

Emancipation of Kamaiyas: Development, Social Movement, and Youth Activism in Post-Jana Andolan Nepal

Tatsuro Fujikura
Department of Anthropology
University of Chicago

The Kamaiya Liberation Movement that began on May 1, 2000, forced the Nepali Government, on July 17, 2000, to declare the emancipation of up to 200,000 bonded laborers in western Nepal.¹ This historic movement, coming as it did ten years after the restoration of a multiparty democratic system in Nepal, is a critical diagnostic event for gauging Nepal's political present. 'Emancipation', many commentators were quick to point out in July, is not something that can be achieved simply by a governmental decree. Indeed, the movement continues as the former-Kamaiyas struggle to fashion their new modes of life. And so does the need to reflect seriously on the significance of this movement.

A newspaper cartoon a few days after the declaration depicted a man whose left leg is freed from the fetter of the 'Kamaiya System' but whose right leg is still chained to the larger fetter of 'Poverty.'² Because the liberation movement came from western Nepal, some political observers wondered aloud about its relation to another famous movement in western Nepal – the 'People's War' being waged by the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist). The Kamaiya issue also stirs reflection on ethnicity, the overwhelming majority of the bonded laborers being Tharus, and many of the landlords being high-caste Hindus. The Kamaiya liberation movement thus engages fundamental questions of

¹I am grateful to many of my friends who were participants to this movement for allowing me to catch glimpses of the movement from a relatively close distance, from June to August 2000, in Kathmandu, Kailali, Bardiya, and Dang. I am especially thankful to Dilli Chaudhary and other members of BASE, and to my friends at Martin Chautari. Martin Chautari, a discussion forum in Thapatali, Kathmandu, has provided crucial support for the Kamaiya movement since June 2000. Needless to say, this paper does not necessarily reflect the views of BASE or Martin Chautari, nor are they in anyway responsible for any mistake of fact or interpretation in this paper. I thank Pratyoush Onta and Seira Tamang for their helpful comments on a draft of this paper. Same disclaimers

Nepal's political present, and about the meanings of democracy, citizenship, and poverty – what it means 'to be free', or 'to be freed.' The following essay is a partial and preliminary account of some of the aspects of the ongoing movement in order to suggest the issues they raise for further historical and political inquiries.

I was fortunate to be in Nepal from late June to early August 2000 and to catch glimpses of the liberation movement immediately before and after the declaration. The way I approach this issue is also informed by my larger research project on development discourses in Nepal, entailing historical inquiries as well as fieldwork in western Nepal and in Kathmandu. Thus, before turning to discussions of the movement itself, I shall make brief, preliminary remarks sketching my approach towards development discourse and political agency.

Development, Discipline, and the Figure of Youth

The democratization of Nepal in the 1950s introduced 'development' as the supreme object of the polity. In a definition promoted in the 1950s, development was "[a] process of releasing, through effective leadership, the enormous potential that resides in people who discover that through their own efforts they can improve the usefulness of their lives" (Rose 1962:100). Thus, the 'people' were simultaneously the beneficiary of and the means for development. They were objects as well as resources. A development-oriented government aimed and aims to identify and cultivate the 'enormous potential' of the people, make them aware of it, and help them behave in such a way as to

apply. This short paper is part of a larger research project on development discourse in Nepal, which has involved fieldwork in western Nepal and in Kathmandu from 1996 to 1999. An earlier version of this paper was presented as part of the panel on Decade of Democracy in Nepal at the South Asia Conference in Madison, WI, in October 2000. I thank Susan Hagen and Laura Kunreuther for organizing the panel.
²See Spotlight (2000).

'improve the usefulness of their own lives'. Technically, this has involved classifying the people into further sub-categories – such as 'small farmers', 'the landless', 'women', 'children', etc. – each with different problems and potentials.

'Youth', I suggest, was one such category. The motto of the Sports Council of Nepal, a government branch primarily focused on youth, has been "Development, Discipline, Dynamism." The motto signified a governmental will, as well as anxiety, to contain and exploit the power of the youths for the project of nation building. The youths were to be shaped, through discipline by such devices as schooling and sports, into dynamic and energetic participants of development and progress – in the Panchayat vocabulary, into those who find pride and pleasure in the work of *des sewa*.³ Indeed, a vast number of young people have been recruited into the frontlines of development work. Yet, youths, to begin with, are very unruly and unpredictable. In the public discourses in rural Nepal, young people are represented sometimes as poor, uneducated, ignorant, and unemployed. At other times they appear as over-educated, lazy, and unemployed. Often they are perceived as lacking in respect towards elders and authority, and always, potentially violent. The Panchayat regime used the youths' capacity for violence for the purposes of suppressing dissent. Now the bodies of youths are being deployed by political leaders in the often violent multi-party politics.⁴

³For discussions on the ideologies of *sewa, dharna* and the nation, propagated through state apparatus, such as Social Service National Coordination Council with Her Majesty presiding over it as the benevolent 'mother', see Onta-Bhatta (1997; 2000: 101-102). The motto of SSNCC was: "*Atmaa saachhi raakhi mana bachan ra karmale sewaa garaun*" ("With our souls as our witness, let us serve with our thoughts, words and deeds") (Onta-Bhatta 2000: 102). On the practices of crafting nationalism and shaping nationalist sentiments through education during the Panchayat era, see Onta (1996). For an interesting account of contestation between the Panchayat government and the youth activists of underground political parties, involving the definitions of public/social service, see Burghart (1994:8-9).

⁴Consider, as an example of unintended consequence of the Panchayati-Bikas practices, the recent riots in Kathmandu by 'unruly' youths. They were reportedly reacting to an alleged remark by the Indian movie star, Hrithik Roshan, who was supposed to have said that he disliked Nepalis. Devotion to Nepali nation and anti-Indian sentiments stirred Nepali youths out of control. See the article, *Riots break out over actor's remarks: At least 4 killed, hundreds injured* (Kathmandu Post 2000b). I thank Pratyoush Onta for suggesting to me this and other points of connection between the legacies of Panchayat practices and the category 'youth' in the present.

In what follows, I suggest that agentive forces of some to the actors in the Kamaiya liberation movement derived at least partly from the complex constitution of the category 'youth' in recent Nepali history. More generally, I would like to suggest that, after five decades of saturation in development discourse, almost any significant socio-political mobilization in Nepal in the present would involve some degree of translation / transmutation of development categories.

Kamaiya Liberation Movement, 2000

Kamaiya practices in the agrarian western Tarai, since they included forms of debt-bondage and bonded labor, had been considered a major developmental and human rights issue in Nepal, at least since 1990.⁵ Debt bondage was clearly stated to be unconstitutional in the 1990 Constitution.⁶ Many international organizations, NGOs and political parties had been calling for the end of these practices, and many had proposed programs to gradually liberate all the bonded laborers. However, no major changes had been effected – until this year.

On May 1st, 2000, 19 Kamaiyas in Kailali District went to the VDC office, and a few days later to the CDO office, to file their cases demanding minimum wages, the cancellation of their debt, housing and land and personal secu-

⁵The word Kamaiya originally derives from a Tharu word designating a man in a position within the intra-household division of labor where he carries out physically demanding work like tilling the field and 'earns' the living for the household. Because of the resonance of its original sense, and because of the diversity of contemporary Kamaiya arrangements not every person called Kamaiya may be a bonded laborer in the legal sense. Conversely, those who are not called a Kamaiya, such as a female member of a Kamaiya household (Kamalahari, Bukrahi, etc.) may effectively be a bonded laborer. For accounts of Kamaiya practices, see: Rankin (1999), Dhakal et al. (2000), Sharma and Thakurathi (1998), Robertson and Mishra (1997) Ministry of Land Reform and Management (1999) Nepal South Asia Centre (1998).

⁶Article 20(1) of the 1990 Constitution states that "Traffic in human beings, slavery, serfdom or forced labor in any form is prohibited. Any contravention of this provision shall be punishable by law." Mulki Ain (Part 4, section 11, sub-section 3) prohibits slavery-like practices and prescribes 3 to 10 years of imprisonment against offenders. Nepal also ratified the Slavery Convention (1926) and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institution and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) in 1963. For more details on legal provisions see: Ojha (2057 v.s.; 2000), Pandit (2000).

⁷The choice of the date, May 1st, by the protesters was deliberate, as the day marked the international laborer's day.

city.⁷ The initial refusal by the CDO to even consider the case, led to major sit-ins and demonstrations by Kamaiyas and their supporters, altogether involving tens of thousands of people. Also, Kamaiyas in 5 western Tarai districts – Dang, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali and Kanchanpur – started filing similar cases with their respective CDO offices, and the number of such cases reached more than 1,600. NGOs and human rights organizations, including BASE, INSEC, GRINSO and CCN, helped mobilize and support these actions. Particularly, BASE, an organization led by young Tharus with a membership of over 130,000 in 6 western districts,⁸ played a crucial role – because only BASE had the huge manpower and long established communication with so many Kamaiyas to assist in their mass mobilization. From July 13th, roughly 150 bonded laborers held a sit-in, or *dharna*, at Bhadra Kali in front of the Singha Darbar. On July 17th, the same day that the 150 Kamaiyas and their supporters were arrested during a demonstration in Kathmandu, the government declared that, effective that day, Kamaiya or any form of bonded labor was prohibited in the Kingdom of Nepal. Kamaiyas were declared immediately free, and since the debts they owed were void or null, they did not need to repay anything.⁹

While the declaration came with the government's public commitment to provide necessary assistance for the rehabilitation of the freed Kamaiyas, this has hardly materialized even five months after the declaration. In the meantime, particularly in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts, thousands of former Kamaiyas have been displaced, often forced out of their former dwellings by the landlords. Now, many are living under dire conditions in makeshift camps scattered around the two districts.

Currently, the former Kamaiyas are demanding at least 10 *katthas* (approximately 0.34 hectare) be distributed by the government to each former Kamaiya family in their own village. To this end, for instance, thousands of former Kamaiyas staged protest rallies in front of government offices on November 24th, and organized sit-ins along the East-West Highway, temporarily blocking the traffic in some parts of the western Tarai on December 11. Their argument is that proper rehabilitation, with decent housing

⁸These are Dang, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur, and Salyan.

⁹Decision of 'emancipation' was made by the Ministers Council and announced as a 'statement of public interest' at the National Assembly by the Minister for Land Reforms and Management, Siddharaj Ojha. The same statement that announced the immediate ban on bonded labor practices, acknowledges that the practices had been illegal for many years under Constitution and Mulki Ain. For details see Gorkhapatra (2057 v.s) and The Rising Nepal (2000).

¹⁰Here and in the rest of this paper, I foreground BASE and the 19 Kamaiyas in the story of Kamaiya movement. INSEC, the human rights organization which has been involved in Kamaiya

and land to till, is the first need to be met before accepting any other programs, such as education or skill training programs (further detailed below). As of December 2000, the government has yet to meet any of these demands.

This has been a brief summary of the events so far.¹⁰ In the following section, I would like to further highlight and discuss some aspects of this movement. This will include the movement's relation to more conventional development projects, as well as relations to such things as youth clubs. I will also be discussing the connections between intentions and outcomes, and the processes of translations and articulations involved in the movement.

Kamaiya Movement and BASE

As I mentioned above, the organization called BASE played a leading role in the Kamaiya mobilization. There is an emic distinction within some development circles, between a 'project' and a 'movement' or between an NGO and a social movement. BASE moves between the two categories. BASE (or Backward Society Education) is an organization based in western Nepal, with more than 130,000 members.

Only a few days after the declaration of emancipation, Dilli Chaudhary, the chairman of BASE, who is also the convenor of the Kamaiya Mukti Parichalan Samiti, described BASE as something that started out as a popular movement led by young Tharus, with such objectives as empowerment of the oppressed and freedom for the Kamaiyas. But after 1990, with the donor money flowing in not only for its primary, and extremely popular, activity of non-formal education classes, but also for other conventional programs such as health and women's savings groups, BASE had become more 'project oriented'. However, recently BASE has again taken the form of a movement, succeeding in Kamaiya emancipation, and now intends to continue focusing on movements, rather than projects.

The distinction between 'project' and 'movement' contains an incisive critique of much of what goes on in the

issues at least since 1991, and was a participant in this year's movement, would tell alternative story with markedly different plots and emphases. See for instance, an article titled *INSEC with Kamaiya (Bonded Labor) Liberation Campaign* (INFORMAL 2000b). Divergent constructions of the history of Kamaiya liberation by different parties (including political parties) after the declaration, raise important issues that I cannot go into here. For a brief comment on the problem see Onta (2000). For other illuminating analyses and commentaries on the movement, see, for example, Tiwari (2000) and Bhattarai (2000).

name of development. Improving the living conditions of any segment of society often requires restructuring power relations within the society. Yet, the overwhelming majority of development programs pretend that political processes can be circumvented. Development blueprints, equipped with flowcharts and itemized budgets, often construct a fantastic vision where social change appears simply as a result of deliberate and technical intervention, where outcomes of complex social transformations could be known in advance.¹¹

The recent announcement of a Kamaiya rehabilitation program by the Nepal Office of International Labor Organization (ILO) illustrated this point. The \$3.5 million project funded by the United States Department of Labor "propose(d) direct action targeted at bonded laborers and their families to secure effective release from bondage, and sustainably reduce their poverty through training and education, livelihood improvements, and service provision" (cf. Chaudhary 2000). Responding to this announcement, Dilli Chaudhary argued in his op-ed article (Chaudhary 2000) that the ILO program represented another example of the flawed 'project mentality' in which Dilli himself and his organization had once been trapped. Dilli argued that the program was destined to fail since it was conceived without consulting the former-Kamaiyas about their actual, urgent needs. Clearly, former-Kamaiyas needed to have housing and land issues reasonably settled before they felt like participating in a skill training class or a savings-and-credit group.

Yet, development discourse is not simply a cover, an ideology or mystification, that conceals the asymmetric power relations. While it often functions to serve the latter purpose, development discourse does much more. Obviously, the solution is not to stop using the word 'development', as if by 'forgetting' development, we can gain an unhindered vision and start engaging in genuine work toward social change. My contention is that development discourses *have been* transforming the socio-political terrain in Nepal for the past five decades, and thus inquiry into the conditions of politics in the present requires one to engage with the effects of those development discourses.¹²

Dilli Chaudhary himself is ready to admit that, without that 10 years of work and growth as an NGO, mostly implementing conventional donor funded projects, it is hard to say if BASE could have succeeded in the massive mobilization for the Kamaiya liberation. BASE has accumulated

¹¹On the 'anti-politic' nature of development discourse see Ferguson (1990).

¹²Anthropological works that make strong case for the need to engage with the effect of development discourses on contemporary social life in Nepal include Pigg (1993; 1996).

its legitimacy and resources (including the more than 130,000 membership) through operating in the field of development. Importantly, it has enabled BASE to remain independent from political parties, and yet exert pressure on them, in a post-1990 climate where party-affiliation seems to exert decisive influence on so many areas of life.

But the connection between BASE and conventional, donor driven development projects I would like to highlight here has to do, not with BASE in its mid-phase, but the origin of the BASE itself. The origin of BASE, which goes back to around 1985 in Dang, cannot be separated from the presence of the Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project by USAID. Dang was the headquarters of the multiplex USAID project.¹³

In 1985, Dilli Chaudhary and his friends started a youth club in Dumri Gaun, organizing literacy classes and other activities, and were quickly approached by people from the VFC (Vegetable, Fruit and Cash Crops Project) of USAID to organize a 4-H club. They established it, and called it Dumri Gaun Misrit Caar Patte Club.

In thinking about the history of development, or the history of youth and youth activism in Nepal, I suggest that the history of youth clubs needs to be explored. This history would take us back, among other places, to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries where one could trace a construction of a paradigmatic image for rural development in America. The 4-H clubs originated, with their characteristic emphases on 'life skills' and 'learning-by-doing', group meetings, and exhibits, amid the dual concerns for appropriate education for rural youth and modernizing agricultural practices.¹⁴ Moving forward to the 1950s in Nepal, when the first team of Americans arrived and tried to implement community development programs on a massive scale, one would see the promotion of 4-leaves youth clubs. Also, the key figure in the scenario of community development, the village level worker, was of course a young man or woman. The Community Development model went out of fashion during the 1960s. Integrated Rural Development Projects in the 1980s are in its spirit – with insistence on holism, interconnections, and so forth – the return of the community development. So, it is appropriate that the figure of youth and the youth clubs

¹³For a critical account of the impact of USAID's Rapti Integrated Development Project see Zurick (1993). On the issue of the USAID project and social changes in mid-western Nepal, a couple of recent journalistic articles have suggested that the USAID activities *contributed* to the emergence and success of the Maoist insurgency in the area (Mainali 2055 v.s.; Sharma 2057 v.s.).

¹⁴4-H stands for "Head, Heart, Hands, and Health" – My HEAD to clearer thinking, HEART to greater loyalty, My HANDS to larger service, My HEALTH to better living.

return with them, and they recruit the youth in a place where incidentally radical changes were already occurring with the building of motor roads and so forth (cf. Fujikura 1996; On the transformation of rural life see Zurick 1993).

The Dumri Gaun Youth Club was supported for some years by an NGO called No-Frills, which in turn was working under the USAID project. But the relationship turned sour as the Dumri Gaun group became more 'politicized' and started doing things that youth clubs were not supposed to do – like confronting landlords in disputes. The youth club lost support from the VFC. They changed their name to Sramik Mukti Sangatan (Laborers Liberation Organization) and tried such things as organizing a strike by agricultural laborers. Youths were getting out of control – from the perspective of USAID and also from the perspective of the Panchayat regime. Or, from another perspective, that of a possible school of development critics, this change may represent the Dumri Gaun group regaining its true political self, a move that freed it from a temporary co-optation by the development industry. I would like to adopt a different perspective, and see the Dumri Gaun group as re-articulating itself as it moves through different circuits of ideas and activities. In 1988, Dilli Chaudhary, through the help of the director of No-Frills, attended a meeting of the Asian Adivasi Committee in Thailand. Through the contacts established there, he visited India and learned more about tribal rights movements there (Cox, n.d.: 14-15). Hence, a local youth group, by assuming a role in the US funded rural development project, became a participant in a transnational circuit of ideas and practices of development. And, through this participation, the group became a participant in a transnational circuit of ideas and activism of tribal rights and freedom struggles.

Although the group suffered from a lack of funding towards the end of the 1980s, after the democratization of 1990, the group was able to register as the NGO 'BASE', and succeeded in attracting funding from DANIDA and others.¹⁵ In 1994, Dilli Chaudhary received the Reebok Human Rights Award, an international recognition of his work that significantly contributed to his position of strength when negotiating with political forces in Nepal. For many years now, BASE has been a significant presence in the complex web of local social interactions in at least six western districts, while at the same time it has been part of complex transnational circuits of ideas, persons and activities. I argue that all these and other pro-

¹⁵Before 1990, the group was not allowed to register as a NGO with the government. For discussions of the shifts in governmental policies (as well as popular conceptions) towards the NGO sector before and after 1990, see Onta-Bhatta (1997).

¹⁶For accounts of BASE, including its early history, see Cox (n.d.) and Ødegaard (1999).

cesses have contributed to constructing BASE as it exists today. Hence, attempts to determine whether BASE has been involved in development or politics, or whether it is a local or global agency, would be essentially futile.¹⁶

Translations and Articulations of the Kamaiya Movement

Returning to the Kamaiya movement itself – as I mentioned, the Kamaiya liberation movement this year started on May 1st, with 19 Kamaiyas going to VDC to file their cases. The person who convinced these 19 Kamaiyas was Yagya Raj Chaudhary. Yagya Raj was once a Kamaiya himself. He tried hard and succeeded in negotiating with his landlord to let him work outside to repay his debt, and eventually became free. When he heard of BASE around 1990, he joined, and was later elected to its central committee. While running for the central committee membership, he argued that instead of trying to create a coalition of organizations to put pressure on the government to free all the Kamaiyas at once, as was the main strategy of BASE at the time, BASE should go ahead and free Kamaiyas one by one, by helping them escape and file legal cases while giving them support and protection. Following his own words, Yagya Raj worked for several years with the 19 Kamaiyas, who all labored under one landlord, the former minister, Shiv Raj Pant, trying to convince them to take bold actions against the landlord. So, up to May 1st and beyond, Yagya Raj's intention was to liberate these 19 Kamaiyas and their family members, nothing more. When things started to snowball, both he and Dilli Chaudhary were surprised. Dilli started organizing sit-ins, marches, and the filing of cases as things unfolded, but he did not know what lay ahead two steps away. No one had planned or predicted the course of events. This, Dilli Chaudhary explained, was the nature of a social movement – as opposed to a 'project'. The project-mode of the past 10 years, with all the money that went into it and all the reports that it produced, has failed to bring about significant changes in the Kamaiya situation. Assuming its 'movement-mode', BASE acted and reacted pragmatically to each unfolding situation, without the pretence of knowing all the likely outcomes in advance.

Yet, one still wants to ask – why did the 19 Kamaiyas decide to act when they did, and what exactly did they want?

¹⁷Based on statements by the 19 Kamaiyas, that each Kamaiya couple received 15 quintals (1.5 tons) of paddy per year from the landlord, one calculation shows that (disregarding the 100 rupee fines that are charged each day one fails to work) the daily wage per person amounted to around 13 rupees (INFORMAL 2000a).

¹⁸Among the Kamaiyas present were Raj Dev Chaudhary, the

And why did thousands of other Kamaiyas also act the way they did? For the 19 Kamaiyas, some reports say that what prompted their decision for that radical action was the passing of the minimum wage law by the government (cf. Parajuli 2057 v.s.). The law was to take effect on the 1st of Magh, 2057 v.s. (January 15, 2000), and it prescribed the daily wage for agricultural labor to be no less than 60 rupees a day. For the Kamaiyas who were receiving far less, this drove home their own severe deprivation.¹⁷ So it seems, to be paid a just wage was a very important issue for some of the Kamaiyas who acted. There may have been other various and complicated issues that were on the minds of Kamaiyas. Yet, in the course of the movement, for the movement as a whole, the issue of wages became secondary or tertiary.

In early July, leading Kamaiyas¹⁸ and people from organizations supporting the movement held a two-day meeting in Nepalgunj.¹⁹ Vivek Pandit, a tribal rights activist from India and recipient of the 1999 Anti-Slavery International Award, served as the facilitator of the meeting. He and others argued that freedom was the first and foremost issue for the Kamaiyas. Without being free from the domination of the landlord, there could be nothing. After freedom, other issues could be dealt with. The goal of the movement had to be clear. And the goal was freedom. Vivek divided the participants into groups and encouraged each group to compose and sing pro-Kamaiya songs and slogans. Vivek also tried to help participants to visualize this movement as an epic fight between the good and the evil—as in Hindi movies. There were heroes and there were villains. Heroes, of course, were the Kamaiyas; the villains were the CDOs and the landlords. NGOs and INGOs were friends of the heroes. As in the movies, heroes never die. Even if the heroes died, they would somehow return to life before the end of the movie. The story doesn't end until they win. And they do win at the end.²⁰

When the 150 bonded laborers began *dharna*, many human rights activists and political leaders came to Bhadra Kali and gave speeches expressing their support for the

chair of Kamaiya Sangarsa Samiti, and Ramesh Magar, one of the 19 Kamaiyas who worked under Shiv Raj Pant.

¹⁷The following account of the meeting in Nepalgunj is based on an oral presentation made at Martin Chautary in July, and a more recent personal email, both by Ashutosh Tiwari, who participated in the meeting. My thanks to Ashutosh.

²⁰Needless to add that part of what was being attempted here, likely with a significant degree of success, was hegemonization of a particular, clarified (or simplified) vision/translation of the situation and the goal. For useful discussions on the diversity of *kamaiya-jamindar / kamaiya-kisan* relationships, and the apparent dissonance between local visions and human rights discourses on those relationships, see Rankin (1999).

Kamaiyas.²¹ The human rights activist, Gopal Shivakoti 'Chintan', welcomed the Kamaiyas and told them that, "The Nepali government is sending armed police forces to western Nepal, saying that the government is trying to make the Maoists obey the Constitution. Now you came all the way from western Nepal to Kathmandu, in order to make the government itself obey the Constitution [and stop allowing bonded labor practices]."

There were disagreements among the organizations supporting the movement, as to what the demands should be. Some argued that a comprehensive law detailing the processes of emancipation and rehabilitation should be passed, before anything else (cf. Ojha 2000). Some also argued that when negotiating with the government you should not have only one or two demands, you should ask for twenty or thirty. Then you might get two or three. But some kept arguing that there should be a clear demand, that of freedom, in order for the movement to have any chance of success. Some legally minded activists said we don't need any more of those *dukha* stories (i.e. narrating of numerous hardships experienced by the Kamaiyas).²² We just need to repeat our clear legal argument.

Many journalists came to Bhadra Kali to ask the Kamaiyas questions about why they were here, what they wanted, their stories of *dukha*, and what they wanted to do, if liberated. Sitting in Bhadra Kali, amid the dust and gas fumes, many protesters became ill. But they all responded to the reporters that they had come here for justice, their rights. They recounted stories of abuse, said they wanted to be free to go wherever and whenever they wished: Girls said they wanted to go to school once they became free.

In reflecting on the aspects of the liberation movement, I find myself concerned, not so much with such things as what the pure and original intentions of the Kamaiyas were, but more with the instances and processes of translation, the creation of narratives, and the assumption of images and roles that may or may not let one act as a certain agent in a particular situation. A social movement, a concrete historical process, involves a constant encoding of the meaning of the process as its integral part. The process involves the creation of certain kinds of actors (e.g. "youth," "bonded laborer") with particular kinds of capacities, competence

²¹The political leaders included those from Nepali Congress Party, Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), Sadbhavana Party, and United People's Front. Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) also expressed their support for the Kamaiya movement through press statements (cf. Kantipur 2057 v.s.).

²²See for example, the article titled *Kamaiyas Speak Their Heart* (The Kathmandu Post 2000a).

and desires (e.g. an ability to act as an activist, to desire to be free).

A Kamlari girl, about 13 years old, was smiling after we were released from Mahendra Police Club, a few hours after the declaration of emancipation by the government. "How are you? Weren't you sick yesterday?" I asked. She answered "Now I'm fine. Because we won."

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