [Which class have you passed?] and *Ekai class mai panda naisaka laa?* [Why can our children not study in the same class?].

This example illustrates both the complexities that the teachers confront and also the way that teachers perceive the Raute children. Teachers – even ones that have been working with the Raute for many years, as this one has – see the Raute students as lazy, filthy, uncivilised, troublemakers in the school; this also affects how they treat them. This attitude is specific to the Raute (the same teacher considered high-caste Hindu students as civilised and intelligent) and it fosters humiliation and dissatisfaction among the Raute children in the multicultural society. The ill-treatment by school elites, like teachers and school management committee members, reinforces the social hierarchy and reproduces new classes.

## School attendance and performance

The state considers the Raute – both nomadic and sedentary – to be a burden and wants them to integrate into Nepalese society. The government has thus initiated projects to assimilate them, provided land and established schools and clinics for the development of sedentary Raute. However, the Raute are reluctant to accept such programmes because they contradict their values and identity and do not recognise their ethnicity. While the nomadic Raute avoid them completely, the sedentary Raute participate, but to a very limited extent, usually dropping out after primary school.

As noted above, migration for work is one important reason that Raute children drop out of school. Whole Raute families, including the children,

temporarily migrate for wage labour to adjacent villages. During the period of temporary migration, Raute children often go along with their parents and remain absent for one to two months. Although the students might wish to return when the season is over, the school discourages what they call 'absenteeism'. The teachers directly and indirectly threaten Raute students with failure in the final examination and termination from school if they are absent. The students' response is to then not return to the school at all.

One member of the school management committee told me, during an informal discussion:

When a school takes action against temporary absenteeism, children prefer to drop out. They are more interested in their traditional occupations such as woodcarving, hunting and gathering. They have a stronger attachment to the jungle than to agriculture and school education. Corporal punishment and scolding of absentee Raute children by the teachers only increases their dropout rate.

Like most formal education systems, Nepali schools seem unable to link their educational practices with divergent livelihood strategies and cultural practices. This is a common issue for schools in hunter-gatherer communities; researchers working with hunter and gatherer communities in southern Africa have noted similar patterns (Biesele 2008; Hays 2016). In my own observation and experience, public schools in Nepal are run like prisons for children. School-going children are locked within school premises between 10 am and 4 pm. For Raute children, this means that in order to go to the forest to forage for wild fruits and roots, they must skip school altogether – and they often do this. Therefore, by creating an environment where they are locked in, the school in fact may be encouraging their absenteeism; likewise by not allowing for seasonal absence, the school in fact creates the reason for Raute children to drop out.

The government and non-government organisations have been initiating affirmative action plans in an effort to increase the enrolment of Raute in education. Nand Ram Nath, a local resident and former police security guard, was involved in the process of sendentarisation and several other development activities concerning the Raute. He shared with me his perspective, based on his long experience:

Raute children join school for incentives like books, stationery and scholarships. When such incentives are over, they either attend irregularly or they drop out from the school. Their parents say things like, 'Our children receive nothing at school, why do we send them to study?' The students receive a meal at the break time, then they leave school and go back to home without attending remaining



classes. Their parents become happy if their children begin to hunt, manufacture woodenwares and forage for wild products.

For those students who do not drop out due to the reasons noted above, those who remain have a high rate of absenteeism which affects their educational performance. As the absent students participate less in the class, they often fail exams and achieve low grades.

There is also a gender element to the dropouts. Although in the Raute society, there is no significant gender bias, there is preferential treatment for sons, as is common among other caste and ethnic groups in Nepal. The school records of different academic years shows girls' school dropout rate is higher than that of boys due to their monthly periods, early marriage and burden of household chores besides gathering, cooking, grinding and tilling of fields.

Overall, the social discrimination and humiliation that Raute experience from the non-Raute children in the school both contributes to school dropout, and creates an uncondusive learning environment for those who do not. This will be described in the following section.

## **Responses to stigmatisation and bullying at school**

Bullying based on caste, class, gender and ethnicity is common in Nepali schools, and often leads to school dropout for those who are bullied, as it does for the Raute. Bullying is a production of social structure; it creates a distinction between superior and inferior which is based on cultural disposition and social reproductions. Schoolchildren learn it from their society, peers and family members without necessarily being aware of its impact in the everyday learning process in the multicultural school. There are three important characteristics that define bullying: intentionality, repetitiveness and power imbalance (Olweus 2013) – all of these are relevant to the Raute. Madan Sing Raute, a Raute father, told me that 'Raute children are often mistreated, mistrusted, and abused by both teachers and non-Raute students ... this humiliates the Raute children'. This experience contributes to their segregation and isolation and creates tension in their everyday life, obstructing the learning process. However, although the Raute are victims of bullying, they are not passive in these dynamics; their responses, as described below, include fighting back and withdrawal from the school environment, retreating to their own environments.

Bullies intentionally use specific language and gestures to discriminate against one another in ways that inflict harm in the personal development. I

observed Raute children being bullied in schools, playgrounds, tea shops and the market. Children from other groups call them derogatory names, including *Rautya* and *Rauteni*, (gendered linguistic forms that denigrate a particular ethnic group; in this case the Raute). The Raute children responded to this humiliation by cursing and spitting at the others, and turning the same insults upon them, calling them *Khaskya* and *Khasyani* for Brahmin and Chhetri, *Dom* and *Domani* for Dalits. The use of these kinds of derogatory insults, common both in class and outside of school, fosters hostile relations between the different groups of students and can lead to physical fighting.

The bullying is based largely on stigma attached to the Raute, and a lack of understanding about their culture and lifestyle. Narayan Bhatta, a non-Raute from a high-caste group (Brahmin) that I interviewed, recalled his childhood memory of his Raute friends:

They are considered inferior, cowardly, untidy, and shameful by others at the school... Their educational performance is poor because they are absent from class; they prefer hanging out in the village, swimming in the river and hunting or gathering food in the forest. Since their relocation to the village, there has been a lack of inter-ethnic interaction, due to the language barrier and social discrimination. Villagers treat them as *jungali*, drunkards and childlike. This leads to bullying at school, and is one reason they drop out of school.

This description was confirmed by my observations. One day, I met some Raute children who were purchasing goods in a local market, I asked them if they were supposed to be in class in the school and they answered that they were – but that they had some urgent work at home. The local shopkeeper told me (using the derogatory forms *Rautya* and *Rauteni*, described above) that the previous day they had received their social security allowance from the government – and that they were hanging out in the market and purchasing *raksi* (alcohol) and other items instead of going to school. One Raute child said to the shopkeeper, ‘you better to call us *Rajwar* instead of *Rautya* and *Rauteni*, because we feel insulted by you’. Others who witnessed this exchange laughed at Raute children, saying ‘look at how these small children feel pride if we call them *Rajwar*’.

The use of prestige terms by Raute is one that came up frequently in my interviews and observations. Bir Bahadur Bohara explained to me that the Raute claim that they are descended from *Thakuri*, and that when discussing with non-Raute they use word forms that communicate their own superiority. For example, the term *a laa*, is a rude word that implies that someone is ‘uncivilised’, and it is commonly used in Nepal to signal dominance over

others. The Raute children commonly use this when speaking to non-Raute – which both inverts the stereotypes that others apply to them, and also further exacerbates the perception of them as rude, savage and uncivilised. However, when I asked the Raute about this, they usually said ‘we do not know what the proper words are in polite language while speaking with non-Raute’.

Shanti Devi Rawat, a social worker and female leader from the Raute community, has been participating in different meetings and programmes of government and non-government organisations for the welfare of her community. In an interview, Shanti Devi said;

Bullying practices are related to our traditions and traditional practices. For instance, our ancestors spent their life in the jungle; when the non-Raute and school authorities call us *jungali*, our children feel discrimination. This causes pain and forces them into an oppressed position, which does not foster the conducive learning environment.

Social stigma, poverty and discrimination are important factors that discourage the Raute from participating in education. Increased bullying at school and negative peer interactions hinder adjustment and learning, exacerbates social stigma, and causes frustration, mental anxiety and fear among Raute children. In general, this situation contributes to the overall poor performance of Raute children.

It is important to emphasise, however, that the Raute themselves do not passively accept the discriminatory treatment. They respond – but their responses do not lead to better attendance or performance at the school. Sometimes, Raute children challenge the verbal abuse and bad treatment by the school authorities by talking back to them, which also worsens relations between the Raute and the school. They may also drop out as a form of resistance to bad treatment. At the same time, Raute parents exert a strong influence over their children; this also means that Raute children have limited contact with outsiders. Thus, they can find it difficult to socialise with non-Raute children, to follow a strict school schedule and to complete their assignments. Because of their different upbringing, the staff, teachers and non-Raute children find it difficult to understand their choices and interests.

## Knowledge reproduction and resistance

Dominant societies tend to reproduce and legitimise their values and ideologies through the curriculum and teaching practices. Knowledge of the elite is

reproduced through the education system and reinforcing the advantage that elite students bring to school – this is the concept of cultural capital (Erickson 1984:538). The dominance of elites at school denies autonomous power and choice for non-elite students and can lead to a disappearance of cultural identity. The state-run education project obscures the local values, transforms social structures and weakens local power.

The learning process in Nepal has been influenced by the system of *Muluki Ain*, in which one group, especially the Brahmins, receives special privileges depending on their heritage while the majority of other groups like the Dalit and ethnic minorities like the Raute are deprived of educational opportunities. In Nepal, educational inequality is created through distinct social divisions which re-create the dichotomies of dominant and dominated. In the education sector, dominant groups and elites impose their language, knowledge and ideologies through a centralised system. The stories and lore of the dominant groups are imposed across the country at the expense of those of other ethnicities within the state. Marginalised groups' voices and their knowledge systems have been suppressed through government policies, regulations and practices. For hunter-gatherer groups like the Raute, educational institutions in Nepal impose the national culture, language, knowledge and ideologies in the name of 'civilising' them, ignoring and undermining their cultural diversity.

It is not only the content that is imposed – it is the learning strategies themselves. In their own society, Raute children learn social and ecological knowledge through imitation, instruction and guidance. Like other hunter-gatherer societies, Raute children learn through trial and error, with possibility for innovation and invention – in a process known as individual learning (Takada 2016). The communal and individual learning processes that reproduce their cultural practices, including those related to hunting, gathering and fishing, are passed through generations. The Raute share and transmit their knowledge and values to their children informally in different contexts (see also Lavi, this issue). Their learning practices are associated with nature, local environment, skills and traditional occupations through copying, imitation and sharing in the different contexts. Raute children accompany parents, friends and relatives for foraging, crafting and manufacturing where they learn gender-based skills and techniques for their subsistence.

Hewlett et al (2011) discuss two modes of knowledge transmission among hunter-gatherer societies: vertical and horizontal. In vertical transmission, knowledge is transmitted from adults to children through emulation and teaching. In horizontal transmission, children learn within multi-aged peer

groups. Among the Raute, oral traditions such as riddles, fairy tales, puzzles and myths contain wisdom and knowledge that are transferred orally through sharing practices. They nurture to their children to protect the *kul dharma*, ('ancestral religion'), language and culture. They reproduce the knowledge by peer sharing and imitation from one generation to another without formal curriculum saving their foraging culture and behaviour. Raute children strictly follow principles of taboo, morality and ethics that determine their learning processes. They copy and imitate adult members to learn the skills of toy making, of foraging and general social behaviours and practices, very much in the way that has also been documented for San hunter-gatherer of southern Africa (Imamura 2016). Culture provides the space for learning folk play and games like hide and seek, cock fights and swinging in the tree. Raute children manufacture different toys (ie *halaana*, *paalaa*, axe, bow, slingshots and spears) from wood; such toys closely resemble the tools used in their foraging culture. They learn through imitation, intergenerational relations and through contact with other children.

They also learn through contact with non-Raute children, through a process of imitation and gradual assimilation. They play such games in their school premises and village after school or during school holidays. The space of their learning broadened after resettlement to include a multicultural setting. Raute children now have more options to learn new games, language and ideologies beyond their traditional culture. Although these processes are a normal result of contact between different children, and can be seen as positive, it is important to remember that they are not occurring in a neutral environment.

The life ways and learning mechanisms of the Raute are also being transformed by influence of government and non-government programmes. Biases within these educational institutions reproduce the inequality of hunter-gatherers and marginalise their traditional knowledge. These institutions exclude the knowledge, history, faiths, beliefs and subsistence practices of the Raute and reproduce power for the maintenance of their hegemony and ideologies. Educational authorities expect Raute children to learn their values and civilisation; school teachers are imparting their own knowledge which has been employed to convert foraging groups into 'civilised' groups. The refusal to include Raute's egalitarian values, their traditional skills and knowledge ensures that indigenous knowledge, local values and diversity are kept in the shadows. The cultural capital produced, distributed and consumed is always under the control of local elites and tends to reproduce their ideologies. The modern education system reproduces classes, social groups, inequality and biases in terms of caste, class, ethnicity and religion.

The state promotes a national culture through the monolithic pedagogical and linguistic approaches of formal education,<sup>13</sup> imposing national values and ideologies and neglecting bilingual and multilingual policies for the promotion and preservation of languages through education. The educational institutions contribute to the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities that fuel social divisions, in which the dominant group's pedagogical approaches misrecognise the values, language and capacity of dominated (underprivileged) groups in the learning processes – this is how social class determines the educational opportunities (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990).

Above, I have delineated some reactive attributes of Raute children against this domination and the imposition of cultural hegemony from the school authorities. The educational resistance of the Raute has surfaced through the physical presentation, behaviour and symbolic actions. Resistance to education normally is triggered by a teaching approach in which a teacher demonstrates his superiority to the non-elite group students (Alpert 1991:350). The resistance of Raute in school does seem to be a counter-product of the government mission to civilise the Raute children. Their traditional knowledge, based on their natural environment, the animal and plant species, and associated livelihood strategies, is excluded by state educational agencies which fail to recognise hunter-gatherer life ways. The Raute children are therefore less interested in modern education and tend to avoid requirements such as homework, rules and duties, attendance and timely arrival in school. They reject an institution that is unable to incorporate their own social and cultural milieu.

The Raute themselves clearly state this. The elder Bhan Dev Raute opposed the institutionalised domination and hegemony of state and its ruling elites:

school texts do not encompasses our stories, proverbs, riddles and myths, which carry our treasury of knowledge. The neglect of our knowledge means neglect our intelligence, wisdom and egalitarian values.

The criticism, denial and rejection of modern school by the Raute is a response to the systematic exclusion of foraging knowledge. Thus the strategy of the government is counter-productive – ultimately the exclusion of local knowledge results in a failure to achieve the stated national interest of creating literate citizens and reducing social inequalities. In other words, in order to achieve their own goals, the national curriculum needs to recognise traditional knowledge and cultural practices of the Raute and other marginalised groups.

13. The Nepali language is the medium of instruction, known as '*khas bhasa*' formed under the policy of *ek desh ek bhasa ra ek dharma* (one country, one language and one religion), developed in the Panchayat era (1960–1990) in the name of modernity.

## Conclusion

The modern state of Nepal attempts to assimilate foraging societies through education. The reproduction of the national culture and ideologies gives preferential treatment to the dominant groups and misrecognises and devalues the ethical, moral, aesthetic and intellectual values of foraging groups. It also results in the mistreatment and bullying of the Raute by both teachers and other students. This is a common experience for hunter-gatherers; as Hays has noted, mainstream institutions are often 'unfriendly, unhealthy and unsafe places' (2011:148) for indigenous students. For the Raute, the domination and assumed supremacy of dominant groups are also accompanied by structural exclusion, a lack of recognition of their language and a lack of access to education beyond primary school because of the remoteness of higher schools.

In this paper I have described the responses of the Raute to this situation and have argued that they are resisting this situation, both by standing up to the teachers and other students that bully them and through absenteeism and dropping out of the schools that do not recognise their priorities, cultural values and language. Ignoring and neglecting Raute culture therefore does not achieve the aims of the government.

In order to be inclusive, education must recognise, and where possible integrate, cultural norms and livelihoods. It remains to be seen how this could be achieved for the Raute. However it is clear that education that is simply imposed upon them, and that does not meet their needs, will not be accepted. The Raute are not passive; they value their own culture, skills, knowledge and identity. Any solution to the current educational situation must include the Raute students, parents and elders in decision-making processes and must respect their culture, language, livelihoods and the value of their traditional knowledge.

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