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## *Negotiating identities : a study of the lives of street children in Nepal.*

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# NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES:
# A STUDY OF THE LIVES OF STREET
# CHILDREN IN NEPAL

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# ABSTRACT
## NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES:
## A STUDY OF THE LIVES OF STREET CHILDREN IN NEPAL

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Recent decades have seen a plethora of research on 'street children', much of which approaches these children's lives as inherently problematic. Addressing the gap in anthropological analysis of Nepali childhoods, this study inspects the lives of 'street children', the vast majority of whom are boys, through comparison with poor housed children in both rural and urban settings.

The thesis traces the processes involved in boys' departures from home, their employment in the city and the adoption of 'street' life. In locating boys' decisions to leave home within Nepali cultural norms and the pressures of poverty, it argues that 'street boys' (*khate*) are urban migrants who can, through certain strategies, maintain positive relations with their families. An inspection of both daily life on the streets and boys' perceptions of their social status, reveals that the *khate* identity is ascribed through boys' interaction with those advocating the standards of a Nepali middle-class childhood. Through analysis of the roles of local and international organisations, the media and the state in defining goals for street children's lives, the thesis explores the potential for *khate* to negotiate their identities and improve their quality of life.

Using longitudinal data to examine street boys' efforts to achieve social status, the research demonstrates their selective use of educational and training projects, and their simultaneous search for opportunities within 'street' networks. The key to their success lies in the cultivation of personal relationships with a patron figure who can offer material and social support.

In the light of these findings, the thesis shows that the limitations of current social theory regarding the 'careers' of stigmatised individuals and the contradictions that emerge in efforts to 'empower' children, arise from inadequate analysis of the interpersonal nature of social relationships in Nepal.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION
## CHARTING THE COURSE OF MY RESEARCH

"You need a good strong sack you see, that's about it really. It's how you eat and it keeps the cold out at night," explained Santosh when I asked about his early experiences as a rag-picker. "If you want good stuff like copper wiring or broken iron, then you have to start before it's light. Sometimes Dawa and I go together and split the earnings. His sack was nicked the other day. That happens quite often—in the night while you're sleeping—and even in the Common Room!"

When he first arrived in Kathmandu, Santosh's father found him a job cleaning glasses in a tea shop but he never got the wages he was promised. The owner told him that they were going to his parents but he couldn't be sure. It was two boys, who sometimes came for tea in the mornings, who first told him about rag-picking. There was money to be made by collecting recyclable goods like hard plastic and different metals from the street rubbish piles, then selling them at a junkyard. They said that if you hit lucky you could earn fifty rupees a day and they talked about going to see films frequently. In the two years since he ran away, Santosh had not returned to the tea shop because his family were bound to have heard of his departure. Sometimes he sees people in the bus park that he recognises from the village. If he is carrying a sack then he avoids them. At the Common Room, a drop-in centre for street children run by a local organisation[1], staff asked him about his home and whether his parents knew he was here in the city. They also talked about getting a good job or going to school. For a few weeks he stayed there and attended the literacy class, but now he goes only if he is ill. He prefers to sleep on the roadside with friends.

This thesis is about boys[2] like Santosh who live independently from their families and are, on a daily basis, homeless. It aims to describe how the process of becoming

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[1] The non-governmental organisation (NGO) named Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) established the Common Room in 1989.

[2] Children living on the streets in Nepal are almost all male (for reasons I will explain in due course). When I use the term 'street children' in relation to Nepal, I am referring to boys. As will become evident, I use the term 'boys' even for individuals in their upper teens and early twenties. This is because the *khate* identity is one associated with the period before adulthood, and 'youth' is not a generally used category in Nepal. Although they demarcate status differences according to age and experience, *khate* of all ages refer to their friends as 'boys' (*ketaharu* ).

homeless and known as *khate* (a Nepali[3] term approximating to 'street children') is understood by the children concerned and others who interact with them. It then examines children's relationships in the city that are significant in daily living and for their future prospects. What I have learnt about these children's lives results from a study that evolved over a period of three years.

Before studying anthropology, I taught for a short period in a Kathmandu primary school. Like most visitors to Nepal, the children begging and sleeping on the streets made an impression on me. People said that five years previously, such a sight was rare. So how did these children arrive and what did living on the streets involve? Curious to know more, I conducted a three month study at the end of my second year of a BA in Anthropology. I was a volunteer in the Common Room, the centre run by Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), a Nepali non-governmental organisation (NGO). There, I learnt something about homeless children's backgrounds and current lifestyles. A small survey of growth status suggested that homeless children were better nourished than a comparable group of children from a hill village (Baker 1993). It was this result that prompted me to question the popular assumptions about street children, which depict them as victims of poverty and abandonment, destitute vagrants or delinquents. The circumstances surrounding children's arrival on the street were diverse, often involving their families, prior work or a move to the city. It was quickly apparent to me that prevailing images of street children are grounded in Western ideas about childhood (ibid.). In general terms, these hold that childhood is a stage of life with certain needs and that these cannot be fulfilled if children live independently in the city. However, it was not clear to me which particular aspects of western notions of childhood influence academic discourse about 'street children' in Nepal, how these ideas were being applied in a development context and the extent to which they related to the lives of individual Nepali children.

Questions about the differences between homeless children's experiences and well-being, and that of their peers, were central to the subsequent study conducted by a team of three researchers between July and December 1993. The team comprised Catherine Panter-Brick (a biological anthropologist with research experience in rural Nepal), Alison Todd (an independent researcher trained in medicine and anthropology) and myself (an MSc student). The combination of disciplines and prior research experience in Nepal allowed us to design an extensive comparative study of

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[3]In recognition of recent usage amongst scholars from Nepal and outside the country, I use the term 'Nepali' to refer not only to the language of Nepal, but to its people and aspects of its society and culture.

children living in different places, and whose lifestyles appeared to differ radically. Did homeless children share certain experiences that were uncommon among village, 'squatter'[4] and middle class school children? And could any characteristics in their backgrounds be identified as predictive of homelessness? Following the earlier finding regarding children's growth status, our second aim was to explore the impact of homelessness on children's general well-being through a comparison with other groups of children living at home. Upon reading reports of previous studies conducted on street children, it was clear that the majority of these studies adopted a uni-dimensional approach to well-being which neglected important interactions between the physical, social and psychological aspects of street living. Thus we drew on the two disciplines of biological and social anthropology in order to investigate children's lifestyles from a number of perspectives including physical health, activity patterns, sources of livelihood and social relations.

The results indicated that homelessness was not simply about being alone, ill and powerless, as is often assumed by a western public whose ideas are influenced by media reports or appeals from development agencies. What emerged was the importance of children's decision-making as individuals and as family members, in becoming and being homeless. Undoubtedly children living on the streets have experienced hardship and pain, but so have many of those living in their village or urban homes. We learnt that in the Nepali social and cultural context, the categories 'homeless' and 'squatter' are not as distinct as government and NGO policy documents make out. Of course, such a lack of fit exemplifies the general problem of using universal categories but it also begs the question of how local group definitions are made.

The results of the comparative study raised a number of important questions which I decided to pursue by returning to Kathmandu for a year's doctoral research in June 1994. My general feeling about the previous study was that the findings relating to children's movements from home, experiences in work and quality of life that were generated by the quantitative methods, could not be fully explained. They lacked a firm grounding in the social and cultural context to being homeless in Nepal. This perspective was also lacking in our early attempts to use qualitiative methods to document children's experiences. For example, the interviews we conducted among

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[4] The term 'squatter' is the best translation of *sukumbasi*, meaning those who live in self-built housing on public land. Officially families should have been landless for three generations to qualify as *sukumbasi*, however many families own small patches of land in rural areas.

children in each setting were based around questions that we thought pertinent, as opposed to those that our informants identified as significant. A different approach was needed to investigate the issues raised by children's evaluations of their experiences.

The obvious starting point was to observe and interact with homeless children over an extended period of time. Previously, the need to gather a number of large data sets for our study in four settings, combined with the mobility of homeless children, had prevented close involvement with individuals in their habitual environments. I was aware that the homeless children moved within and between various physical and social environments. But I knew little about the relationships formed in each of these or how children viewed mobility versus settling in any one place. Moreover I was curious to know how aspects of 'home' such as their caste, village community and family affected their lives as incomers to the city. One objective therefore was to understand how 'the streets' were interconnected with or juxtaposed against 'home'. A second was to find out whether homeless children had support networks and if so, their location, their effectiveness and their role in shaping their future prospects.

Over time I built relationships with groups of homeless children based in a city centre square frequented by tourists, and in a junkyard where rag-pickers sell scrap collected from rubbish piles in the street. Individuals from these places would frequently turn up at one of the two NGO centres, each of which had a group of 'regulars' and where I was teaching several times a week. I spent time in school with a group of 'ex-street children' whose education is sponsored by foreigners (including myself). They often visited the Common Room to meet friends and staff members. Occasionally, one ran away from school and back to the streets. It was as if there were several key sites, each of which had many characters arriving, pausing for a period and then leaving for the next one. The scattered and fluid nature of the research setting meant that a bicycle was my most valuable piece of research equipment. If spotted without it I was asked by the children where I had left my 'best friend'.

It was as a result of my continuing close association with NGO staff and my own role within these organisations as well as in the city locations where children live, that I realised how important it was to pursue an enquiry into the ways in which street children are represented—and the extent to which boys are aware of and act upon such representations. Participation in the daily activities of two NGO drop-in centres (the Common Room and Bal Kendra, a centre run by Child Welfare Society (CWS)) gave me insight into the symbiotic relationship between 'street children' and those

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who provide for them. It was in conversations between the children and those working towards improving their lives through welfare support or informing the public, that certain 'facts' about their lives were juxtaposed with acceptable standards within a good childhood.

Some children commented on the repeated interviews taken by journalists and the fact that nothing had changed for the better. NGO advocacy and the media have contributed to a public consciousness of 'street children' (*khate*), attached to which are ideas about their origins, behaviour and what should be done for them. Public opinion of street children is influenced by the images and ideals promoted within the arena of service provision and campaigns for the recognition of children's rights. I began to question the effects of such representations on children's views of themselves and their potential to make changes in their lives. My interest lay in the precise nature of the social identity implied in the term *khate*. If, as I suspected, there were stigmatising aspects to this identity that further marginalised children within wider society, it was important to explore the potential for individuals to manipulate these dominant images in their local environments and acquire status within these settings.

In addition, I questioned the effects of the status differences between research participants at each stage of the study. I was aware that as an adult female, I would be considered by adults and by children to have a certain degree of authority. To counter the effects of this power relationship I used more interactive and participatory research methods. As the research progressed, I replaced structured interviewing with group discussions, some of which were facilitated by a fifteen year old. Alongside these distinctly 'research' activities, I learnt through my engagement with children as a provider of tea and rides to the hospital, an NGO worker ('miss') and facilitator of a mechanic apprenticeship project. Essentially these roles were about responding to 'needs' as represented by the children and adults involved. I invested the most time and energy into the apprenticeship project because it was prompted by boys in the junkyard well known to me and we ran it jointly. Working towards common goals was satisfying and also frustrating. In learning how to respond to grievances, gratitude, dishonesty and requests beyond my capabilities, I gained some understanding of the resources required from within individual boys and from external social supports (including family, friends and project workers), in order that they could move on from a state of homelessness.

The broad aims of the thesis described above can be reduced to three specific objectives:

1.  To explore what 'home' and 'the streets' mean for children who have moved between these two settings. In illuminating a wider construct of the family and children's role in the home, I seek to understand aspects of home life that remain significant in boys' lives while living in 'the streets'. I draw upon the existing literature in order to contextualise these boys' experiences within the childhoods of poor rural and urban Nepalis.

2.  To investigate children's movements between work and living environments and ask what effects a period of 'street living' can have on their future prospects. I endeavour to document the ways in which street-living children talk about and act towards their future.

3.  To critique my methodology in order to examine the process by which I came to these understandings. I ask whether efforts to increase children's participation in the research process have accessed their own definitions of their social worlds, and if so, what can be done with these.

My ethnographic analysis takes a temporal approach in order to connect children's past and present experience with notions of who they are now and what they might be in the future. The thesis is therefore structured to examine the process of entering, being in and moving out of homelessness. An additional important temporal thread is a critique of the research process that generated my ethnography. The methodology developed as a result of the previous study acted as a guideline, but was adapted as the scope of my role as a researcher of 'street children' became clearer. There are several important reasons for including a critical reflection of the research procedure in parallel with an analysis of the experience of homelessness among Nepali children.

Firstly, each becomes a tool for refining the other as the study proceeds. The production of an ethnographic text is all about identifying and communicating informants' experience to one's readers. In order to do this, an ethnographer engages in relationships with informants that evolve over time. As becomes evident in this thesis, these relationships are revealing of social norms and practice and are therefore the stuff of the ethnographic analysis. An example of the dynamic nature of this process is my use of terms for the children who are the focus of my study. I began by referring to 'homeless' children, but later opted to use *khate* in line with my growing understanding of their connectedness to others in the city and in distant homes, and my awareness that the term *khate* is widely used and negotiated by children as well as by the public.

Secondly, an increasingly strong link is being forged between anthropology and 'development'. For many anthropologists, social relations structured around problem assessment, service provision and empowerment of subordinate groups are important aspects of the research environment. Development practitioners exploring anthropological concepts expect theoretical rigour, sound methods and practical applicability. Many anthropologists work in environments where they are immediately accountable for the way in which 'facts' are determined, communicated and used. Like myself, they may not be doing 'applied research' because they are not directly employed by a development enterprise and have no remit to solve problems. However, all research is political in nature, both at the stage of data acquisition and once it is publicly available. Given that the 'development' sphere for street children involves multiple parties engaged in defining needs and providing or receiving various services, critical issues are raised for researchers in terms of practical research activities and the presentation of findings.

Finally, the experience of homelessness is viewed as a problem by and for the children themselves and its implications extend to other members of society. These include their family, local community and bodies concerned with child welfare. Those who talk and act on behalf of homeless children, for example, are those who express the need for research. It is therefore important to compare representations of children's experiences in pieces of research that, although diverse in design, all aim to understand children and serve their needs better. Unlike the majority of prior studies on 'street children' in Nepal, my own research made use of a wide variety of methods. Hence I am able to comment on a range of interpretations of the experience of being homeless and how these related to children's self conceptions as 'homeless street child' and research subjects.

Chapter 1 describes the design, the procedure and the outcomes of the comparative research conducted in 1993. It justifies the aim—to describe characteristics of homeless Nepali children that distinguish them from their peers—and the approach used to explore children's backgrounds and lifestyles. I demonstrate the ways in which the literature on 'street children' around the world influenced this project's underlying theoretical orientation and our interpretation of results. The project consisted of a survey approach followed by an in-depth comparative study of a selected sample of children and used a range of biological and social methods. Thus, I discuss the principal findings of two surveys implemented among homeless children and three control populations; urban squatter children, urban middle-class children and rural children. The first explored demographic characteristics (children's family backgrounds) and the second measured growth status, an indicator of past and

present physical health. I will explore differences in homeless children's family and wider socio-economic backgrounds and in their physical well-being. I discuss the implications of this research process for our understandings of 'street children'. The assumptions inherent in our quantitative approach are outlined and its resultant limitations made apparent.

Chapter 2 begins by establishing the rationale for my own subsequent research in the light of gaps identified in the prior study and of bodies of social knowledge that informed its development. I argue that a shift in perspective was required to take full account of the social and cultural context of child migration, work and independence from the home. I then relate the set of questions I took to the field to pertinent theoretical positions and thus describe how I set about answering them. Engagement in children's daily lives in their various environments was fundamental to this period of research. The timing of different methods, including extended interviews, focus group discussions (PRA techniques) and 'action-oriented research' is considered in relation to my evolving role in a range of 'street' environments. Here I expand my discussion on the importance of social identity in homeless children's lives and consequently to my research. I question the sources of ideas about these children that are common currency in Nepal and that guide the actions of those who influence homeless children's everyday lives. Then I describe my approach to children's representations of the past, their present lifestyle and its bearing on their future. Finally I explain the criteria used to analyse the verbal exchanges and written texts collected during the course of this research.

Chapter 3 looks in depth at the socio-economic and cultural context of living and working independently of the home during childhood. Wider social features are explored, including age at which children's work responsibilities begin, their roles within the household and migration practices[5]. I relate these to Nepali cultural notions about the life course; fate, hardship versus ease and the determinants of social status such as age, gender, wealth and caste. Differences in adult perceptions of children's needs between the rural and urban settings suggest that childhoods vary widely within Nepal. One end of this range is characterised by a traditional rural childhood still experienced by the majority of poor Nepalis, and the other end by a modern, largely urban, childhood similar to that of the industrialised North. The homeless children interviewed speak of early work experiences indicative of the

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[5] My own observation of rural childhoods and migration practices took place during a 3 week period of research in Salme village (1993) and a ten day walk through Baglung district (1996), both of which are located in hilly areas of Central Nepal.

former yet have been treated by some city-dwellers according to the latter's norms. These values are evident in the action of intervention programmes in Kathmandu designed to support homeless children in a variety of ways. Using interview narratives and the work of other ethnographers, I describe the similarities between homeless and other poor children in family histories, early childhood experiences and current socio-economic status. Discussions with groups of homeless children and adolescents from the squatter area shed light on their notions of 'childhood'. Hence context is given to the external circumstances and individual decisions that lead to a period of homelessness.

Chapter 4 looks at the daily practices and social relations of the homeless children. I discuss their use of the city to earn a living, for recreation and for physical and emotional support. I question the notion suggested in the literature that so-called 'homeless' children recreate the functions of the home using resources found in the city. From an outsider's perspective, these children's lives seem to lack any form of stability. Yet how does the mobility of homeless children differ from the supposed stability of the home in the context of poverty in Nepal? I detail what the children perceive to be the benefits of mobility and of the regularities in their lives. It is these patterns which suggest that homeless children move between several social domains depending on the roles they are able to fulfil or on their current needs. Such domains include the city streets and junkyard communities, the NGO centres and the homes of family or natal community members. I examine the relationships cultivated by children in each of these settings and the manner in which their collective identity is negotiated.

In chapter 5 I shift the focus of my analysis from children to the adults who are working on their behalf. I trace the growth of the popular movement for working children within Nepal's recent social and political history and explain how 'street children' came to be a focus of attention. I then describe the rationale behind programme objectives for street children. It is important to approach institutions working for street children as powerful voices in the national discourse, but also as comprising individuals who are responsive to the wider social climate and the circumstances of individual children. I therefore examine self-perception amongst NGO staff and critiques of development rhetoric within Nepal. In order to illustrate the dynamic between NGO constructions and children's experiences, I describe the emergence of a cultural narrative of street living that is meaningful to *khate* and the wider public alike.

Chapter 6 focuses on the future prospects of children who are based on the streets. It begins by considering the scant longitudinal evidence available on changes in children's lifestyles, then sets out a theoretical framework for analysing the kind of change in identity envisaged. I outline *khate* boys' views of their futures as well as those of others in Nepali society. Moving onto children's efforts to change their lives, I describe their attempts to follow the routes off the streets offered by NGOs, including formal schooling and skill training. My analysis focuses on the social interaction between children and project staff, and the expectations of each regarding their current and future relationships. With these in mind, I examine the steps taken by boys to move into alternative occupations and social positions using the social networks established on the streets and in junkyards.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by presenting a synthesis of the major ethnographic findings and reflections on the scope of my analysis. In view of the socio-political context in which the study was undertaken and the nature of my conclusions, I discuss their implications for those working towards improving the lives of 'street children' in Nepal.

# CHAPTER 1
## STREET CHILDREN IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to describe the approach, work and findings of the collaborative study undertaken in 1993 to compare the backgrounds, lifestyles and well-being of homeless street children with those of their peers in Nepal. It provides a background to the particular set of questions that this research aimed to answer and the methods used in the enquiry. I explain the criteria used and the questions raised in categorising these four groups of children in a manner appropriate for comparative analysis. Throughout the chapter, I discuss the approach and findings in the light of investigations of child homelessness in other developing countries. Out of these findings arose further questions that were beyond the scope of this first study. Lastly I explain the links between the limitations of the early study and the very different approach taken in my subsequent fieldwork.

## 1.1 IMAGES OF CHILD HOMELESSNESS: A SPECIAL VULNERABILITY?

> Homeless children in families are increasing in numbers across the country (United States of America) and have been noted to have frequent health problems. (Wood et al. 1990:858)

> Many engage in risky behaviour....Divorced from a stable social environment, (street) children easily descend—or are led—into petty thieving, which often develops into more serious criminality (Black 1993:7)

> Millions of children, beset by hunger, disease and violence, are struggling to survive on Brazil's city streets (The Independent, October 1992)

Reports produced by academics, policy makers and the popular press frequently associate homelessness[1] with vulnerability. Homeless people, in any setting, are therefore categorised as a population 'at risk', both physically and psychologically. In the USA, children of homeless families are found to be in worse physical and

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[1] The term 'homelessness' is used in this chapter to denote current residence outside the home. It does not distinguish between those children who have a home and those who are orphaned or have no home.

psychological health than those of poor housed families (Lewis and Meyers 1989, Molnar et al. 1990, Wood et al. 1990, Wright 1990). Recent research in a number of countries, including the USA and Honduras (Wright et al. 1993a) and Sri Lanka and Norway (Hannsen 1994), points to the similarities in health hazards faced by children living outside the home in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Cross-cultural differences are however noted in the demographic characteristics of the young homeless. In developed countries, the focus of attention is on children of homeless families and the rising numbers of 'homeless youth'; teenage runaways who sleep rough in cities and may resist offers of alternative settled lifestyles (James 1991, Shinn and Weitzman 1990:4). In contrast, children living independently from family members in the cities of developing countries have drawn international concern because they are younger, living in desperate poverty and apparently exist in very large numbers. Commonly known as 'street children', they do not appear to have a secure home base and are considered vulnerable to the city's perils. For children in all cultures, the reasons for and impacts of homelessness seem overridingly negative. In 1990, a Nepali non-governmental organisation named CWIN (Child Workers in Nepal) published a report entitled "Lost childhood: survey research on street children of Kathmandu". In its preface, Gauri Pradhan, CWIN's co-ordinator, introduces a particular group of children:

> We have heard about many poor and starving children in third world countries. They are either malnourished or undernourished. But what about the children who have made the street their regular home? Yes, they are called 'Street Children' here in this book. Street children are not a traditional phenomenon in our society. But, it has been increasing every year as part of our urban reality. The number of street kids in Kathmandu is not so big at present but (the) magnitude of this problem is intolerable. Poverty in our society has created many problems and it is complexed [sic] with other issues. The state of the street children in therefore an outcome of such complexities.

CWIN's survey report goes on to support the argument that homeless street children differ from other urban children. Living and sleeping on the streets are associated with certain common characteristics in their backgrounds and current lifestyles (plate 1.1). These are described as entirely negative for the individual children and for wider society. Pradhan asserts that small numbers at present should not detract from the issue; street children are suffering now and the population is growing. The report concludes that the particular problems of street children deserve special attention and provision.

Our research aimed to pursue the question inherent in this assertion, namely: can street children be distinguished in this way or are these 'particular problems' more to do with society's perceptions?

## 1.2 PLANNING THE COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

The foregoing CWIN statements echo the presentation of facts and call to action that are characteristic of other reports of street children aimed at informing the public and generating their support. Moreover, they resonate with the dominant themes of research studies produced by academics who have attempted to document the causes and effects of child homelessness. This initial study (conducted by Panter-Brick, Todd and myself with the help of Nepali research assistants[2]) was conceived in a similar vein and asked the following questions:

1    How do the backgrounds of homeless children differ from those of their peers?

2    How do homeless children support themselves?

3    What effect does homelessness have on children's well-being?

In asking these questions, we aimed to find out whether Kathmandu is necessarily a perilous place for children to live independently and whether Nepali children always fare better if they live at home. It is worth noting here that we needed to identify appropriate criteria for judging peril and well-being in order to answer these questions. As will become apparent, the study afforded opportunity for reflection on such critical issues of methodology. Before describing our procedure, I outline some pertinent features of the study setting.

Measures of poverty that include human resources and capacities, as well as economic assets, rank Nepal as one of the world's poorest countries[3]. Its diverse topography, stretching from the lowland Terai through a large hill region to the high Himalayas, contributes to large differences within its predominantly rural economy, and between rural and urban livelihoods. In relation to its land area, Nepal has few urban centres and most are grouped on the lowland Terai region (see map 1 in appendix II). The last fifty years have seen large migration from the hills to the Terai and to urban centres, which on top of a high population growth rate produced a seven-fold increase in the urban population between 1952 and 1987 (Sattaur

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[2]In Kathmandu,Sarita Sainju, JB Shrestha and Kedar Subedi were employed as research assistants, as were Dilman Tamang and Yo Ghale in Salme village. Their work was invaluable to our study.

[3] Nepal is ranked 154th out of 175 countries on the basis of the human development index which comprises three variables: life expectancy, educational attainment and real GDP per capita (UNDP 1997:55).

1993:21). The capital, Kathmandu, is the largest urban centre, with a population approaching 600,000[4] (CBS 1994:10). In 1990, CWIN estimated there to be approximately 500 homeless children living on the streets of Kathmandu, and in 1993 they put the figure at 1,000 and rising[5].

Previous studies have tended to define distinct groups of 'street children' on the basis of their day-to-day lifestyle and the reasons they give for having left home. Underlying the lengthy debates about the terminology applied to such groupings is the assumption that being a street child is in some respects qualitatively different to being an ordinary poor child, although just what constitutes the latter is seldom explored. The comparative study was guided by similar expectations of a uniqueness in homeless street children based on the existing literature[6], and on a sense gained during my undergraduate study, that homeless children regarded themselves as in some way distinct from their peers (Baker 1993). Following these expectations, the research was designed to identify differences between home-living and homeless children according to a number of chosen variables pertaining to lifestyle and well-being. We therefore assumed the existence of a distinction between homeless street children and their peers, although at that stage its precise nature was not known.

Thus our study was planned with three working hypotheses:

1    Homelessness is a distinct state of being, and the past and present experiences of homeless children are qualitatively different to those of home-livers.

2    The resulting effects of homelessness on health and lifestyles can be separated into single and measurable variables. These are applicable to all children, not just the homeless, and form the basis of comparison.

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[4]The exact figure of 598,528 is the total population of the municipalities of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur which together comprise the urban centre of the Kathmandu valley.

[5]Estimates of the numbers of homeless street children in Kathmandu must be viewed as very approximate due to the difficulties in collecting this type of data and the variance in definitions of 'street children' employed (CWS 1996:4).

[6]One of the means of classifying street children that influenced our thinking is the distinction drawn by UNICEF between children 'of' the street who work and sleep on the streets, and children 'on' the street who, after working in the streets, return each night to a family home. This distinction is based Tacon's contribution to the policy debate for street and abandoned children (Tacon 1985), and has since been used in research and programming globally (Franchet 1996, Rosa et al. 1992, Veale et al. 1993).

3    The study would indicate the 'needs' of children defined as homeless.

It would seem obvious that any research premised on the distinctiveness of homeless children would require a comparative analysis of children's lives within specific physical and social environments. Although a small number of studies have addressed the differences between 'street' and 'market' children, or those defined as 'of' or 'on' the street (Rosa et al. 1992, Wright, Kaminsky et al 1993b), comparison with a range of control groups is rarely integral to research on child homelessness (Ennew 1994b: 413). We made efforts to place child homelessness in the context of alternative childhoods by focusing on three peer groups: urban squatter children, middle-class urban school children and rural children.

## 1.2.1    PEER GROUP COMPARISON

Data from homeless boys aged between 6 and 17 years and the three peer groups were collected. Girls were excluded on the basis of the very small numbers of homeless girls documented by CWIN since 1989[7]. Contact with homeless boys was established via the CWIN Common Room, where under-privileged children could rest, eat, play, attend school and receive medical attention. CWIN regularly hold 'health camps' with an emphasis on preventative care for homeless and squatter children. CWIN agreed to hold a four day health camp to facilitate our study and the event was publicised by staff during street visits. Children were asked to alert their friends, thus generating our sample through a snowball effect (Lee 1993). Due to the potential sample bias towards those in ill-health or those sharing characteristics unrepresentative of the wider population, we also conducted research in public spaces frequented by homeless children, including central streets, temple compounds and market areas, and in the squatter settlement.

The three groups selected for comparison were as follows:

1    Squatter children lived with their families in slum conditions in Kohiti, a settlement on the banks of the Vishnumati river in Kathmandu (plate 1.1). Most families had migrated from rural areas in the last 15 years (Yami & Mikesell 1990) and earned a living as sweepers, market vendors, jewellery makers or rag-pickers. Many of the children attended a local government school, worked in the home and sometimes with their parents. Those who had

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[7]Of the 418 street children registered by CWIN between 1989 and 1992 only 4% were girls (Baker 1993:6)

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Squatter settlement (foreground right) from the bridge where squatters sell fruit, clothing etc.



The same settlement after being bulldozed to make way for a road in 1996.
The junkyard where homeless rag-picker boys sell their scrap remains (centre of picture).



Homeless boys sleeping in Thamel, an area of the city popular with tourists.



This pair of homeless boys requested tea and a photograph from the researcher.

16

Plate 1.2 The comparative study: Scenes from the urban school and Salme village



In rural Nepal, boys begin ploughing from about 12 years.
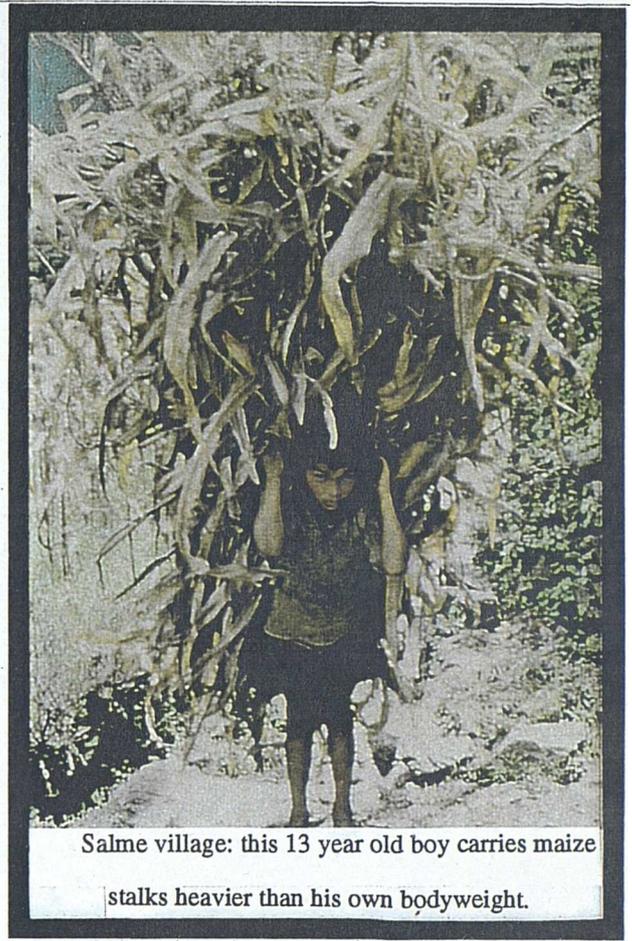


Salme village: this 13 year old boy carries maize stalks heavier than his own bodyweight.
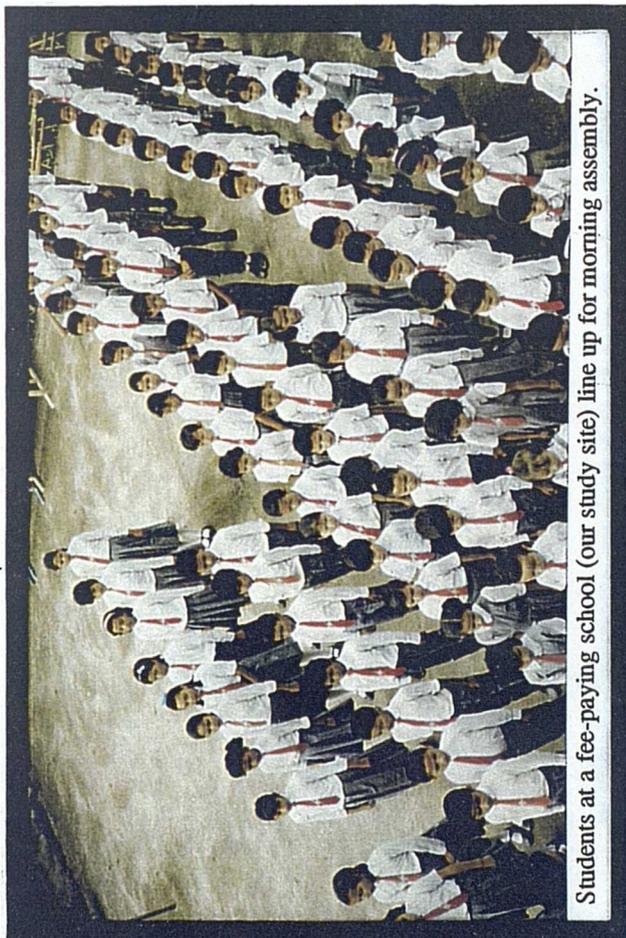


Students at a fee-paying school (our study site) line up for morning assembly.



Students show the ragdolls they made in craft lessons with a British volunteer.

dropped out of or never attended formal school came to the CWIN Common Room for lessons.

2    School boys attended a private fee-paying school in Kathmandu at which I had previously taught (plate 1.2). The majority lived locally with their families and came from middle-class backgrounds (where one or both parents were educated and/or in full time waged employment), although a few children were boarders from rural areas or receiving sponsorship.

3    The rural children lived in Salme village in central Nepal (plate 1.2). Ethnically, these children are Tamangs of Tibeto-Burman origin and members of the largest single ethnic group in Nepal. In common with the majority of Nepali hill villagers, residents of Salme relied largely on agro-pastoralist activities, supplemented with produce from the market and wages earnt outside the village. Most boys in our sample attended the local school (comprising of two classes) and had been to the market town at least once. Among some families there has been migration of a number of members to Kathmandu in search of work. These migrations include young boys who have left the village with or without parental permission.

## 1.3 METHODS AND SAMPLING OF THE 1993 STUDY

The methodology was guided by previous studies and the assumptions described above as well as the background and skills of the research team (as outlined in the introduction). We proposed that biological and social anthropology, with contributions from medicine and psychology, could provide an appropriate framework for an enquiry of children's experiences and quality of life. Interdisciplinarity can significantly strengthen analysis of children's quality of life, yet poses a number of theoretical and practical challenges (see Streefland 1995 on interdisciplinary research on AIDS). The major challenge in this approach is to move beyond the use of multiple methods which yield various types of information, to an integration of different sets of data that have practical application.

Such integration depends, however, on the robustness of the constituent parts. We were therefore concerned to use methods that would produce the desired information given the practical constraints under which we were working. We were also concerned that tried-and-tested measures of children's well-being used in studies of street children offered only narrow perspectives on physical or mental health. These have included the use of case notes taken by health workers during

interviews with children (Wright et al. 1993a) and psychological tests largely developed for use in western societies (Aptekar 1989). What we embarked upon was thus an experiment designed to understand the interrelationships between the physical, social and psychological aspects of children's well-being using traditional methods as well as a number of techniques little used outside laboratory conditions. Table 1 lists the methods used and a brief description of the type of information produced by each, but a fuller account of rationale and technique is found in sections below and in prior publications (Baker 1996, Baker et al. 1997, Panter-Brick et al. 1996, Todd et al. 1996).

## Table 1. The range of methods used
## and types of data produced in the 1993 study

| Methods | Indicators of well-being and past experience |
| --- | --- |
| anthropometry^ | growth status |
| heart rate monitoring* | physical activity and fitness |
| blood spots * | nutritional status and response to pathogens |
| self-report of illness^ | perceived morbidity |
| salivary cortisol^* | physical and psychosocial stress |
| survey^ | demographic histories |
| observation | daily activities and social interaction |
| photo exercise* | peer assessment of personality |
| semi-structured interviews* | family and work background, current lifestyle |
| thematic drawings* | values and experiences |

Key

^   Large samples were sought for initial surveys in order to achieve inter-group comparisons (307 boys aged 6-14 years took part in the anthropometric survey and 329 boys aged 6-17 years participated in the demographic survey). Structured observations documented the activities of large numbers of street children in different areas of the city.

*   Methods used with samples of only 20 boys aged 11-14 years from each group.

Gaining a representative sample is one methodological issue frequently debated in studies of homeless people (Burnam and Koegel 1988). Research was conducted in a number of locations (see above) in order to correct for institutional bias, and all children were asked how many times per week they visited the CWIN Common Room. We were able to verify the representativeness of our sample in terms of age and frequency of visit to the Common Room using CWIN's registration data, which

they judged to cover the vast majority of children living on the streets[8] The representativeness of the homeless sample is shown in table 2 (from Panter-Brick et al. 1996:443), and further details of the sampling procedure and reasons for the age criteria used given in appendix I.

## Table 2. Sample representativeness
## of the homeless children studied in 1993

| Age (yr) | 6-9 N(%) | 10 N(%) | 11 N(%) | 12 N(%) | 13 N(%) | 14 N(%) | Total N(%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Census | 50 (10) | 52 (10) | 58 (12) | 138 (28) | 99 (20) | 102 (20) | 499 (100) |
| Sample | 5 (5) | 8 (7) | 14 (12) | 13 (28) | 35 (31) | 19 (17) | 111 (100) |

Census comprises all 6-14 year-old homeless boys registered by CWIN (Child Workers in Nepal) by December 1993.

Precise characteristics of samples from the four groups of children, research locations and personnel involved are detailed in publications that report specifically on the anthropometric survey (Panter-Brick et al 1996a, Todd 1996), demographic survey (Baker et al 1997), heart rate monitoring (Panter-Brick et al 1996 (b,c)) and cortisol survey (Worthman and Panter-Brick 1996). Analysis of the cortisol study and the photo-test designed to measure children's responses to psycho-social stress is on-going, and a statistical analysis of the structured observations is planned.

At the outset of our study, we were aware that its comparative aims and dependence on the survey would lead us into problems of definition with respect to our research subjects and the questions we were asking. For example, in the context of a paucity in comparative research, our focus on the homeless group had the potential to reinforce the widespread research bias towards street children and away from others deserving care (Glauser 1990:147). Although our study included poor children living with their families (represented in the squatter and village groups), the omission of those living in the workplace such as domestic servants and carpet weavers, meant that we were unable to assess the impact of different working environments on children's lives. Moreover, because surveys are designed to standardise measures of children's lives and use a limited number of variables, they may exclude important aspects of children's experiences that are relevant to

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[8]This was later confirmed during structured observation by the small proportion of children met on the streets who reported never having been to CWIN.

category distinctions. However, we were also aware that in many ways, it was the very process of definition that might enable us to look more closely at the fit between the categories we assigned to these children, and any factors that differentiate their backgrounds or current lifestyles. At this stage we did not question the assumptions about lifestyle that have formed categories of children and topics of research interest. Before discussing the problem of selecting appropriate criteria for categorising children into groups, I will attempt to convey something of the impressions we gained of street children's lives while doing this research. The following is an extract from the journal I wrote during this study:

> This morning's structured observation of street children's activities began at six o'clock at a busy crossroads in the city centre. Four boys were stirring in a shelter near the temple where on previous nights I have seen several huddled shapes and guessed that they were homeless boys. It was Bhim and his three friends, all of whom I've talked to before. They were pleased to see me, chatting avidly about spitting in a tube and then getting a cup of tea. All four were filthy and had open sores on their legs, arms and heads. (They showed no embarrassment about the procedure—rather the whole process was unusually jolly as they checked the quality and amount of each other's samples and responses to the questionnaire!) Bhim complained to me that his clothes had been stolen while he was sleeping and when he spoke of a plan to visit the NGO centre, the others opted to join him. I bought the customary tea and donuts from a pavement stall and they seemed to enjoy my presence, handing me the first cup and telling other customers (most of whom were adult male porters) that "she is our miss". A middle aged woman, who did not appear rich, approached to tell the boys that there is a better life than begging and sleeping in the streets, that they should wash themselves and change their lives by studying or looking for work. The boys did not pay her much attention and I wondered whether my presence had precipitated her comments.
>
> Watching the four boys munching their donuts, I was struck by the way they looked out for each other, while at the same time demonstrating very volatile behaviour; aggression, open crying and loud laughter following in quick succession. For example, one snatched the remaining piece of his friend's donut and hid it in his pocket then gave it back grinning. Then, as a result of having to divide the extra donut between four, a play fight in which the scab was knocked off Nabin's knee causing him to cry openly like a baby, evolved rapidly into a real fight where punches were aimed to hurt. Within minutes, the pieces of donut were re-distributed and they began to give each other piggy-backs down the road. It was difficult to make sense of what I had seen; apparent child-like immaturity in the extremes of their behaviour, yet an obvious responsibility for their own survival and an input in that of their friends, that I would normally associate with adulthood.

The above is a brief snapshot of the activities and social interactions of street children observable during the research process. It illustrates something of the process termed 'participant observation' that formed the basis of our interpretation of the survey data, as well as showing the kind of questions that were forming in my own mind while collecting quantitative data. At the end of this chapter I describe what I felt to be the important areas of enquiry not encompassed in this study that

formed the foundations of my subsequent research. Before doing so, I will highlight significant findings of our study and will draw out some of the benefits and problems of a survey approach in terms of data analysis.

## 1.4 DEBATING CATEGORIES OF CHILDREN

It is widely accepted that a meaningful comparative study demands maximum homogeneity within groups and qualitative distinctions between them. For this reason, I will discuss the criteria we used to classify membership in each of the four groups of children, and in particular the 'homeless street children'. Diverse means of classifying street children are apparent in the literature and include habitual sleeping place (Veale et al 1993, Campos et al. 1994), value orientation towards home or street life (Bourdillon 1994, Glauser 1990), and whether children were abandoned by family or took the decision themselves to leave home (Aptekar 1989, Felsman 1984). Such variation in criteria, when considered in the light of my earlier observations of the different occupations and living arrangements among Kathmandu's street children, alerted us to the probability that we would not be able to classify 'homeless street children' in any comprehensive way. Indeed, as I have already indicated, our aim was to investigate differences between and within groups, that would in turn contest our own classification.

When we set out to investigate physical well-being, we assumed that we could define our four groups using the criteria of physical and social living conditions. We included the local habitat, the socio-economic position of families and children's position with respect to their families. Thus rural-urban differences in habitat and economic security of the household distinguish the village, urban squatter and urban middle-class children.

Kathmandu's street children have been described in very general terms as those who are seen "roaming around and sleeping on the pavement" (CWIN 1990a:1) While reliance on visible appearance may seem inadequate, these words portray the essence of being a homeless child; daily independence from family members or employers and as a result, living and working on the streets. We therefore used sleeping place as an indicator of homelessness, and in order to make distinctions with squatter children, we asked the question "where did you sleep last night?" Those who did not respond "at home" were classed as homeless street children. But, a significant limitation of this criterion is that it fails to accommodate children's mobility between sleeping places. We risked excluding children whose preceding night at home was a rarity and we did not distinguish between 'homeless'

children who were to some extent dependent on NGO night shelters and junkyards (in which there is varying adult supervision) and those homeless on the street. One option was to use alternative criteria based on children's experiences of departure from the home or on the local term for 'street children'. Nevertheless, we judged these to be more problematic for the following reasons.

Some researchers have adopted Felsman's distinction between 'abandoned' and 'abandoning' children (sometimes termed 'runaways'), because they feel that the extent to which a child directed his actions makes for a different relationship with the street environment and ability to cope with its challenges (Aptekar 1989, Hannsen 1994). This classification is useful in terms of acknowledging children's agency in their departure from home, however it contains the implicit assumption that these 'abandoners' have made a psychological transition to the values of the street and rejected those of the home (Todd 1995:13). Furthermore, as will become evident in this thesis, it fails to consider the effects of living in the city as a 'street child' (*khate*) on self-identity and thus quality of life.

In this study, we also rejected the use of self-definitions using the local term *khate*. We did so because in our initial survey, membership could only have been determined by the question "Are you a *khate*?". Although attractive in terms capturing an individual's sense of self in relation to others, at this stage we, (and I include our Nepali assistants), lacked the knowledge to use this category appropriately. In asking boys the above question, we would have indicated our assumption that *khate* are distinct from other children. However it would not have been clear to our informants whether we based our assumption on psychological, social or physical factors. Moreover, we could not expect a consensus of definition amongst all who would call themselves *khate*. We were also aware of changes in local usage of the term *khate*. While once a term used only amongst the rag-picker boys who coined it, over the last ten years *khate* has entered the public vocabulary and refers to all homeless street children regardless of whether they rag-pick or beg. The advocacy work of local NGOs and the media has been a primary force in making the term common currency and is one that is contested by some boys currently living on the streets (Onta-Bhatta 1996:183-186). In the light of associations made between *khate* and deviance in the public domain, we considered it unfair to ask individuals whether they identified themselves with a 'deviant' group, as well as problematic in terms of truthfulness of responses. In short, our reason for rejecting a definition based on the term *khate* was the indication of a range of constructions of the *khate* identity.

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Our difficulties in finding appropriate criteria to define 'homeless street children' lend support to the argument that the term 'street child' is in fact a social construct. Writers working in diverse cultural contexts have argued that this construction is based upon the dissonance between dominant western notions of an appropriate childhood and the social and physical environment of 'the street' that is perceived to threaten such notions (Aptekar 1988, Ennew 1994b, Swart 1990, Tyler et al 1992). Glauser suggests that one of the reasons we need to conceptualise 'street children' as a category is because conventional western ideas about children's needs, for example a safe and emotionally secure environment epitomised in the 'family home', are plainly at odds with the risks of abuse and other dangers associated with urban spaces that are beyond adult supervision (Glauser 1990:145). As well as concern for children's well-being, the tendency to classify 'street children' is motivated by society's desire to protect its norms of order and the "integrity, tranquility, security and property" of the public (ibid.:146).

By deconstructing the term 'street child', we were forced to consider the possibility that our categorisations were motivated not only by the demands of a comparative study, but by a vested interest in protecting our notions of what children should and should not be doing. However, at the outset we needed workable group definitions in order to proceed with research that would shed further light on alternative criteria by which children may be distinguished. These early attempts to identify workable group definitions provided the basis for my later efforts to pursue the subtle complexities of relationships between the individual life course and connectedness to the 'home' in Nepal.

## 1.5  EXPLORING REASONS FOR LEAVING HOME

The demographic survey included the question "why did you leave home?" and responses were grouped to give a broad indication of the major factors prompting children's departures (see table 3). We further explored the differences in children's home backgrounds through semi-structured interviews. Questions were prepared for both of these in consultation with CWIN staff and our research assistants. The demographic questionnaire was administered alongside the anthropometric survey and, owing to time and coding restrictions, could only ask brief questions relating to children's family context and their current occupations. Large samples from each of the four groups allowed us to perform a statistical analysis in order to look at intra and inter-group differences.

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Table 3. Reasons stated by homeless boys for departure from home
(from Baker et al. 1997:135)

|  | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| ECONOMIC (total) | 30 | 35 |
| No food or money | 7 | 8 |
| Looking for employment | 18 | 21 |
| Was asked to earn by family member | 5 | 6 |
| FAMILY RELATED (total) | 36 | 42 |
| Poor relations with biological relative* | 20 | 23 |
| Poor relations with step-parent* | 11 | 13 |
| Orphaned or "felt alone" | 4 | 5 |
| Illness in the family | 1 | 1 |
| INDEPENDENCE | 20 | 23 |

N = 86 homeless boys
* Neglect, abuse or mere presence of step-parent was reported

The span of responses mirrors those reported in other studies of street children's backgrounds conducted in Nepal (CWIN 1990a CWD 1994), elsewhere in Asia (Chaterjee 1992:23) and in other parts of the world (Martins and Ebrahim1993:265). The fact that over one third of the responses are directly related to economic hardship, plus the likelihood that lack of opportunity at home heightened boys' desire for independence in the city, suggests that economic factors play a significant role in child homelessness. The CWIN report, like those generated in other developing countries, cites poverty—in its economic, political and social complexity—as "the principal reason why children make the street their home" (CWIN 1990:3). Of course, the effects of poverty are not spread evenly amongst Nepal's people, but are structured across geographical area as well as social divisions according to living environment, caste, gender and age. Thus poverty is experienced differently among families within a community and also by the individuals within families. Children of poor families, and more especially girls in Nepal, are widely assumed by the public and in development spheres as being especially vulnerable because they have little influence within the family and are neglected by the state (Sattaur 1993:51, Yogi 1994:20). At the same time, there is growing recognition of the vital contributions children make to the household's livelihood through domestic, agricultural or waged work (see chapter 3). Until recently, research with a quantitative component has rarely focused on children's

working roles and responsibilities that are integral to their relationships with the family and community. A probable reason for the general paucity of research in this area, and the failure of our initial study to address these relationships, is that the survey is an inappropriate tool for the job. As Todd points out, quantification is a process that can destroy meaning because information is lost in coding the open-ended responses to survey questionnaires (Todd 1995:37)[9]. Although coding was done using more extensive information from the semi-structured interviews and thematic drawings, we were unable to fully understand the reasons behind actions taken by children, or relatives on their behalf, in response to long-term or acute poverty.

A second set of questions posed in the survey attempted to connect children's departure from home with socio-economic and cultural factors that were part of their families and communities. Questions were asked about the whereabouts of their home. Responses revealed that only a small minority (16%) of homeless children came from Kathmandu itself, with a similar percentage from within the valley (see table 6 in Baker et al. 1997:141). A significant proportion (43%) came from towns on roads to the Indian border and the remainder (28%) were from rural areas between eight hours and four days travel from Kathmandu (ibid.). The pattern suggests that homelessness is connected to the larger context of rural to urban migration. It also indicated the general increase in travel resulting from recent improvements in transport and communication between the rural and urban areas, and particularly the regular bus services between border towns and the capital. In the light of these findings, and the reportedly large numbers of migrant children working in factories and the service industry in urban areas, I was prompted to pursue an analysis of child homelessness as part of the process of labour migration (see chapter 3).

On the basis of children's surname we were able to compare the ethnic composition of the homeless sample with the squatter and school children in Kathmandu. Ethnicity and caste are linked both to geographical origins and to socio-economic status. Across Nepal's regions, particular ethnic groups predominate. For example, the Tamangs[10] live in much of Central Nepal including Nuwakot district where the

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[9]The contributions of methodological issues raised in this study to the design of my subsequent research are discussed in chapter 2.

[10]Tamangs are of Tibeto-Burman origin. In the 1854 legal code (*Muluki Ain*), the Tamangs, Gurungs, Rais, Limbus, Sherpas and other hill groups, were inserted into a middle position in the Hindu caste structure between the high caste Brahmins and Chettris, and the occupational and untouchable castes (including leatherworkers, blacksmiths and tailors) (Hofer 1979:54).

study village, Salme, is located. The rural boys in our study were all Tamang. We excluded the blacksmiths (low caste Indo-Aryans) due to the small size of their community.

It might seem surprising at first that the ethnic composition of the homeless group shows a closer resemblance to the urban school group than to the poor urban squatters (figure 1). In Nepal, caste and socio-economic status are related, but high caste families without land are found in the squatter areas, and among low caste communities, some families are comparatively wealthy (Johnson et al. 1995:33, Valentin 1996). Hence, while caste cannot be used to indicate socio-economic status in contemporary Nepali society, these results show that the homeless children do not necessarily come from the most destitute sectors of society.

If poverty alone cannot explain child homelessness, it would seem that another major causal factor is the family. Precisely because public opinion often assumes that street children are from 'failed families' (Ennew 1994b:411), researchers are in danger of taking on board normative notions of the 'successful family' when they attempt to untangle the particular prompting factors to children leaving the home. A comparison of the family compositions amongst the four groups of children indicated that homeless children in Nepal are rarely orphans (see figure 2). As shown earlier (table 3), homeless children reported a range of family difficulties including loss of parents, neglect and abuse by family members, that contributed to their departure from home. However, as I will demonstrate in chapter 3, an appreciation of the social and cultural context of childhood and family life in Nepal is necessary to interpret these findings.

In terms of family composition, the distinguishing feature of the homeless children is the presence of step-parents who appear to have influenced the reasons behind a child's departure, as well as the age at which they left home. Children in stepfamilies reported leaving because of abuse, not because of poverty or to acquire independence, and all were aged 10 years or below when they left. Yet the reader will note that conflict and abuse occurs as frequently with biological relatives as with step-parents (table 3). Although there are no official statistics available documenting rates of step-parenting in Nepal, we can safely assume that a large proportion of stepchildren do not experience conflict with their step-parents and remain in the home. In this light, our findings implicate family members as being potentially protective of, or contributory to, a child's homelessness. However, they offer few clues as to the economic and social pressures operating on parents, their efforts to resolve such difficulties and children's understandings of these, nor of the extent to which children regard the decision to leave as their own.

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**SQUATTER**

LOW CASTE 58%

TIBETO- 4%

HIGH CASTE 36%

**SCHOOL**

LOW CASTE 10%

TIBETO-BURMESE 27%

HIGH CASTE 63%

**STREET**

LOW CASTE 16%

TIBETO-BURMESE 40%

HIGH CASTE 44%
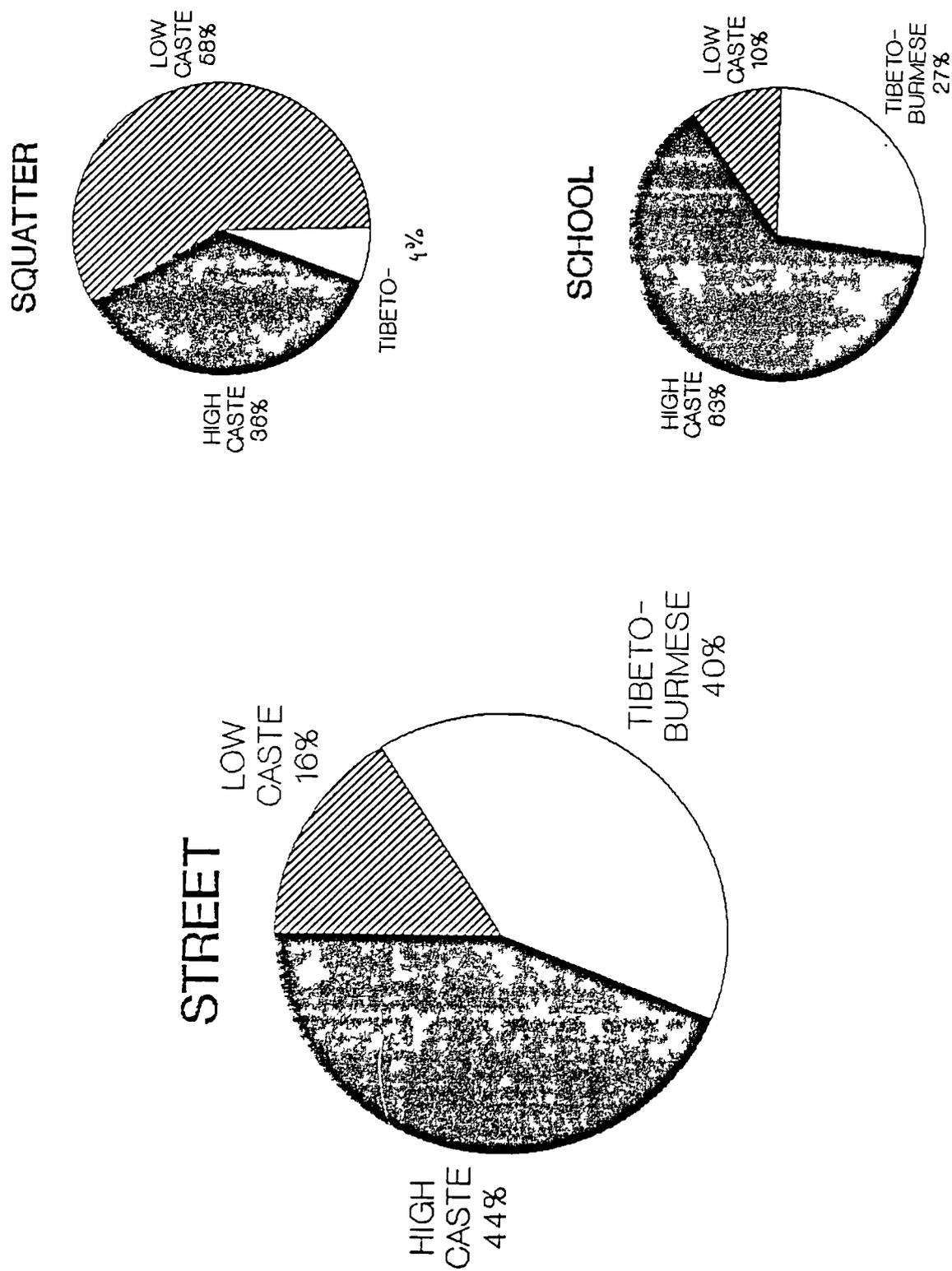
Figure 1. Ethnic composition of three groups of children studied in 1993

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SQUATTER BOYS

HOMELESS BOYS

BOTH PARENTS
84

ONE PARENT
14

STEP PARENT
2

BOTH PARENTS
52

ORPHAN
8

ONE PARENT
17

STEP PARENT
23
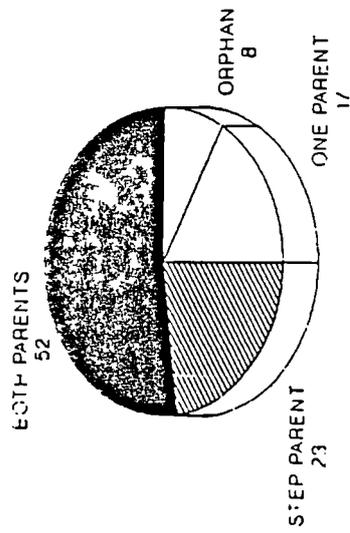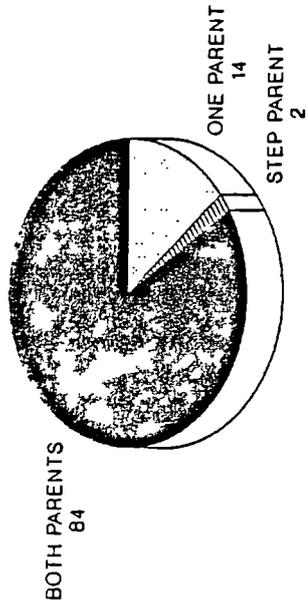
Figure 2. Family composition of homeless and squatter boys studied in 1993

## 1.6 EARNING AND LIVING ON THE STREETS: LINKS WITH HOME?

Our second and third research questions relate to the experiences of being a homeless street child. Prior research in Nepal gave us the impression that, having reached the streets, life for these children is a wholly negative combination of past and present experience; "neglect, abandonment, premature work activities, little or no schooling, sexual exploitation, physical or mental abuse, deliquency, hunger etc." (CWIN 1990:1). Moreover, it was stated that such a situation would lead to "a very high risk of the child's break-up with all contacts with his/her family and community," (ibid). But on what grounds was the link made between the adoption of 'a street lifestyle' and total separation from family members? The frequency and nature of contact with home or family was an obvious area to explore and so we began by asking children when they last visited their home. Almost three quarters of the homeless children reported visiting once or several times per year, often for important religious festivals such as Dasain[11]. Thus, in contrast to Sattaur's assertion that few street children "know the whereabouts of their relatives or guardians", the majority of participants in our study had some contact with home. Others have pointed to the myth that the process of becoming a street-based child necessarily leads to the complete severing of family relations (Ennew 1994a:14, Glauser 1990:141). In our study, relatively infrequent home contact among boys with step-parents and the lack of connections between frequency of visits, daily income or travel time, suggest that family structure and quality of relationships are significant to the type of contact maintained between children and their homes.

In order to find out more about the 'lifestyles' of homeless children and begin to measure their relative success in being homeless, we asked questions about their work and daily income. Rag-picking was the predominant occupation, especially for older children, yielding higher earnings than begging or other jobs (eg washing or guarding vehicles, tempo-conductor, portering). Daily income was evaluated on the basis of children's responses to the question "how much did you earn yesterday?". The answers ranged widely with 41% stating less than 25 rupees (£0.33), the approximate cost of a day's food. At the opposite end of the scale 23%, most of them rag-pickers, reported earning between 50 and 200 rupees (£0.66 – £2.50) per day which is equivalent to or more than daily pay for labour on a construction site.

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[11]Dasain is an important Hindu festival in the month of *Asoj* (late September to early October) when families gather to worship the goddess *Durga* and feast on meat.

Although a large number of children appear to be in a precarious economic position and in danger of going hungry, our initial survey could not document the networks of support used by children, for instance loan arrangements between friends or with employers, and provision by NGO drop-in centres. Nor were we able, at this stage, to look at children's mobility in terms of changes in occupation, social group and living arrangements.

Even after accounting for their connections with the home, homeless street children are usually considered distinct because they are outside the family sphere on a day-to-day basis. However, early observations showed that there are considerable overlaps between the physical surroundings and activities of homeless street and squatter children. Some squatter children rag-pick frequently for their families and many homeless rag-pickers sell their goods, relax with friends and often build small sleeping shelters in junkyards in the squatter settlement. Clearly our comparative analysis needed to take into account these similarities between the groups. Moreover, over time intra-group differences became apparent that challenged the basis on which our comparisons rested and confirmed that boxing children into categories will always be problematic. For example, street children's occupations, especially rag-picking and begging, appeared to make use of 'the streets' at different times and in different ways. Moreover, observation indicated that beggars and rag-pickers have the potential to form meaningful social relationships in a range of environments, but that these might differ in character depending on whether they were frequenting a market area, a tourist spot or a junkyard in the suburban slum.

## 1.7 INDICATORS OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

Conclusions about the effects of street living on children often include assertions such as;"the child's physical, mental and emotional development is hampered and he starts a new street culture which is the mixture of many social problems" (CWIN 1990:1)

Physical health is thought to be endangered by work activities, a lack of shelter, washing facilities or access to medical care, as well as a poor and inconsistent diet. Indeed, it is difficult to refute such assumptions when one can observe skin sores and infected wounds on children's arms, legs and faces. The CWIN study describes a general lack of routine in their eating and sleeping patterns that effects physical and emotional health. Eating whatever "food they can find, beg or steal" that includes leftovers from restaurants and rubbish tips, and sleeping "whenever they feel tired", the image presented is of scavengers wandering without direction or

purpose (CWIN 1990:6,9). In her comparison of street children to "weathercocks", Agnelli promoted the image of street children as passive respondents to environmental circumstances (Agnelli 1986:37). The absence of a guiding force in such portrayals of street children's lives fuels assumptions that they are especially vulnerable to physical harm and exploitation in the absence of adult protection.

We aimed to look behind these myriad perceptions using measures of well-being drawn from biological anthropology. Although 'well-being' undoubtedly relates to quality of life, its component aspects are rarely precisely defined and are prioritised differently across disciplines. I would suggest that there is consensus that 'well-being' includes physical and psychological health. However, the definition only sometimes includes psychosocial elements such as being being able to cope with change, a capability that is related to positive self-esteem and sense of inclusion within a group (see for example Tyler et al. 1992).

It is important to emphasise that 'well-being' was not tightly defined prior to research because we aimed to explore the various aspects of well-being and investigate causal links to the range of home backgrounds of children within the four groups studied. In this regard, our research was experimental in nature. We were testing both the practicalities of implementing what we saw as the appropriate set of methods, and also the feasibility of integrating the results generated.

In order to question widespread assumptions of street children's overall inferior physical well-being, our anthropometric survey recorded the weights, heights and ages of children from all four groups and achieved a measure of health called growth status. It is well recognised that "the most constant and characteristic marker of childhood malnutrition is growth failure" (Mascie-Taylor 1991:56). Thus a child's growth status is an indicator of his/her past, present and future health. Moreover, "poor nutrition, disease, delayed mental and social development, and impaired physical performance have all been linked to inadequate growth" (Todd et al 1996:152). Measurements of growth status are widely used in nutritional surveys because they are straightforward to collect. Details of the field procedure and statistical analysis can be found in two preceding publications (Panter-Brick et al. 1996a, Todd et al. 1996).

Two findings deserve particular attention. First, the urban middle-class school-children achieved the greatest height-for-age (where low scores show chronic under-nutrition) as we had anticipated. The more surprising result was that homeless boys were significantly taller than both the squatter and the village boys (figure 3) (Panter-Brick et al. 1996a).

# FREQUENCY OF STUNTING
## NEPALI 6–14 YEAR OLD BOYS
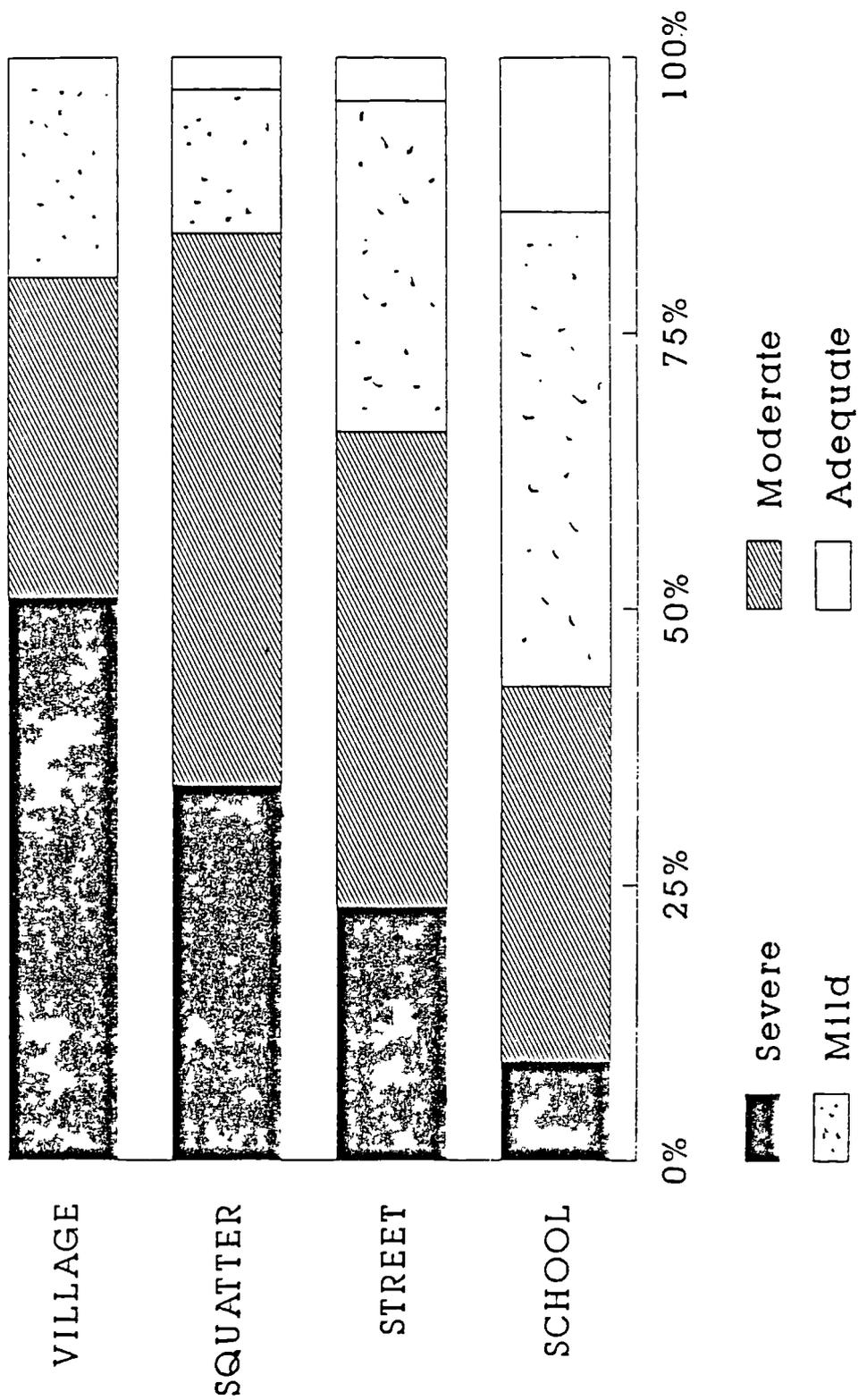


Figure 3. Results of anthropometric surveys conducted in 1993

Several possible explanations were identified for the respective alignment of growth measures for the village, squatter and homeless boys on the basis of triangulation of data from heart-rate monitoring and morbidity surveys (see Panter-Brick 1996a,b,c, Todd 1996). One of these is the lower level of intense physical activity amongst homeless street boys than village boys. Others include the more varied diet and greater access to medical treatment available to homeless street boys than to both village and squatter children[12].

The second notable result was that among the homeless sample there was no evidence of a deterioration of growth status with length of time spent on the streets (which ranged from 1 week to 9 years). Although the data are cross-sectional not longitudinal and should therefore be interpreted with caution, they suggest that homeless children, despite the lack of a home or family, are able to maintain their growth while on the streets (Todd et al. 1996:154). In a comparison of height-for-age and time of arrival on the street, there is some evidence that first-time arrivals are tall to begin with. Moreover, there was little evidence to suggest that our sample was biased towards those doing well on the streets. Given that such results are indicative of a better diet or lower levels of infection in early childhood, they raise the possibility that many currently homeless children come from families who are, or were, relatively economically secure. While the latter results are important in confronting stereotypes about the nutritional status of street children, the fact that homeless, squatter and village boys all had impaired growth relative to the middle class school children, confirms that poverty in any context underlies negative outcomes on children's health. The combination of empirical measures of physical well-being described above accounted for the impact of past and present lifestyle characteristics, but did not include an enquiry into children's perspectives on the effect of illness in their daily lives (a topic I took up in my later research).

In an attempt to measure psychosocial aspects of children's well-being, saliva samples were collected to compare differences between groups in levels of the hormone cortisol[13]. This technique has been developed to provide a biological

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[12] Fitness, as indicated by heart rate, is recognised to be beneficial to physical well-being. However, high activity levels demand more energy expenditure and therefore more energy input in the diet, if children are to sustain normal growth. The greater proportion of children who are short for their age found in the village can be explained by their high activity levels in agricultural work, the relative paucity of protein and nutrients in their diet, and levels of infection.

[13]Cortisol is a steroid hormone produced in the HPA (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocorticol) system that responds to arousal or stress (Worthman and Panter-Brick 1996:6).

measure of psychosocial stress and is recent to child health studies (Flinn 1995:854). Differences in cortisol levels between groups of children have been analysed (see Worthman and Panter-Brick 1996), however two significant problem areas remain in this investigation. The first is in controlling for further factors that raise cortisol levels namely diurnal variation, food consumption, time since waking and temperament (ibid.:7). The second problem lies corrolating the physiological arousal shown in cortisol levels with a notion of 'stress' meaningful to Nepali children. Stress is a problematic concept and especially so when applied cross-culturally. It is not possible to translate the term directly to Nepali and the nearest equivalents used by children, namely 'worry' (*pir*) or 'weakness' (*kamjori*), are closely connected to a person's position within social network of family or friends, rather than particular events occurring to the individual. It is for this reason, that I decided not to pursue an analysis of 'stress' as conceived in Nepal, but rather to focus on the social relationships in which homeless children are engaged and their evaluations of the support obtained from these. In the light of widespread assumptions of the poor mental health of street children in Kathmandu (shown for example in the desire for counselling training amongst NGO staff) and conflicting evidence from other contexts (Felsman 1984:13, Aptekar 1989), I was interested to investigate factors that contributed to homeless children's inclusion in various 'street settings' and to their self-esteem.

## 1.8 CONTEXTUALISING RESULTS: DEMANDS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

At the beginning of this chapter I drew attention to the common association between child homelessness and vulnerability. Evidently, the comparative approach used in the research described above allowed us to further understand homeless children's backgrounds and the effects of street living, as indicated by the variables we chose to measure. The outcome has been to challenge the assumption that a homeless lifestyle is qualitatively distinct from the lifestyles of other Nepali children and that it has purely negative effects on physical and psychosocial well-being. A further outcome of the survey approach was to raise a number of important questions that were beyond the scope of our research at that time. Many of these questions demanded an appreciation of the particular social and cultural context, and analytical space for the subjective interpretation of becoming and being homeless given by children. For these reasons I planned a further year's research grounded in ethnographic enquiry.

## 1.9 Methodological limitations:
## A critique of our survey approach

The ability of surveys to "reveal the tips of many icebergs" is both a strength and a weakness (Clifford 1997:244). The limitation of the surveys used in our study were that they could not account for the wider socio-economic processes and cultural factors involved in children's departure from home and their lifestyle on the streets. Their shortcomings prompted me to investigate children's participation in rural to urban migration as well as cultural factors influencing the socialisation of Nepali children within their families and the wider community.

I alluded earlier to the importance of cultural norms of childhood in constructing the image of 'the street child'. The subject of children's work is one which has provoked much recent debate, and one in which there appear to be ambivalent social norms. For example, Sattaur reports that "survival in the streets is a full time job" for street children, and describes the long hours they work in menial jobs for very low pay (Sattaur 1993:22). However an alternative portrayal of the street child is apparent in CWIN's summary of "bitter facts" about the street children of Kathmandu:

> Most children do not labour hard like other working children. They are influenced by (the) bad street atmosphere and have learnt all types of bad habit (CWIN 1990:preface)

Here the suggestion is that homeless street children have taken a soft option which is in some way morally questionable. In our initial study and in many other reports written about street children, too little attention is paid to the social context of children's work and its significance for them as individuals and as family members. Our research indicated that the search for work was a frequent reason to leave home in the village and travel to the city. What we could not tell was the extent to which boys were working and earning for their family, and thus the significance of 'a good job' as a connection with home for those living in the city. It was my impression that by exploring ideas and values connected with certain occupations, and with street living, a clearer picture of children's relationship with 'home' once living on the street would emerge.

Two further shortcomings of our comparative survey are related to the level of analysis. The first was an omission of the macro-level factors influencing children's well-being in the urban and rural environments investigated. We were therefore unable to account for the larger social processes that force families and children to take certain decisions relating to residence, work and schooling. The second relates to our focus on differences between groups of children, which prevented an

appreciation of the diversity within each group. We were therefore unable to investigate children's responses to being known as *khate* and thereby ascertain what being homeless means to individual children. In addition to pursuing this substantive question, I strove to address a number of ethical concerns centred around issues of consent and co-operation in my subsequent research (see appendix II). My view was that the ethical problems encountered in the first study demanded methodological changes that would address the social and political context of street children's daily lives as well as those who work with them. The next chapter documents this development in the light of the questions emerging from the study described above and the theoretical perspective chosen.

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# CHAPTER 2
## GROUNDING MY RESEARCH

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The comparative study described in chapter 1 revealed a great deal about the experiences of children living in different settings in Nepal. It also highlighted gaps in my understanding that prevented me from fully appreciating the significance of these experiences to children currently based on the streets. My intentions for subsequent research could, in some ways, be described as back-pedalling; to study children's everyday experiences and their own interpretations of these, as well as perceptions of others in Nepal that collectively define 'street children'. I did not set out to repeat previous enquiries because these had fulfilled their purpose, generating information on children's backgrounds and lifestyles using a range of variables. In the next phase of research, I aimed to pursue complementary approaches that would yield substantive information concerning the context of homelessness amongst children in Nepal. In addition to asking what being homeless on the streets means for children here and now, I was interested in its consequences for their futures.

This chapter sets out the framework upon which my research was built. I describe the process of evaluation of the former study which enabled me to define my research objectives and approach. The theoretical perspectives which informed my research design are outlined prior to a description of the methods employed. I draw attention to some critical ethical and theoretical issues that arose during the course of research and subsequent data analysis.

## 2.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, use of the survey method during the 1993 comparative study relied on the distinctiveness of the four groups of children. It was found that the four groups were sufficiently homogenous, according to certain demographic variables, to support an analysis of between group differences. While the categories used were not considered to be rigid, the methods employed in this

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study were clearly inappropriate for close study of similarities and differences within groups of homeless, squatter, urban middle-class and rural children.

Initial analysis of the semi-structured interviews showed that individual children move between the categories assigned (see appendix IV). For example, some squatter boys attend a private school and their lifestyles resemble those of middle-class school boys. Others, however, rag-pick daily for their families and are friends with homeless street boys, meaning that they spend longer periods of time outside the home relative to other squatter children, and may potentially move out to become 'homeless'. Amongst the so-called homeless children, there are individuals who visit home regularly and thus may consider themselves part of the family although they are not co-resident.

Clearly one of the limitations of an approach which deals solely with externally imposed categories is that it failed to encompass children's subjective experiences. Anthropologists have drawn on linguistic concepts to distinguish between experiential and analytical categories, distinguishing these as emic and etic respectively (Seymour-Smith 1990:92)[1]. To my mind, there were two powerful reasons to attempt an emic perspective on street living for children in Kathmandu. The first was to examine boys' subjective understandings of their past and present experiences which had hitherto not been attempted. The second was to ascertain the impact of popular concepts relating to children's activities and living environment on these boys' understandings of their lifestyles, and by association, themselves as persons. In other words, I wanted to probe the meaning of khate, the local term for children living on the streets, and question the extent to which this definition and all its connotations influence their self-image and actions. Before I outline the methodology used to pursue such an enquiry, I explain the links between the outcomes of the initial study and the issues I judged to be pertinent to my impending research.

Having found out that street living does not especially hinder Nepali children's physical growth, I was curious to know what its effects are on the social experience of childhood and of growing into adulthood. Our previous study indicated that

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[1] Theoreticians vary in their use of emic and etic as forms of analysis (Crane and Angrosino 1992:122). Here, an etic analysis is one in which data are described according to the observer's criteria and classification, whereas an emic analysis aims to bring out indigenous meanings and categories. Thus an emic analysis must be verified against opinions of those people under study as opposed to the wider scientific community (Silverman 1977:9). However, it should be pointed out that even the most emically oriented study necessarily has an etic component in order to communicate anthropological knowledge to readers from the writer's community.

street children shared the common experiences of work at an early age and inconsistent school attendance with their counterparts in the village and city squatter settlement. A further similarity was reflected in the extent to which village and squatter children had travelled between rural and urban areas, in the company of relatives or friends. The principle distinguishing features of the homeless group revealed in the demographic survey were a higher proportion of step-parents, prior conflict within the family, and current economic independence of the family. These findings suggested significant variation between homeless children's physical, economic and even emotional connectedness with their homes and families. I therefore set out to question the significance of a period of homelessness during childhood within generalised notions of the life course in Nepal. My task was to determine the characteristics of 'normal' Nepali childhoods and then ask particular questions including:

* How does living on the streets on a day-to-day basis affect boys' family affiliation and interaction with members of the urban community?

* What kind of peer relationships develop on the street and what kind of support do they offer children?

* What are the problems experienced when making the transition from childhood to adulthood within street-based social networks?

The above questions are enquiries about the lived experiences of street children in Nepal. They pertain to the nature of *khate* experience in relation to that of other poor Nepali children. When investigating at the level of street children's experiences, my aim was to prioritise their perspectives as opposed to those of adults who could undoubtedly provide ready and often stereotypical answers to these questions.

At the outset of this chapter I queried the effects of categorisation as *khate* on individual children, thereby alerting the reader to a second level of investigation; that of social identity. The critical issue here is the role of public opinion in construing *khate* as a group with a shared identity. Should this identity involve some form of social stigma (as was indicated in the comparative study), what part does this play in children's everyday lives? The effect on individuals of prevailing attitudes with the potential to marginalise street children can only be fully understood in the context of the structural features of Nepali society. Thus an analysis of the way in which institutionalised social relations function to privilege certain groups and marginalise others in economic and political terms, must run

alongside an enquiry into dominant attitudes and values pertaining to street children.

The previous study indicated that in Nepal, as elsewhere, values that guide ideas about what is and is not acceptable in children's lives, position street children as a group who need attention. It was my intention to explore the sources of such values and the particular kinds of attention they prescribed for street children. Hence my first point of investigation was the spectrum of ideas about childhood and children's needs that are found amongst Nepali communities. I suspected that Nepal's ethnic and religious diversity would make any definition of 'a Nepali childhood' problematic (see chapter 3), as would the intermingling of notions of a 'good' childhood originating outside Nepal. Much of the recent sociological literature points to the imposition of Northern-informed[2] developmental psychology that has no space for cultural relativism in evaluating maturation or defining children's needs and policies to address these (Bar-On 1997:71, Woodhead 1997b:8). The impression gained is that, as advocacy and interventions for street children have increased, so has the tenacity of the Northern cultural values upon which they are based. In order to assess the role of such values in Nepal, it was necessary to research the historical development of action for street children (see chapter 5).

Whatever their cultural origins, there is a common tension evident in ideas about childhood. For, while asserting forms of structural distinction between children and mainstream adult society, those defining 'child' and 'adult' must recognise that children are in the process of maturing into that very society. As Qvortrup reminds us, the important point here is that although children grow up, "childhood itself does not disappear but remains a social form" (Qvortrup 1995:14). Just as children pose a particular theoretical challenge to social scientists who attempt to theorise their involvement in social relationships, street children potentially present a conundrum to those who try to improve their situation. For, if street children's actions are considered to be detrimental to their own well-being, evidence that they are coping in some way with street living raises questions about the value judgements that are applied to their behaviour. To address these questions, I set out to investigate the extent to which factors other than their identity as 'children' were sources of concern to members of the public.

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[2] In order to reflect the wider political context and follow current convention, I use the North-South distinction as opposed to that between Western and non-Western societies.

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In summary, I draw attention to the main issues relevant to the two levels of my enquiry. The first level focuses on children's experience and follows up issues that were significant to boys interviewed during the initial study. These included their circumstances of departure from home, relationships formed on the street, contact with relatives, means of earning and opportunities to leave the street. The focus of the second level, namely self and group identities, demanded a closer look at how street children are viewed within wider society. Thus, it was important to look at attitudes towards their occupations, mobility, and apparent dislocation from conventional family life. Each of these then required contextualising within prevailing ideas about childhood and maturation. The link between these two levels of enquiry lies in the potential for an individual child's quality of life on the street and his understanding of self, to be as much influenced by the reactions of those around him as by the idiosyncrasies of his past.

## 2.2 DESIGNING THE METHODOLOGY

Much recent social research on children analyses the nature of their participation in society and has asserted children's status as competent social agents in the world around them (Alderson 1994, Hetherington 1991, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998, James and Prout 1990, Mayall 1994, Qvortrup et al. 1994). A significant benefit of this approach has been to shift the focus from the study of childhood as a preparatory phase for adulthood to children's actual social and economic participation in their communities. Yet what does this shift mean for the study of street children who are generally travelling, earning and living more independently from their families than children who have been studied in Northern research settings?[3]

The first question raised by this change of perspective is who should participate in research about being a 'street child'. Is it appropriate to use legal definitions of children or to attempt to identify culturally meaningful distinctions between childhood and adulthood? The second question concerns differences in children's cognitive abilities according to their age. The 'adult' lifestyles of street children, so often remarked upon by the public and in the media, suggest that qualitative differences between children's and adults' capabilities cannot be assumed. Yet can the accounts of eleven year olds be analysed in the same way as those of seventeen

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[3]Major contributions to understanding children in societies in the South include Reynolds' (1991) study of children's work and social roles in the Zambezi Valley and Nieuwenhuys' (1994) ethnography of children's social and economic worlds in South India.

year olds? In the following paragraphs I explain the issues that surround these two questions and the steps I took to resolve them.

## 2.2.1 Defining 'children'

The frequency with which friends in Britain ask me how old the Nepali street children are illustrates that chronological age is an important marker of maturation and development in the North. The 1993 study also placed importance on chronological age in an effort to compare like with like and to document some of the physical effects of street living. By contrast, of those boys who did not know exactly how old they were, none regarded this as problematic. The indication they gave was that chronological age has little significance in daily life on the streets. For, although the 1992 Children's Act prohibits the employment of children below 14 years and demands special protection for those between 14 and 16 years, this law has not been enforced in junkyards or other informal sectors where *khate* boys work.

As has been documented for street children elsewhere, the problems for *khate* lie in becoming adult-like rather than in age *per se* (Aptekar 1988:78). The arbitrariness of age boundaries has been noted by psychologists (see LeVine 1998:103) and anthropologists (Caputo 1995:35), and there is an increasing awareness across the social sciences of cross-cultural variation in markers of maturity and delineation of stages in the life-course (see chapter 3). Those who have studied the social construction of childhoods in a variety of historical and cultural contexts show how pervasive ideas about children's capabilities and duties function to subordinate them to adults (see Hockey and James 1993, Chaput Waksler 1991, Qvorturp et al. 1994). Where these are under challenge, as in the case of street children (see chapter 1), and society reinforces certain rules of conduct for 'children' and 'adults', we see that social constructions of youth and age arise from "the struggle between the young and the old" (Bourdieu 1993:95).

Due to my interest in the process of arriving in, living on and moving away from the streets, I did not use age as a criteria for participation. Consequently, I included 'boys' aged between 8 and 24 years, the majority of whom were between 11 and 17 years old. In using the term 'boys' throughout the thesis, I am not suggesting that all these individuals are children. Rather, I follow common usage of the term *khate* to refer to those who are young and considered 'pre-adult' (legally or culturally), who engage in certain street activities and are apparently disconnected from their

families[4]. Interestingly, the *khate* also use terms such as 'the boys' (*ketaharu*) and 'friend/mate' (*sathi/yaar*) without any apparent upper age limit. The definition *khate* is based on lifestyle factors which form a structural distinction between *khate* and fully social adults. As will become clear in chapter 6, the dilemmas of older *khate* regarding changes in occupation and way of life, attest to the fact that *khate* is normatively an identity associated with childhood.

## 2.2.2 CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE ABILITIES

In arguing for cultural rather than developmental definitions of 'children', I am not suggesting that the relative ages of those about whom I am writing are insignificant. Developmental psychologists point out that children's cognitive abilities develop with age, although research suggests these are largely fully functional at much younger ages than was previously thought. For example, there is evidence of interpersonal sensitivity and strategic manipulation of language amongst five year old Japanese children in play, that is attributed to maternal instruction of two year olds to avoid confrontational language (Kelly 1989 and Clancy 1986 in LeVine 1998:124). An important question in research that relies on the accounts of children about past events, is whether they understand that others may give a different account of the same events. On the basis of his research on children's play, Denzin claims that very young children "attach different meanings and interpretations to self, other and object" as well as "how to form, break and challenge social relationships" (1977:166). Such findings support Bruner's point that it is not cognitive abilities that hinder children from taking the perspectives of others, but their understanding of the situation in which they are operating (Bruner 1987:93). It is important to remember that young children have not had as much time as older children to accumulate experiences which can be drawn upon to help them cope in less familiar surroundings. This point has a bearing on the analysis of children's narratives and is one that I shall return to in a later section of this chapter.

In adopting a perspective that endeavours to place Nepali children within their cultural context and to account for individual life histories, it is vital to attend to their position within the wider social structure. It was important to ask about the forms of status difference that exist between children and adults within Nepal's various ethnic groups (see chapter 3). In addition, I needed a research framework

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[4]Adults who rag-pick (for example squatter parents or lone male vagrants) are described as doing *khate* work, but the identity *khate* is reserved for independent, or 'street', children.

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that could encompass general lines of difference within Nepali society that impinge on children's lives, for example gender, caste, wealth and education.

### 2.2.3 POVERTY AND CHILDREN

Reflecting on the need to place Nepal's street children within the larger social structure, I found it useful to broaden my perspective and view them as individuals experiencing and responding to poverty in its widest sense. By poverty, I mean a range of physical, social and intrapersonal factors that negatively affect well-being. For Chambers, these can be thought of as distinct but highly inter-related "dimensions of deprivation" that allow an analysis of the particular constraints faced by poor people in different settings (1995:18). In identifying nine dimensions of deprivation, Chambers offers a perspective on poverty that includes social inferiority, powerlessness and humiliation (ibid.:21-22). The first of these encompasses socially defined differences based on gender, caste and age, that were clearly important to my analysis. I was most interested, however, in the inclusion of powerlessness (defined as lack of influence due in part to dispersal and an inability to organise) and humiliation (referring to dependence and an absence of self-respect), because these opened up the possibility of analysing the social identity ascribed to *khate*. An important challenge was to identify how the label given by society affected children's livelihoods. For example, was it one that facilitated or hindered their access to support on the streets? To what extent do street children influence their public image and how does this affect their dependence on others? These questions were critical to my analysis of boys' experiences of material poverty in the city streets and of the label 'street children' assigned to them. To pursue them, I needed to relate the economic, political and value-oriented constraints imposed on children by wider society and their responses to these.

The work of Oscar Lewis in the 1960s provoked much debate amongst social scientists about the relative contributions of the social structure and cultural response to the experience of poverty. In identifying and describing a 'culture of poverty', Lewis proposed that the responses of the poor to economic hardship and social stigma are repeated across cultures and become part of the socialisation process which reinforces survival, acceptance and resignation (1966). His analysis has been criticised for locating "the fundamental problem of the poor in their learned behaviour and values that need to be fixed"; a deterministic viewpoint that implicitly places blame on the poor for their circumstances (Goode and Eames 1996:409). Emphasis has been given to the support street children extend to one another within friendship groups, which in Johannesburg were found to have "set

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modes of organisation and distinct norms of behaviour" (Boyden and Holden 1991:64 reporting Swart 1989). Although such reports correctly recognise children's coping strategies, they risk implying that behaviour described as 'street culture' (see for example Sattaur 1993:21), is an expression of a 'sub-culture' in which children reject the dominant values of their society. Interestingly, Swart's analysis of drawings done by street children in Johannesburg showed that their value orientations did not differ from those of wider society, thus disproving public perceptions (Swart 1990).

In my view, public preconceptions of value differences amongst street children mirror Lewis' cultural determinism because they suggest that children marginalised by society have *chosen* this position. I was deeply uncomfortable with a perspective that viewed children's decisions to work and live on the street, as indicative of their choice to live outside mainstream society. The issue of choice versus force of circumstance underlies the distinction between 'abandoning' and 'abandoned' street children (see chapter 1), which is found to be overly generalised when applied to Nepali boys' reports of their departures from home (Baker and Panter-Brick, in preparation). To perceive children as having either 'chosen' or been 'forced into' street living risks neglecting the various aspects of poverty, including those defined above that relate to powerlessness, social identity and self-image.

Representations of street children pervade the public and policy discourse in Nepal as they do in most other developing countries. I therefore needed to be able to account for the impact of these images on the lives of my research subjects, without obscuring the fact that they remain external to the individuals themselves, whose personal experiences might contradict some of the dominant imagery. As Goffman warned, the "natural history of a category of persons with a stigma must be clearly distinguished from the natural history of the stigma itself - the history of the origins, spread, and decline of the capacity of an attribute to serve as a stigma in a particular society" (1968:45). In view of earlier indications of common usage and nuances in meaning of the term *khate*, I could not presuppose that being labelled so was necessarily the most significant factor in these children's lives. Thus, while representations associated with their presence on the street remain an important level of enquiry, I needed to begin by considering the formation of children's identities through their relationships with those around them. In other words, I was interested in finding out about relationships in which children have a role as provider or recipient of material or emotional support.

Such relationships begin in the home community amongst family and neighbours. Here, children first learn through observation and participation about a range of

social roles and about what is expected of them as members of their family and their neighbourhood. In Nepal, boys learn what is expected of them as sons, brothers and friends through their participation in the household and community economy. To study the particulars of their social identities, I therefore needed to explore notions of childhood, maturation and family membership that exist within Nepal and relate these to the demands placed on poor families (see chapter 3). Sociological studies of Nepal and other South Asian societies have emphasised the value placed upon interdependence within the family and community, and the force of these relationships in structuring society (Dumont 1970, Bista 1991, Stone 1989). These analyses alerted me to the potential differences between Nepali notions of personhood and those originating in the North that have informed much of the literature on street children. At the outset of my research I envisaged that notions of personhood and interdependence would be significant to my analysis of children's early experiences as family members and their potential to maintain connections with the family once they are living away from home. However, it was only through analysis of social interaction in the city that I learnt how pervasive these notions are within the relationships boys create in various work and 'street' settings.

At this stage, I wish only to highlight the significance of street children's past experiences in the home, specifically with respect to family and friends, in forming their self-image and social identities. It seemed logical to assume that a child's perspective on his departure, as well as those of members of his community, would differ depending whether it was prompted by conflict within the family, the encouragement of friends or the search for work. A boy's self image may change as he experiences the new social arena of the city, but his identity within the home community may remain unaffected. Potentially, therefore, 'going home' could involve the reconciliation of past identities with those formed in the city amongst peers, employers and others with whom children have made ties.

Given that "all history is inevitably the present projected on the past", we can expect that the current experiences of children have influenced their accounts of the past (Gagnon 1981:52). Thus I could anticipate that boys' understandings of the reasons they left home and became street children are influenced by their more recent experiences on the streets, in employment and in NGO centres. What is more, despite anticipating a wide range of experiences amongst street children, I envisaged being able to identify some commonalities that would indicate their inclusion in some social arenas and exclusion from others. To this end, I planned to explore boys' friendships and their rapport with others in places where they work, the staff of NGO centres, the police and members of the general public.

My hypothesis was that the lines of inclusion and exclusion that function in Nepali society, as expressed in the attitudes and actions of others, are critical in forming a street boy's social identity and self-image. It was nevertheless important to appreciate that children interact with many different people who contribute in different ways to their understandings of who they are and the opportunities open to them. The previous comparative study alerted me to the range of city locations used by street children, but did not allow full exploration of the social interaction within these. I was aware that an investigation of relationships amongst children and with others in these locations was crucial to my analysis of the kinds of support available to them in day-to-day living and for their longer term prospects. I needed to know whether participation in these settings involved a learning process that distinguished newcomers from experts. Following Lave and Wenger's concept of learning as situated in particular social contexts, I sought to understand how newcomers learnt the practical skills needed in each setting and how to manage social relationships to their advantage (Lave and Wenger 1991:53).

## 2.3  METHODS, ANALYSIS AND RESEARCHER RESPONSIBILITIES

It was my intention to identify the significant people in street boys' lives and to understand how these relationships interconnected. Anthropologists advocate ethnography as the means of ascertaining how a particular group of people are linked into the wider social fabric. Ethnography is a descriptive exercise and cannot claim objectivity but, claims Peacock, "through its portrayals and interpretations it can communicate human truths" (1986:84). At the outset of research I adopted this approach as one which would immerse me in the complexity of street children's lives. I needed to employ this method in order to illuminate the meanings of home, work, family, childhood, the street and satisfaction in life, according to street boys and those involved in their lives.

The obvious route to take was to become personally involved in social interaction in places frequented by street children. Thus my research was grounded in the involving process of "engaged learning" (Carrithers 1992:147), commonly known amongst social scientists as participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, Lofland and Lofland 1984, Armstrong 1993). The point made by those who have adopted this method is that participation is always active and hence inherently political. As explained below, engagement with my subjects' lives meant playing a number of roles and accepting accountability within these. Many of my responsibilities to boys, NGO staff and other research participants were on the level of everyday concerns. They were about whether or not to pay for boys' food when I

met them on the street, how much to engage with them in discussions criticising NGO work, and where the limits lay to my own capacity to help boys improve their quality of life. The difficulty of fulfilling multiple obligations often made me anxious, yet it was this process that taught me the most about street children's lives.

The far greater challenge is to respond responsibly to the interest expressed by others in academic and policy circles in the UK. If my analysis is to fulfil obligations to individuals and to the collective effort to improve children's livelihoods, then it has to attempt as accurate a representation as I am able to produce of the particulars of Nepali children's lives. Given that this is the objective of my ethnography, the rest of this chapter explains how I collected and analysed the information on which it is based.

### 2.3.1   ENGAGING WITH STREET LIFE

For ten months I spent the bulk of my day (and parts of the night) moving between the junkyards where rag-picking children sell their scrap, market places and streets in central Kathmandu, NGO centres that offer services to street children, schools attended by ex-street children and various forums established to discuss policy and programming for street children (for example UNICEF workshops and meetings of the umbrella organisation CAR-NG). On several occasions I was privileged to be invited by children (currently or previously based on the streets), to travel to their family homes. Like the children I was studying, I was initially very mobile and gained a broad overview of their environments. My decision to invest more time and energy in certain sites was based on a desire to understand what it was like to live and work in these settings, as well as indications that boys did not welcome my presence in certain places (including video parlours and the streets in Thamel)[5] The places I chose were Durbar Square, an open plaza near the city centre where between five and twenty boys beg and sleep; a junkyard in Kohiti squatter settlement which is the source of income for about twenty rag-picker boys and young men, and an NGO centre[6] frequented by street children run by CWIN (see

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[5] On two occasions I visited one of the illegal establishments that show videos all night for 10 rupees and are popular with street boys. Although not hostile, the owners and the children were disconcerted by my presence and I decided not to visit again. As explained in chapter 4, Thamel is the hub of tourist activities and a large group of boys beg in the area. My decision not to research there on a daily basis arose from complaints by some boys about the 'hassle' they receive from researchers and journalists.

[6] Although the in-depth study was carried out at the CWIN centre, I spent considerable time at other NGOs drop-in centres and education projects for street children (for example *Bal Kendra* run by CWS).

map 2 in appendix II). I also spent time with eight boys currently attending boarding school who were living on the streets during the 1993 research period.

Over time, my role in each place evolved from a provider of bicycle rides, snacks, access to the hospital and an attentive ear, to one of liaison between boys' sources of support and a potential means of leaving the streets (see chapters 4 and 6). Understandably, as a foreigner and an adult who was known amongst the street boys to have spent time working with CWIN, I was expected to provide various services. This role as facilitator in boys' efforts to leave the streets evolved while I was teaching in non-formal education classes at the two NGO centres mentioned above, and over the course of an apprenticeship scheme in motorcycle mechanics that I co-ordinated for older rag-pickers based in Kohiti junkyard (see chapter 6).

My primary motivation for getting involved in 'programme work' designed to enable children to leave the streets (i.e. the classes and apprenticeship scheme), was to experience first hand the range of expectations held by parties involved and identify factors preventing their realisation. Participation taught me what no amount of observation could have done, and enabled me to discern patterns within the social interaction amongst children and programme workers. Upon gaining a sense of congruence in these patterns of behaviour, I aimed to interpret their meaning from the point of view of the individuals involved. To achieve this aim, I required research techniques that gave boys known as *khate* the authority to define how the world works and issues that were important in their lives. To do so successfully, I judged it necessary to establish good rapport with the children based in the settings listed above. Once this was achieved, I conducted informal interviews and open discussions that covered subjects such as work and travel experiences[7], contact with relatives, the up-coming election and national festival, the significance of caste in daily life, future aspirations and the work of NGOs. My intention was to emulate the modes of ordinary communication amongst boys in order to maximise the participation of those consenting to involvement. We sat around the fire where boys gather to warm their hands in the junkyard and in Durbar Square, huddled high up on temple steps so that we were slightly removed from the bustle below[8].

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[7]To ground this enquiry, I turned to ethnographic accounts of childhood amongst a number of Nepal's ethnic groups and focused more intensively on the experiences of rural children living at home with their families using data gathered in Salme village (1993) and Baglung district (1996) (see chapter 3).

[8]Having practised taping themselves, boys were unperturbed by the recorder's presence and only occasionally did the curiosity of onlookers force us to stop. Immediately after the discussion I noted factors in the group dynamics that affected the type or extent of individual contributions. A total of 20 discussions were carried out amongst street and

As well as attempting to conduct the research in a place and format familiar to the children, I also encouraged them to define and raise issues relevant to their lives. The general interests and concerns that emerged during discussions were built into informal interviews, some of which were a series of chats which I then recorded in my journal. I also sought the more direct involvement of one of the ex-street boys whom I first met in 1992 and who is now at school. Kumar's ambition was to become an NGO worker and he was therefore keen to develop his research skills. We jointly facilitated discussions with begging boys in Durbar Square and he followed these up with pair and individual interviews (plate 2.1).

Kumar had an easy rapport with the current street boys and asked a number of questions that he saw as relevant to street life but had not occurred to me. However, I was initially disappointed by the structured format of his interviews, which perhaps reflect his experience of NGO research and record taking. Although I wanted to suggest additional topics as well as allowing his interviewee greater scope to tell stories, my primary concern was to respect his identification of significant aspects of *khate* experience. Although we reached a consensus on our objectives and respective strengths in different research roles, there were ethical issues regarding confidentiality and this boy's protection that remained unresolved[9]

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ex-street boys; 11 in two junkyards, 5 in two NGO centres, 3 in Durbar Square and 1 in the boarding school. The numbers of participants varied between 4 and 9, and the length of recorded discussions ranged from 20 to 50 minutes. To continue the comparative analysis, 4 discussions were undertaken with a group of young people living in a squatter settlement in central Kathmandu in collaboration with Karen Valentin. Participants were well known to us via English conversation coaching and Valentin's period of research in this community.

[9] These two ethical points are discussed in detail in a forthcoming publication (Baker and Hinton in press) and I elaborate briefly here. Although Kumar and I agreed that no information imparted by our research participants should be passed on, I clearly could not guarantee them absolute confidentiality. The fact that Kumar is known by many of the current street boys laid him open to mockery and coercion. On occasion I heard street boys teasing Kumar for having become *'thulo'* ('big' in terms of status) and although these seemed to wash over him, I felt responsible for protecting him in whatever way I could.

Plate 2.1 Research techniques



Kumar, an ex-street boy, conducting a pair interview with two street boys who beg in the city centre. The third boy (standing) asked if he too could be interviewed.



Boys living in the CWIN centre and the researcher prepare a scene for the video drama.

## 2.3.2 STREET CHILDREN AND HEALTH ISSUES

The techniques described above were suitable for identifying a broad range of issues pertinent to street children's lives and the problems they face on a daily basis. However they could not document the nature and degree of support available to them 'on the street'. The previous study indicated that children's growth status does not deteriorate with time spent on the streets, but did not include questions about children's sexual health, addiction to drugs, alcohol or cigarettes, nor did it involve any clinical examinations. Significant health risks for children living on Kathmandu's streets were identified in a study contracted by UNICEF (Azad 1995). However, it should be pointed out that this study did not use a control group and concentrated on boys who beg in Thamel. Furthermore, an interesting discrepancy emerged in the results of two measures of the level of infections suffered by the groups of children studied in 1993. The first measure was based on a questionnaire in which boys were asked whether they were ill and if so, what was the matter. Once we had grouped their complaints into 8 categories, we saw that the 'homeless' street children reported the highest number of illnesses, followed by the squatter, school and village children in that order (Panter-Brick et al. 1996:449). However, the second measure, namely blood spot analyses of responses to infection, suggested a much higher infective load amongst the village children than the homeless, squatter and school children (Panter-Brick et al.1996c). Possible explanations for this discrepancy included significant under-reporting of illness by village children, some over-reporting by the street children and/or better treatment facilities available to all the urban groups than the rural children.

Given this deficiency of data, I wanted to gain a better understanding of the health complaints distinguished by street boys themselves and the actions they take to address these. I therefore designed a research technique adapted from the collection of methods termed PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) (see chapter 4 and Baker 1996 a+b). The technique developed was based on discussions with groups of boys (three from street locations and one from the squatter settlement) in which they identified then ranked their illnesses and the treatments they sought using diagrams and simple matrices on large sheets of paper (see appendix III).

For further information on the kinds of social support available to and used by street boys, I conducted 32 structured interviews that were designed to identify relationships active on the streets that involve issues of care, control, respect and conflict. Responses to a series of questions pertaining to real life situations

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indicated persons who provide support, as well as the extent to which so-called 'needs' are fulfilled through an individual's street-based social network (see appendix III for question schedule)[10]. It was anticipated that these more formal styles of interviewing would indicate where street-based children participate in social relationships that benefit their well-being, and where there are barriers preventing them from doing so. Of course, an individual can be excluded from social interaction for a variety of reasons, some of which are related to personality and others to a person's structural position vis-à-vis those around them. The latter relates to my second level of analysis, namely the role of public opinion in determining children's self and social identities.

### 2.3.3 NARRATIVES OF STREET LIFE

In order to gain a clearer picture of children's own understanding of the distinctiveness of being 'a street child' (*khate*), and its effects on daily living, I thought it necessary to explore non-verbal modes of communication and expression. In collaboration with Nepali and British colleagues, I investigated the potential of video work to enable boys to define a story line and its style of presentation[11]. When asked what they would like to depict on a video, boys living in the CWIN centre chose to compare 'life on the streets' and 'life in the centre'. Over a ten day period, preparation of short dramas depicting early morning rag-picking, encounters with the police, the sale of scrap in the junkyard and the arrival of an NGO worker, was carried out using audio tape-recorders (plate 2.1). Boys also interviewed each other about how they came to the streets and what they encountered there. What emerged was not so much a series of individual life-histories, but a pattern of repeated themes that together form a collective narrative of what it is to be a street child (see chapter 5).

Narrative accounts like this are important because they may reflect, and thus reinforce, dominant ideas about street children and/or they may contest these notions. In order to establish the particular points of concern about street children that are commonplace in Nepal, I set out to identify instances in which these were expressed. Potential sources included the national media, publications by NGOs, meetings between those directing programmes for street children, and finally,

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[10]The 'network interview' was devised by Hannsen for use in his research among street children in Sri Lanka (Hannsen 1994) and 'child runaways' in Norway

[11]Participants were well-known to myself and fellow facilitator, Lazima Onta, through our roles as teachers in the non-formal education classes at the CWIN centre. Denise Perrin provided the equipment and undertook the filming on Jan 12 1995.

comment that the research provoked amongst members of the public (see chapters 5 and 6). Upon arrival in Nepal, I learnt that a number of documentaries about street children had been shown on national television and during the research period I watched the film Sadak (The Streets) in one of the popular cinemas with several boys from Kohiti junkyard[12]. However, the greatest influence on public perception of street life appeared to be the series of plays acted by street children under the direction of a professional group of actors named Aarohan[13]. The plays were shown in central locations and their extremely vivid depiction of street life drew large audiences, including street children, and attracted considerable media coverage. The legitimacy of their claim to represent the reality of street living stems firstly from the authenticity of the children performing and secondly from the efforts of the play's directors to establish an initiative to help these children improve their lives. The plays were opportunities for children's voices to be heard and for the plea for greater public sensitivity to their predicaments to be made. A further outcome was to re-affirm the khate identity as something unique both in the eyes of the public and amongst the children who were watching a play about 'us' (see section 5.7 for evidence of shared ideas about a common khate experience that were enhanced by this play).

As I will demonstrate in due course, the power of these and other representations is not limited to defining past and present problems of street children. I became especially interested in how widely-held ideas about street boys' futures influenced boys' own views and actions. Was there any consensus of opinion among boys and those observing their lives about how things would change as khate got older? Do these two parties agree on what should be done to achieve the best outcome? The answers to such questions were made evident to me through daily interaction in the junkyard and streets, as well as expressed directly during discussions. Yet in order to debate possible outcomes of street living, opinions about boys' futures need to be related to individual experience over time. In May 1995, I enquired about the occupations and places of residence of the 126 boys who two years previously had participated in the comparative study. Then in December 1996, during a brief visit to Nepal, I made contact with about a dozen boys well-known to me, many of

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[12]This film opens with scenes of children rag-picking. However as Onta-Bhatta has pointed out, it dwells on the lives of three adults who successfully moved off the streets rather than everyday life for street children and their attempts to leave the street (Onta-Bhatta 1996:181).

[13]Aarohan also established a hostel for the children acting in the play where they were encouraged to study and contribute to the domestic routine as part of their preparation to leave the streets.

whom had made efforts to move into alternative occupations and lifestyles. We spoke about their experiences and I also heard the viewpoint of individuals and organisations endeavouring to assist them. Finally, five ex-street boys who I have known since 1993 and who now attend a boarding school, wrote down their life-stories. These individuals volunteered to do this after I had explained my intention to prioritise their perspectives in my writing about the transitions they had made between home, the work place, the street, NGO centres and the school.

## 2.3.4 ANALYSING CHILDREN'S ACCOUNTS

Earlier in the chapter I raised the question of variation in children's cognitive abilities and the effects this might have on the analysis of children's accounts. My experiences in talking with boys of different ages in Nepal was that variation in narrative detail, expansiveness and engagement in its telling, could not be linked directly to age. Some individuals clearly enjoyed telling stories and discussing issues, whereas others were reluctant to speak about their experiences for a number of reasons (see below). As well as personality, the familiarity of individuals with 'street issues' appeared to influence the level of detail in their narratives. Age was therefore relevant to my analysis only insofar as older children had usually had more time to experience the working and living environments of 'the street', to learn which aspects of street living outsiders are interested in and to have been asked by others (including NGO workers and the police) to explain why they came to the streets. Of course, differences of status between participants in a group discussion and between adult researcher and child informant, must also be accounted for. For the above reasons, I have included the ages of boys whose words I analyse in the forthcoming chapters.

A further important issue for the analysis of boys' accounts pertains to influence of the present in recalling the past. Ram's opening comment as we embarked on an informal interview was: "So are we going to talk about home?" His evident anticipation of having to connect past events with his life on the streets raises a number of issues relevant to the analysis of conversations with *khate* boys.

Was Ram's question prompted by fear and reluctance to talk about the past? Many boys gave singular and brief explanations of how and why they left home. It has been noted that migrants commonly give a single reason for their departure in order to reduce psychological distress and because they find it difficult to reduce a complex multiplicity of factors to a number of categories of 'reasons' (Gmelch 1980:140). Where individuals find questions about their families invasive, brief

responses are an understandable means of keeping the researcher out of this intimate sphere (Milne 1993:158). In a previous interview, Ram states that he has not been home for 4 years but portrays home life as unproblematic, saying that he left after a school teacher shouted at him. It is only much later that he mentions that his step-father used to beat him and that he is afraid to go home. For Ram and other boys who feel rejected by their families, "to talk about the unhappiness of the past is to talk about the present too" (Bertaux-Wiame 1981:259).

I was aware that re-tracing a boy's steps from home to the street in an interview situation emphasises his identity as *khate*. Depending on the context, boys may assume that the interviewer is disapproving of his past and present actions. This may further widen the gulf between "dominant" adult and "subordinate" child that can obstruct open communication. One obvious outcome of this is that conversations revolve around adult-defined issues to the exclusion of children's concerns. Another, although less evident at first, is that children choose to respond on the basis of what they know to be acceptable to interviewers.

Reflecting on Ram's question, I asked myself whether he expected to have to give a plausible reason for leaving home. Knowing that there was no-one in the vicinity who could contradict him, Ram could depict his departure as he wished. The reason I raise this possibility is because it is reasonable to suggest that certain 'home scenarios' are thought by boys to be more plausible as prompts to leave than others to those who question them. I was struck by the frequency with which step-mothers were cited as the cause of departure from home and by the occasional contradiction between accounts of family composition given by the same boy on separate occasions. When I put this query to a group of boys well-known to me, they told me that some *khate* say that they have been mistreated by their step-mother but do not have one.

Evidently, the 'step-mother scenario' proves to be an efficient way of dealing with unwelcome questioning, a factor that we did not consider in our earlier comparative study. Children, like adults, are capable of manipulating the interview situation not only to withhold information (as they do from the police for example), but also to project an image of themselves that they judge to be in their personal interest. While initial conversations with boys who beg frequently included assertions of 'having no-one' (*kohi chhaina*), it later emerged that relatives existed, although the support they extended to boys varied considerably. The point here is that such stories have elicited donations from tourists in the past and may well do so again.

In the few instances where I had access to parental versions of the departure, it was evident that there were multiple contributory factors and 'the reason' was accounted for in different ways by each individual. Sanu said that he left home aged twelve because his father often got drunk and beat him, whereas his mother said that it was Sanu's badly behaved friends who had persuaded her son to go. It was clear from both their accounts however, that money was short at home. Analysis that fails to account for the multiple pressures acting on families would be incomplete, as would a perspective that ignores individual responses to cultural norms, which in this case consist of ideas of 'acceptable' reasons to leave home.

As I have demonstrated, the collection of personal accounts takes place within social and cultural parameters that must be accounted for in analysis. Boys' accounts cannot be objective, nor are they complete representations of the past based solely on memory. Rather, their stories portray the past from the point of view of the present, as well as "give meaning to the past in order to give meaning to the present" (Bertaux-Wiame 1981:258). I therefore used stories told by boys to gain a clearer picture of their understandings of the current situation in relation to the past, but also in relation to the future. As part of a content analysis of boys' narratives, I considered the influence of place, relationships amongst persons present and boys' previous experience of similar communication. I learnt the most from occasions when an individual told a story relating his own experience to the general debate about being a *khate*, thereby conveying his perspective on the problems, advantages and alternatives. Often, others would offer their experiences to re-affirm or challenge the way *khate* were being represented. Such dialogues alerted me to norms and values espoused by these boys. As suggested above, narrative can act as a vehicle for structuring and making sense of experience, thereby contributing to understandings of identity for both the narrator and the listener (Ochs and Capps 1996:21, Mishler 1991:105). Ethnographers support Bruner's (1990) claim that the very experience of telling a story enables the narrator to place a logic on what was a complex confusion of events and relationships (Jeffery and Jeffery 1996:31, Simpson 1997:56). But, to make coherence out of confusion, an individual must draw on existing ideas about why things happen the way they do. The means by which a particular individual relates him or herself to the larger social world are thus made apparent. In line with my interest in the social identity of a group of persons termed *khate*, I looked for repeated patterns in personal and collective narratives about street living. As familiarity between boys and myself increased, group discussions became more relaxed and established their own internal coherence. It was obvious which issues were of concern to discussants, and my interjections were needed only to clarify points. These developments were

invaluable in terms of data quality but were cause for reflection on my ethical position.

Bruner (1990) points out that through telling a story about past and present trauma, an individual is better able to manage its effects. While his point may hold, it begs the question as to the narrator's expectations of support from the listener. It was not always clear whether boys were disclosing information to me that they had not previously shared with NGO staff or others whom they regarded as supports. Having assured boys of confidentiality, I did not pass on any information unless asked to. Counsellors guided by Northern oriented psycho-dynamic theory who facilitate group discussions are obliged to ensure that those who disclose personal information have the option of follow-up support (L. Baker pers. comm.). I was aware that my own ideas of 'support' might differ from the boys I spoke with, or even adult Nepalis in NGO centres in such a role. Nevertheless, it was still necessary to try to minimise the risks of boys being left without any support. One means of doing so was to avoid in-depth conversations with individuals I had just met and whose social networks were entirely unfamiliar to me[14]. As I explained earlier (section 2.2), I sought longer-term involvement with groups of boys in two street settings and in NGO centres where my role could be established. At the end of the day however, there is no way of knowing the precise effects of my involvment on individual self-image and social interaction in these settings.

A hermeneutic approach views the narrative account as "a product of the interaction and desire for understanding between teller and listener" (Peacock and Holland 1993:372). Initially, I often wondered whether boys with whom I spoke actually wanted me to understand more about their lives and what sort of personal gain they envisaged from our exchanges. Once I became more familiar with the expectations they had with regard to tourists and to NGO workers (for my position included these roles), I was able to see how 'talk' about living as a *khate* was linked in boys' minds to action. Moreover, as I became more involved in 'action' (such as taking sick boys to hospital or planning apprenticeship projects), boys engaged with me as a person who could affect their lives. I became aware that the 'researcher's narrative' - my personal history, motives and plans with regard to findings were critical in my communication with *khate* boys (Mishler 1991:106). I aimed to be transparent in these matters from the outset but, as might be expected, boys raised these as issues only once we had become personally accountable to each other over

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[14]Instances where individuals disclosed information as an appeal for help (for example in contacting family members) were followed up personally where I felt able, and in collaboration with NGO staff otherwise.

time (for example through participation in the motorcycle apprenticeship and school sponsorship schemes). At this point, we were able to discuss our mutual responsibilities and, despite being unable to fulfil a number of expectations, I felt that boys were able to critique my actions and I was able to respond at some level.

As Qvortrup has pointed out, research that aims to prioritise children's perspectives must "use children as a unit of observation and as mediators of information" (1995:11). Through the rapport I established with boys in whose lives I participated on a regular basis, I was able to reassess my own preconceptions and focus on their definitions of critical issues. However, as will become apparent, boys' opinions ranged widely and their focus was more often on personal gain rather than that of *khate* in general (see chapters 4 and 6). I was aware too that status differences between boys in the various 'street' settings (city square, junkyard and NGO centre) could exclude the perspectives of children 'on the bottom rung'. In my efforts to avoid bias to groups or individuals, I realised that it was impossible to represent all participants equally. However, my selection of accounts and opinions for use in the forthcoming chapters is based on accumulated observations of everyday practice. I learnt how issues talked about in 'research' conversations (i.e. discussions and interviews) related to daily life, and to distinguish between what people say they think and do, and what they do in practice.

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the rationale upon which my study was based and explained the means adopted to answer particular research questions. It has raised analytical and ethical issues relating to the socio-political context of researching children generally and more particularly, those living on the streets in Kathmandu. The introduction to the thesis outlined the overall structure, which was chosen to allow a temporal perspective on street children's lives. I begin with an analysis of children's experiences of home life and work, and of the ideas and values associated with childhood in Nepal.

# CHAPTER 3
## BECOMING A *KHATE*

## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

Dorje had been living on the streets of Kathmandu for two years and paid occasional visits to his family in a nearby squatter settlement. He recounts his past as follows:

> Eight years ago a flood came and took all our land, so we moved to Kathmandu and built a small house. Then my mother became ill and my father spent all his money on her medicines. When she died my father married again. I left home because my step-mother was scolding me and not giving me food.

Like Dorje, Ramesh first came to Kathmandu with his family and he links his current position with events in the family history and his personal decisions:

> I first came to Kathmandu with my father who arranged work for me in a big house. He said that they would pay for me to study but all I did was clean their dishes, fetch water and take the young children to school. Most of my wages went to my father and a small part to my older sister who worked as a domestic nearby. We saw a lot of each other until she went off and married. My mother ran off with another man when I was small—I can still remember her and I took a photo of her with me. It was then that my father sold all our land and went to work in India. The last time he returned, he wanted to take me and my younger brother to India, but I ran away and joined some boys who were rag-picking.

These accounts highlight two important characteristics in boys' reports of their prior experiences. Firstly, many have travelled with their families to earn a better living. Secondly, although boys might define specific reasons why they left home, their accounts show an awareness of multiple contributory factors affecting their families and themselves as individuals. As was documented for children who left home and came to the streets of Johannesburg, the precipitating factors which "may be categorised as social and personal appear to be closely linked" (Swart 1990:57).

The first aim of this chapter is to examine the processes that contribute to boys' arrival in the city and adoption of street-living. The second is to relate the common experiences of poor Nepali children to their understandings of opportunities within and outside the home, as well as their roles as family members. I begin by reviewing the findings of studies designed to identify causal factors in child homelessness in

Nepal. The design of these studies indicates an assumption that the circumstances and actions of street children are qualitatively different to those of their peers who live at home or in the workplace. Drawing attention to a number of their key findings that refute this assumption, I propose that children's departures from home should be analysed as part of the wider social process of migration. I then discuss migration in relation to poverty in rural Nepal in order to show the constraints operating on children and their families. Pertinent cultural norms and practices in Nepali childhoods are briefly described before I move into a detailed ethnography of children's experiences with regard to work, school, relationships with family members and travel to the city. I will supplement my own material with secondary ethnographic data from several rural and urban locations.

## 3.1 IDENTIFYING CAUSAL FACTORS TO CHILD HOMELESSNESS: A MIGRATION PERSPECTIVE?

> Broadly speaking, the family milieu and personal profiles of the (street) children interviewed do not differ drastically from the general pattern in the majority of poor households in our country. However there are certain factors which seem to compel the children to move out from their homes (CWD 1994, 25).

Several studies conducted in the last decade have attempted to find out why Nepali children come to the streets (Azad 1995, Baker et al. 1997, CWD 1994, CWIN 1990, 1993, CWS 1996). All of these used a survey approach, although the format varied from reliance on an extensive list of closed questions (CWD 1994, Azad 1995, CWIN 1990), to the additional use of structured interviews (CWIN 1993, CWS 1996, Baker et al. 1997). There are some differences in the way each study coded children's responses to questions about leaving home, yet all agree that causes fall into three types; poverty at home, problematic family relationships and the attractions of the city.

A comparison of the principle reasons for leaving home categorised in each study shows a similar distribution across these three groupings (Azad 1995:14, Baker 1997:135 CWS 1996:117, CWIN 1990:5). It is therefore probable that some causal relationships are involved here. However, such groupings mask the interaction of factors that cumulatively trigger a child's departure from home and his adoption of street living. Although, the earliest study recorded more than one reason for leaving for each individual, it does not detail the interrelationships between these factors (CWIN 1990:5). Because these studies have concentrated on attributing specific causes to children's arrival on the streets, none have adequately placed these children's actions within the broader context of family responses to poverty. This

said, there are two key areas of enquiry begun in these studies that shed light on links between the experiences of children living on the streets and those of a much larger number of poor children living at home or in the workplace.

One such area of enquiry relates to the aspects of children's social histories that constrain their options when there is little money at home. The Centre for Women and Development (CWD) pursued this question by gathering data on parental occupation and levels of literacy, land ownership and food sufficiency in the home, which contextualise the work and physical separation of children from their homes in Narayanghat, a large town in Chitwan District, Central Nepal. Their findings show that these children were part of fragile household economies supported by persons with few material or social assets. For example, over 70% reported that their families were landless and their mothers illiterate (CWD 1994:20-21). The implication here is that the labour potential of each family member, including children, is critical both to individual and family livelihood. Under these circumstances, an individual's departure from home could be viewed as a necessary move to a place where work is available. The report also claims that 63% of children who sought parental consent to leave home were given it, indicating that parents may have viewed their children's departure as a necessary move to better their own livelihood and that of their family (CWD 1994:30).

The second area of enquiry relates to family structure and the roles of children as they grow up within the family. The study based in Narayanghat found that the majority of children living outside their homes were from nuclear rather than joint families. Importantly, this piece of research widens the focus from surveys of the proportions of natural and step-parents (as cited in the studies listed earlier) to the part played by the extended family. In distinguishing whether parents and other relatives are physically present in the home or not, the Narayanghat study indicates something of the fluidity in family composition that children have experienced prior to their own departure. As shown above, it recognises children's early work input and parental consent to their working roles. However, as a result of CWD's emphasis on children's need for care, little due is given to children's productive roles in the family and the manner in which these change with age and family structure. For example, a predominance of nuclear over extended families is said to increase children's vulnerability due to a lack of care-givers in the home, particularly in cases where only one parent is present (CWD 1994:18). While this conclusion may hold for younger children, a larger family is more likely to require the income of older children working outside the home and there is greater chance of conflict or dispersal of its members than in a small family.

These studies show that the transition made by some children from home to the street is part of a more general pattern of migration practised in Nepal. The following sections will explore children's participation in labour migration through discussion of poverty and its effects on children, as well as the socio-cultural norms surrounding child-rearing in Nepal

## 3.2  POVERTY: THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

As a result of much experience researching working children in the Philippines, Silva has concluded that the marginalisation of street children is directly related to an equivalent powerlessness of their families under conditions of extreme economic and social deprivation. She states:

> Family poverty is both a cause and a consequence, a symptom of an even greater strain or imbalance that has a direct impact on children and their families and is a reflection of the unbalanced social structure (Silva 1996:279).

Her words advocate a perspective that situates the presence of street children within the broader socio-political context. Prior to investigating the particular aspects of the social structure that impinge on family life and on children directly, it is instructive to trace the social histories of individual Nepali street boys:

> Bhim and Surje are brothers, aged 13 and 12, who have been based on Kathmandu's streets for the last four years. They occasionally visit their parents who live in a *pati*, a small government-owned shack adjoining a temple on the very outskirts of Kathmandu. Originating from Dhading in East Nepal, the family are landless and belong to the untouchable caste group of tailors (*Damai*). During a visit home with Bhim, I met their father Kesab, who told me how the family came to Kathmandu eleven years previously:

> When I married we moved from Dhading to the Terai to obtain some land. I had heard that the soil was fertile there. We cleared some land and built our own hut but the government got angry with us for encroaching into the jungle and they burnt down all our homes. All the landless people were forced to move to places far away so I came to Kathmandu with my family. These days, my wife and I earn very little from tailoring and sometimes we just have water in the evenings. Our three eldest children are married and seem to have regular work. I worry a lot about the younger boys—Bhim and his brother—because I cannot be sure of their safety. I have been several times to the city centre to look for them and tried to bring them home, but they don't like to come.

The events that brought this family to Kathmandu and to a state of near destitution are illustrative of social and economic disparities within Nepal that affect large sections of the population. It is difficult to ascertain whether recent economic, political and ecological changes have significantly altered the long-standing

structural inequalities that exist throughout Nepal. Social analysis suggest that although migration is integral to Nepal's history, changes in destination, purpose and prevalence have occurred over the past fifty years. A period of high emigration from the hills to the fertile Terai began in the 1950s, due in part to the success of malaria eradication in the area (Toffin 1976:32). The 1970s saw a rise in temporary labour migration to India and Nepal's urban centres, as well as the permanent settlement of large numbers of hill families in urban areas (Shrestha 1990). Concurrently, migration to the Middle East became more popular amongst the Gurungs of central Nepal (Macfarlane 1997:189), and slightly later amongst the Yakha of eastern Nepal (Russell 1992:38). These trends have continued and recent highly sought-after destinations include countries in South-East and East Asia. Growing numbers of young men, and sometimes women, from rural urban poor areas travel to these destinations to work for several years, often having paid vast sums of money to a middleman whose guarantee of work may not be upheld.

Labour migration is linked with chronic poverty, particularly in countries where the vast majority of the population depends on agriculture (Seabrook 1996). Of the economically active population surveyed in 1990, 94% were engaged in agriculture (UNDP 1997:183). The pervasiveness of poverty in Nepal is evident when indicators of quality of life are compared with neighbouring countries including India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Although the prediction that one fifth of Nepal's population will not reach the age of forty years is not significantly different to those for nearby South Asian countries, it has vastly higher rates of maternal mortality, fewer doctors relative to its population and a much greater level of illiteracy (ibid.:55,175).

The most often cited underlying causes to the exodus from rural villages are the demographic, ecological and economic changes that have occured in Nepal over recent decades. Nepal's population has risen consistently[1], especially in the hill areas, and exacerbated the chronic food shortages faced by poor families. Scholars have pointed to the overuse of cultivated land and forest resources which has led to poor soil fertility[2], increased reliance on the purchase of staple foods[3], the

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[1] Between 1980 and 1988, the average national population growth rate was 2.6%, the highest among the countries belonging to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, exceeded in urban areas to a rate of 7.4% (UNICEF 1992 from CBS Population Projection).

[2] Forest resources are vital fertilisers either as foliage ploughed into the soil or as cattle fodder that eventually manures the fields. Where they are scarce, it is unlikely that the land can sustain efforts to increase production such as intensification through inter-cropping or expansion of the farming area onto higher, steeper slopes. Not only are

replacement of clothing and household goods (iron tools, bamboo matting, ghee and milk) manufactured by the occupational caste groups with largely Indian manufactured commodities and foodstuffs, and a shortage of alternative income sources to enable families to buy imported grain (Seddon 1994:130). The accumulation of these factors against a background of falling production rates relative to population[4] and rising inflation has led to a deepening socio-economic "crisis" that begun in the 1970s and, some would argue, has been exacerbated by the recent rapid changes in government (ibid.:128).

It should not be forgotten that migration in response to periodic food shortages has a long history for many of Nepal's ethnic groups (Toffin 1976:31, Hutt 1997:111, Poffenberger 1980:66, Russell 1992:40, Panter-Brick 1996:254). Thus we can conclude that, in addition to more recent trends, there are pre-existing and pervasive features of the Nepali social structure that significantly influence the range of options available to poor families.

Returning to the ethnography, these factors become evident if we compare the account given by Kesab (father of Bhim and Surje introduced above), with the experiences related by a father living in a hill village who has himself travelled to India for work since he was a child[5]. Purna Biswokarma, who is now married with

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yields low from these hill-top terraces, but they are easily eroded hence endangering fields, livestock and human lives below. There is an argument to suggest that recent population growth and its pressure on the hill ecology has increased the risk of landslides, flooding etc over and above what is expected given the geological characteristics of the Himalayas (Blaikie et al. 1980).

[3] During the 1980s the rise in prices of staple foods had major impacts not only on the urban poor who are totally dependent on purchased foodgrain, but on villagers needing to subsidise their own production (Seddon 1994:135). In common with many developing countries in which similar policies have been implemented, these price rises and high rates of inflation can be attributed in part to the IMF-sponsored stabilisation programme (begun in 1985) and the World Bank's structural adjustment package (1987) that was aligned to His Majesty's Government's Basic Needs programme (ibid.). A further contributory factor to rising prices was the trade embargo placed on Nepal by India in 1989. Many are of the view that the impacts of the embargo were to increase poverty and to contribute to the pro-democracy uprising that culminated in the *Jana Andolan* (people's demonstration) and declaration of multi-party democracy in April 1990. Speculation continues regarding the extent of India's involvement in this movement, however it is clear that relations between the two countries have always been critical to Nepal's economy and internal politics (Burghart 1994:23).

[4] In fact, Nepal's foodgrain production rose by about 20% between 1975 and 1988, however any potential benefits were negated by the 40% increase in population (Seddon 1994:135).

[5] Ashilal accompanied me on a week's walk to his natal village in Baglung District in December 1996, during which we spoke frequently about his experiences and impressions of living in Nepal and India.

two young sons, belongs to the untouchable caste group of blacksmiths (*Kami*) which, as for Kesab, defines his trade. However, due to the marked decline in demand for iron goods by villagers, he and his relatives currently work as day labourers on construction sites and travel widely in the region to get work (plate 3.1). The benefit of this type of work is that he is paid daily in cash, but his income is irregular, unlike that derived from a trade specialisation when in steady demand. He is reliant on the local building trade and in periods of decline, or when competition for work reduced wages drastically, he was forced to look further afield. Although Kesab gives no details of his livelihood prior to his search for land in the Terai, similar pressures from foreign imports and local competition affect the tailoring trade. Kesab was landless and Purna owned only a small garden around his house. Without the land to mortgage or offer as collateral on a loan, their options in times of food shortage are more limited than those of land-owning villagers. Small loans are available to Purna through personal ties in the village (see also Miller 1990 :62), but these have weakened now that he no longer supplies wealthy families with their iron goods.

The readiness with which debts are increased if food is short or funds needed for other purposes (amongst land-owning and landless families) has been noted in a number of hill regions (for example in Humla by Levine 1988 and in Palpa District by Miller 1990). Research in the districts of Gulmi and Argakhanchi has shown that the demands of debt repayments on landless families may force one member or the whole family to seek work outside the community (Panter-Brick and Eggerman 1997:195). Alternatively debts may trap parents and their children in bonded labour arrangements to their creditors who dictate the whereabouts and conditions of their work (ibid.). I will later show that many boys living on the streets have run away from jobs to which they were recruited by their relatives or neighbours (for example, see Ramesh's words in this chapter's introduction).

However, to view migration only in terms of a last resort would be to ignore widespread perceptions amongst villagers that it offers the best potential for improving one's quality of life. Kesab took his family to the Terai because he had heard that the land was fertile and that people were able to sell their agricultural products. In the village where Purna lives, the economic benefits of migration are visibly apparent. The houses belonging to families in which members have migrated for work are in good repair. Imported household goods and stylish 'city' clothes are often part of the migrant's booty. Moreover, some families are able to send their children to fee-paying boarding schools in a nearby town. For villagers like Purna

and Kesab whose options are further limited by their caste status[6], migration represents the potential to achieve some of the above prospects.

When listening to accounts of migrants, I was startled by the distances travelled with no prior personal experience to prepare the traveller for what lay ahead. To me, the risks seemed enormous, but I learnt from Purna and others that migration was not the reluctant journey into the unknown that I imagined. Purna first went to India having been persuaded by his older cousin who had been before. Upon reflection, he did not think it particularly remarkable that he should have made the journey aged only ten years even though he was, in his words, "still a child". His parents did not know anything about the hastily planned trip, however he was presumably considered an able traveller and worker by his older cousin. Purna's description indicated his dependence on his cousin—there appeared to have been a strength in their twosome. His account and the stories I heard from street children about running away with a friend, prompted me to enquire further into ideas about children's capacities (see below), and the importance of alliances with people from home, whether kin or non-kin, for a migrant.

When they arrived in Delhi, Purna's cousin introduced him to a rich householder who employed him as a domestic helper and treated him well. One bonus of his job, said Purna, was the five years of education he completed by studying school books at home and sitting the exams paid for by his employer. In his opinion, he was employed as a doorkeeper of a college in Chandighar (north India) due to his education and to the fact that the headmaster was from the same region of Nepal. He enjoyed doing this job for eight years and on one of his regular visits home he married a woman from a neighbouring village. Purna appears both to have valued the ties with home that helped him as an incoming migrant and to have prioritised his personal links with his village while away earning money.

It was Purna's account of his more recent experiences that alerted me to the cultural significance of these alliances. After the birth of their first son, Purna and his wife returned to Chandigarh for the fourth time to discover that another doorman had been appointed. Needing money for their new family, Purna and his wife travelled to a town in south India where they ran a roadside samosa stall. It was not chance

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[6]According to Bista, who sees caste as prohibitive in Nepal's general development, the abolition of caste laws (referring to differential punishment for offenders of different caste status) in 1963 has "done much to change the attitudes of the people towards caste structure" (1991:55). However his focus on largely urban high caste and high class groups does not fully account for the prevailing significance of caste in the social organisation of much of rural Nepal.

that led them here, but long-practised seasonal migration of Baglung villagers to this particular location, a busy transport interchange where business in roadside catering was good. A similarly tight linkage between villagers from the far-western district of Bajhang and an occupational niche in the south Indian city of Bangalore has been noted by Pfaff-Czarnecka (cited in Hutt 1997:111). She found that almost the entire population of Bangalore's night-watchmen were men from Bajhang who work for a period of two to three years and are then replaced by another Bajhangi. On the basis of her research on migration between a Bangladeshi village and the UK, Gardner advocates a perspective that recognises the complexity of processes of movement and change amongst migrants and their home community, as opposed to a view of migration "as an 'external' force that will inevitably lead to the breakdown of local culture" (Gardner 1995:4). In her view, it cannot be assumed that geographical distance from home for certain time periods will increasingly distance people from their community. Rather the social ties might be strengthened through a network of village neighbours in the urban work place or through regular gatherings and expressions of village identity at festivals. Research conducted amongst the Yakha of East Nepal, has shown that prevalent and extensive migration has become a part of community life (Russell 1992, 1997). Because migration is an expected part of a person's life course, particularly amongst men, long periods of absence do not threaten community membership. Rather, Yakha identity is found to transcend the physical boundaries of region and nation (ibid.).

How then do these findings affect an analysis of children's departures from home? Purna said that he chose to leave his village at the age of ten with his cousin. Bhim and Surje had also left home by this age, seemingly of their own volition. However, their father indicates how little 'home' had to offer his sons, despite his attempts to provide a livelihood for the family. Can children be considered participants in migration in the same way as adults? If so, what are the conditions under which children leave and what are the expectations placed upon them? To answer these questions, it is necessary to explore ideas about who children are and what they can do, as individuals and as family members. This is my objective in the following section.

## 3.3  CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD IN NEPAL

> There is no concept of children as a separate section of Nepali society...For the most part, life is a single continuum with no apparent disjuncture between childhood, youth and adulthood (Bista 1991:69).

Bista backs up his claims by pointing out the early age at which children learn about sex and contribute to the family economy, thus bringing them "the rights and responsibilities of adulthood" (ibid.). His perspective usefully shows the contrast between the long, institutionalised childhoods common in the North, and those experienced by the majority of Nepali children. However, his generalisation (evident in the words "For the most part") fails to account for Nepal's ethnic diversity and the range of ideas and practices that govern children's experiences of growing-up. In my opinion, Bista's assertion that Nepali children are viewed as "small adults" is simplistic because it underplays the status differences between Nepali parents and children, and ignores the processes by which children and parents negotiate the former's maturity.

Given Nepal's ethnic diversity, we might expect to find differences in markers of maturity. These are evident in the rituals demarcating male childhoods and the transition to adulthood across a range of Nepal's ethnic groups (see table 4). Religious orientation clearly influences the number and timing of ceremonies performed during childhood. Amongst Hindu groups[7], a number of rituals mark children's entry into their family and caste, thereby ascribing a social identity that is based on interdependence within these stratified groups (plate 3.2). Groups orientated towards Buddhism and/or animism perform far fewer rituals, and children's alliances with their kin and the wider community are understood in relation to Buddhist cosmology (see for example, Diemberger 1993:104). The most striking difference between the two religious orientations is the lack of formal initiation into adulthood in Buddhist and syncretic groups. As I will shortly demonstrate, adulthood is attained through certain learning practices and tacit agreements made between children and parents. Naming and rice-feeding ceremonies are performed for girls amongst Hindu groups, however only Newari girls celebrate an equivalent to the male tonsure in their mock marriage to a deity (*ihi*) (Quigley 1995:104). Throughout Nepal there are no specific initiation ceremonies for girls and marriage is commonly understood to confer their adult status (for example, Miller 1990:147).

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[7]Hinduism is practised in various forms in the Terai and amongst certain ethnic groups in the middle hills. Although few Nepalis follow orthodox Indian Hinduism, the appropriation of the Hindu hierarchical worldview by Brahmins, Chettris and Newars (who hold positions of power), has given it general currency. Nepal defines itself as a Hindu kingdom. The recent 1991 population census claims that 86.5% of the population are Hindu, 7.8% are Buddhist, 3.5% Islam and the remaining 2% Christian, Kiranti, Jain and others (CBS 1994:17). However, it is widely held that these proportions over-represent the Hindus by subsuming the syncretic religious beliefs found throughout the middle hills into the category Hindu (Bista 1991:30).

Table 4. Early life-cycle rituals performed for males in a range of Nepal's ethnic groups.

| Ethnic groups* | Indo-Aryan Brahmins, Chetris | Newari | Tamang and Gurung | Khumbo |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region of origin | Terai and middle hills | Kathmandu valley | hills in central Nepal | mountains in north east Nepal |
| Religion | Hindu | Hindu (some Buddhist) | syncretic: Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism | Buddhist (Tibetan) |
| Post birth ritual | naming ceremony; family membership (age 11 days) | purification of childbirth,(age 4-12 days) | none | naming ceremony; clan membership, (age 3 days) |
| Within the first year | first rice feeding, inclusion in purity—pollution cycle (age 5-6 months) | first rice feeding (age 6 months) | none | none |
| Attaining personhood | first hair cut (age 3-7 years) | first hair cut (age 3-7 years) | first hair cut (3-10 years) | none |
| Initiation to adulthood | tying the sacred thread; full caste membership (age 8-12 years) | tying the sacred thread; full caste membership (age 10-15 years) | No formal ceremony (Tamang; adult status attained at 12 years) | No formal ceremony (birth of first child marks transition to adulthood) |

* Sources: Bennett 1983, Ishii 1995, Holmberg 1989, Fricke 1986, Macfarlane and Gurung 1992, Diemberger 1993.

While an examination of life-cycle rituals is instructive of the normative stages of maturation, it is necessary to relate these to the way children are treated by their families and communities as they grow older. Parental notions of children's capacities are evident in their expressions of care, disciplinary practices and in the types of 'rights' or privileges accorded to children. In order to explore these areas I draw on ethnographic accounts of parenting amongst various ethnic groups in Nepal and supplement these with observations in Salme village in Central Nepal[8] and the accounts of young people of mixed caste and ethnic origin, who live in a squatter settlement in Kathmandu[9]. As explained in chapter 1, residents of Salme are largely Tamang agro-pastoralists who have long since engaged in labour migration and currently make frequent trips to the nearest bazaar town (located within one day's walk from the village). Thus the views on parenting and childhood of Salme residents and squatters derive from experiences in the rural and urban environments.

As might be expected, all ethnic groups consider very young children to need nurture and protection. For example, after the birth in a Gurung family, "a baby is protected against evil by having magical threads tied round its neck, wrists and ankles. It is fed on demand, washed and oiled daily,..." (Macfarlane and Gurung 1992:20). Parents are responsible for the baby's spiritual and physical well-being, and their acts of caring create a bond with the child that evolves as he or she grows older. Infancy in Hindu society has been characterised as a period of indulgence especially by the mother: "As far as the mother's and the family's means permit, a young child's wishes are fully gratified and his unfolding capacities and activities accepted, if not always with delight, at least with affectionate tolerance" (Kakar 1981:81). There are parallels amongst Buddhist groups, for example the Khumbo whose children are offered their mother's breast and plentiful physical affection until the age of about five years[10] (Diemberger 1993:88). At this point a radical

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[8] The Salme ethnographic material comprises 27 interviews with children and parents conducted in 1993 by Panter-Brick and her local male assistant, as well as my own observations and those of two anthropologists who have conducted long periods of fieldwork in the village (Catherine Panter-Brick and Blandine Ripert).

[9] Data were gathered during group discussions with seven young people aged sixteen to nineteen facilitated by anthropologist Karen Valentin and myself. As part of the discussion of important life stages, participants recorded their ideas visually in the form of a 'timeline' of the male and female life-course.

[10]For Hindu children, this age also marks an abrupt change in treatment from their parents and especially their mother. Kurtz's analysis of Hindu mothering of young children finds that maternal acts implying emotional rejection are intermingled with those of physical nurturing (Kurtz 1992, quoted in Ingham 1996:81). He adds that the

transition occurs as a child learns to 'know shame' and discover the limits of socially acceptable behaviour.

> Treat a son like a *raja* (king) for the first five years, like a slave for the next ten and like a friend thereafter (North Indian proverb in Kakar 1981:127)

This proverb echoes something of the transition that Nepali boys experience from the age of about five years as they begin to participate in domestic work and become liable for punishment for wrongdoings. Hindu boys are given their first tonsure[11] which is said to indicate the death of the mother-infant symbiosis and the birth of the separate individual, such that in popular tradition "he is considered ready for the process of discipline and the family's socialisation efforts" (Kakar 1981:20). These changes convey a demand from parents that children show more maturity (Rohner and Chaki Sirkar 1988:167), at least in terms of taking some degree of personal responsibility for their own actions and moral status.

As children are given more responsibilities in the home, demonstrations of parental affection appear to decline. In Salme village it was rare to hear verbal praise or see a bodily gesture that expressed parental love towards older children (see also Rohner and Chaki-Sircar 1988), however parents rewarded them with tasty food[12] or a small gift if they obtained good marks at school. Amongst Hindu groups boys are likely to receive less overt affection as they get older because unlike girls, who continue to spend time with their mothers, they are encouraged into the male sphere where affection is not so readily demonstrated. In Hindu India, the distance maintained in father-son relationships has been linked with the mechanisms of partible inheritance (Kakar 1981:131). These require a father to show equal support to his own and his brothers' sons. They also place the onus of responsibility on a son to look after his parents in old age, an expectation that is widespread in Nepal.

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exclusive pair bond between mother and infant is further weakened by the care children receive from women in the extended family. Psychoanalysts argue that the mother-infant bond affects personal development across cultures and pay particular attention to the oedipal complex affecting sons. Kakar (1981) and Kurtz (1992) have examined these relationships in Hindu India, however I am not aware of similar studies that have attempted this task within a Nepali context and do not have scope in this thesis to do so myself.

[11]Amongst Newari families in Kathmandu, a boy's first tonsure is usually performed at *bratabanda*, the ceremony of initiation into adulthood which occurs between the ages of ten and fifteen (plate 3.2). Some *bratabanda* ceremonies are delayed until immediately before marriage, in order to minimise costs.

[12]The importance of food allocation as a symbol of inclusion in the family will be discussed later in the chapter.

Plate 3.1 Limited employment opportunities for Nepali villagers



Purna Biswokarma greeting his son having guided the researcher to his home village.



Low-caste groups often work on construction sites or migrate to the towns.
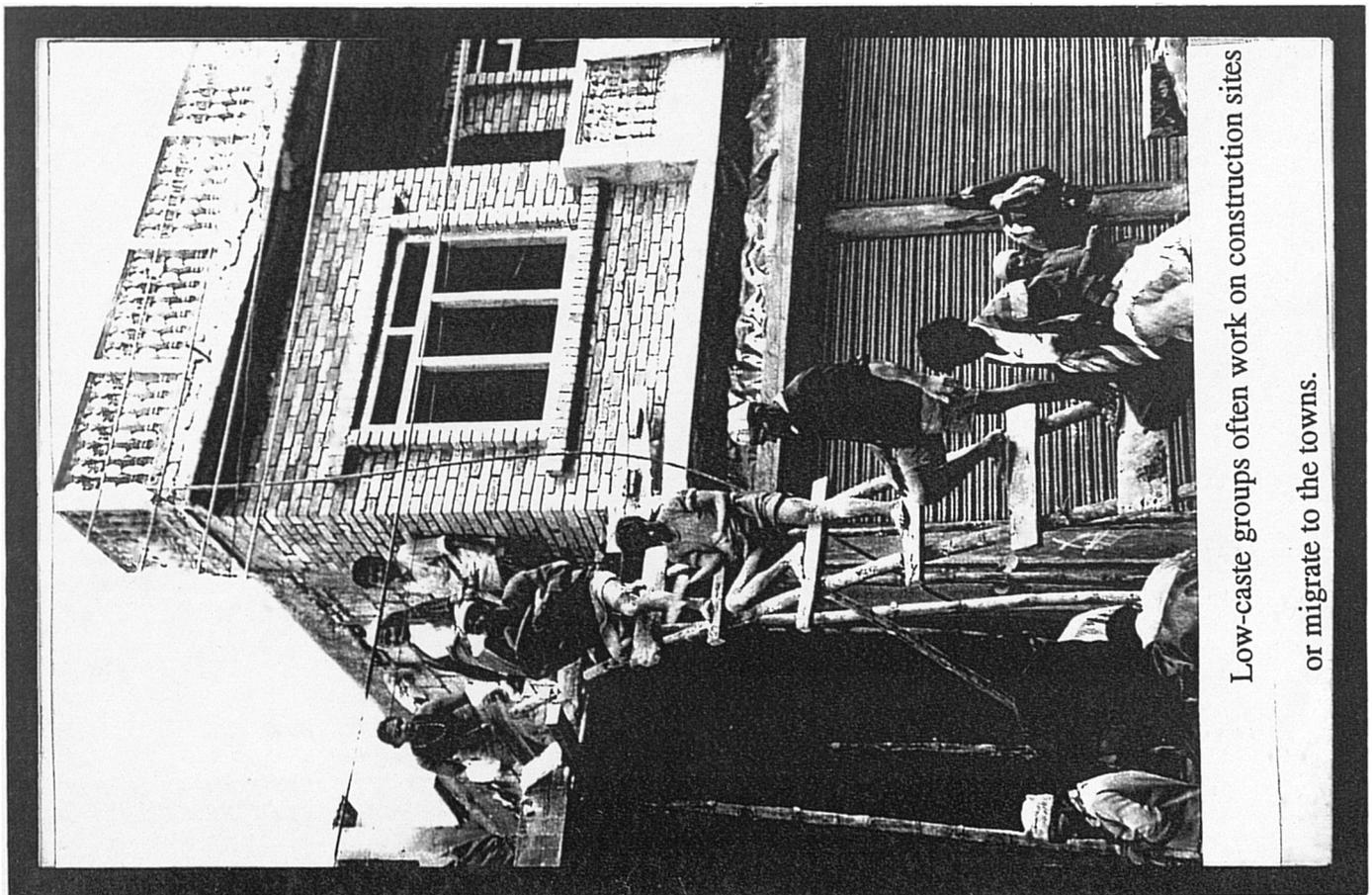
Anthropologists have suggested that breastfeeding on demand and affection towards young children will be to their later benefit throught their strengthening of family bonds (Macfarlane and Gurung 1992). In contrast, Bista argues that the lack of parental control or strong standards harms children in the long term because they do not develop a sense of morality (1991:67). He asserts that Bahun parents rarely punish their children either physically or through social isolation, and that they tend to defend their own child when in conflict with another (ibid.:66-67). As a result, children are said to have little sense of social responsibility and it is only fear of punishment that discourages them from bad behaviour. However, in Bista's view, fear can be allayed by developing a network of friends, known as *afno manchhe* (one's own people) who will remain loyal, and by relying on external forces rather than personal resources [13]. It is important to note that the problems Bista sees in an indulgent up-bringing arise from beliefs in *karma* (the predestined life-course) and the resulting fatalism common amongst Chhetri and Bahun castes. These notions do not have the same significance amongst other ethnic and caste groups and as I will shortly show, an apparently 'loose' up-bringing does not result in problems for children and their relationships with others.

### 3.3.1 PARENTAL DISCIPLINE AND IDEAS ABOUT THE LEARNING PROCESS

Parental attitudes towards children are influenced by ideas about how children learn. Children in Salme are given progressively more difficult tasks at home and in the fields. Clearly, parents expect them to become proficient through observing their elders and through practice (plate 3.3). This mode of learning is likened to an informal apprenticeship by Lave and Wenger (1991), and its characteristic reliance on imitation and trial has been documented in ethnographies of Nepal. For example, Tamang lamas (religious figures) "refine their abilities through practical experience and join accomplished lamas in rituals", in which they start by performing menial ritual tasks and later move up the hierarchy to play a more central role in a respected position (Holmberg 1989:181). In his descriptions of childhood traditions among the Limbu, who are Buddhists living in eastern Nepal, Sagant notes that adults will demonstrate the skills needed to perform agricultural tasks without authority or pressure (Sagant 1996:53). The initiative comes instead from the child who wishes to learn because he or she knows that the time is right. A Limbu boy who learned to plough first observed, then practised and was corrected by an adult on-looker when he made crooked furrows (ibid.).

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[13]See Macfarlane (1993) for a comment on Bista's thesis.

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Plate 3.2 An example of male initiation into adulthood
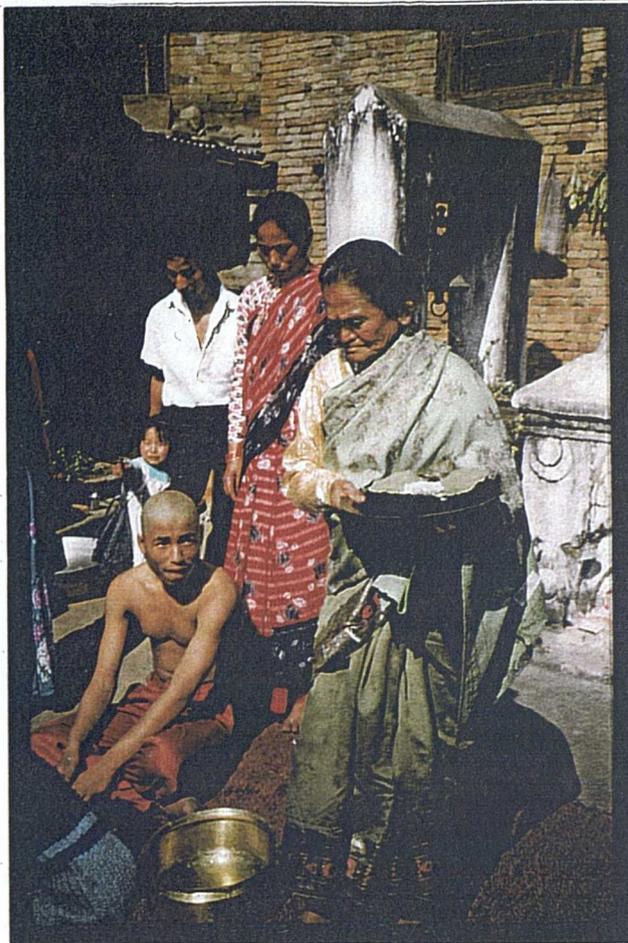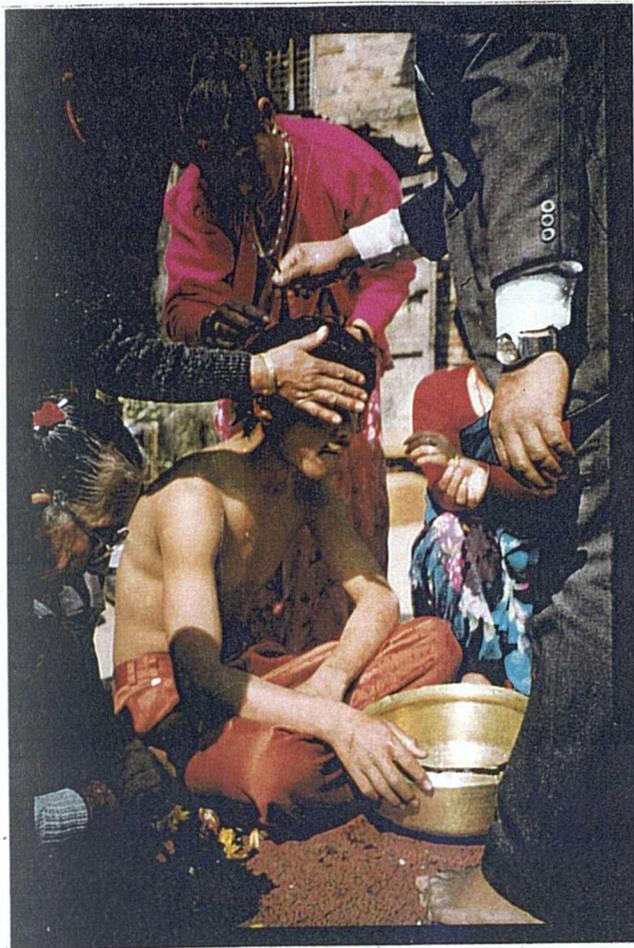




Stages of a Newari boy's initation (<u>bratabanda</u>) in which family members have specific roles to play.
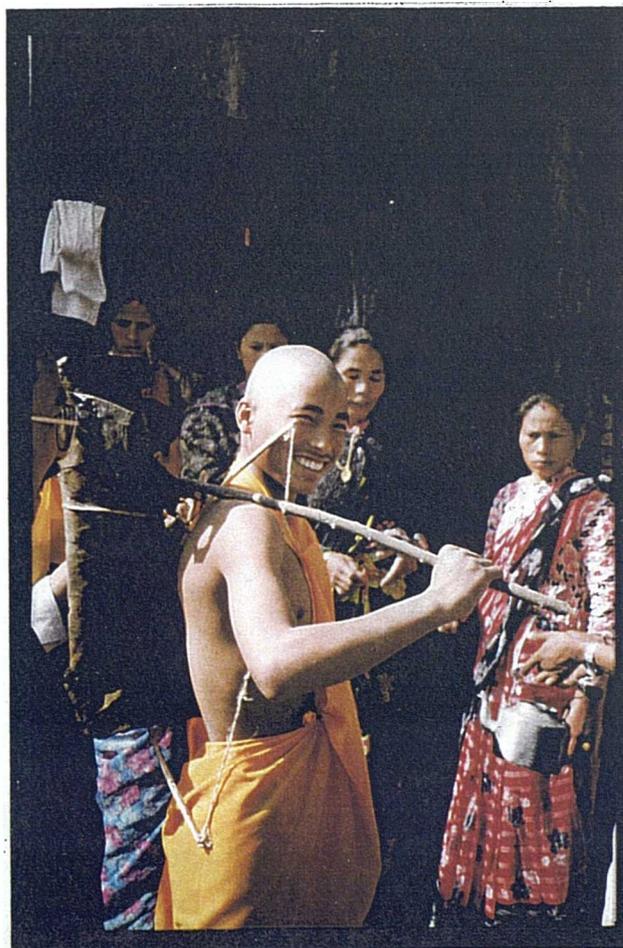
Although the ethnographic record suggests that direct parental instruction is unusual in Nepal, the recent growth in educational provision has brought with it a greater emphasis on the directive role of both teachers and parents in children's development. The links between education, notions of 'progress' and ideas about 'good parenting' may explain why a Tamang man from Salme, who is both a father and headmaster of the village school, was keen to explain to me the appropriate way of disciplining children. In his opinion, when children make a mistake parents should first advise them of their misconduct. If they do not listen then parents must shout at them and if this fails, deliver a beating. While his point was that parents can and should offer rational explanations to their children, it is interesting to note that learning through verbal instruction is found in formal schooling, as are punishments of individuals who fail to demonstrate their learning. Given that instruction-based discipline is part and parcel of highly esteemed formal education, the more 'traditional' parenting practices based the idea that children learn through participation are now considered to be 'backward' and ineffective amongst high caste groups and urban middle classes (see for example Bista 1991).

Sagant suggests that for the Limbu, the underlying conflicts between parents and their children are framed by the wider context in which "young people [are] defending their traditions of independence every inch of the way, against adults who are more attracted to the values of their ex-conquerors" (ibid.:57). In his view the traditional Tibeto-Burmese learning practices based in teaching by age-groups are being superseded by the practices of the Indo-Nepalese groups who conquered the Limbu in 1774 (ibid.:51). Thus the prevalent modern tendency favoured by adults is towards greater paternal authority, nationalism that is embodied in portraits of the King, children's increasing responsibility for household chores and finally the introduction of schooling (ibid.). This change in perspective indicates that cultural constructions of childhood change over time, especially under the influence of imported religious orientations, modes of social organisation and ideas about how children should learn.

### 3.3.2  FAMILY MEMBERSHIP, CHILDREN'S 'RIGHTS' AND GENDER DISPARITIES

In addition to cultural attitudes towards the learning process, children's treatment by parents and input in decisions affecting their lives are influenced by their particular roles in the family. When asked what children needed to be taught, parents in Kathmandu and Salme advocated hard work, diligent study, obedience and abstension from stealing. These standards are set for the child's best interest,

but also appear to protect the moral standing of the family. Notions of family honour (*ijjat*) are found throughout Nepal and underlie codes of behaviour that subordinate children to adult decision-makers. As children mature into family and/or caste members, their actions can bring shame (*beijat*) upon the family (Diemberger 1993:106). The importance placed on teaching children to avoid behaviour that will shame the family reinforces children's primary position as family members. Decisions prioritise the family's economic and social standing and are usually made by the male head with varying input from other family members.

Diemberger's observations prompt questions about the extent to which Nepali children participate in decisions affecting their lives, and whether indeed they have the "rights" that Bista claims (1991:69, see opening paragraph to section 3.3). It has been argued that the primacy of the Asian extended family as a social unit over its individual members may give greater autonomy to the individual child when grand-parents or other dependants are present, yet at the same time may force children into working roles to sustain the family unit (Hockey and James 1993:70). According to Miller, children and women contribute to the planning stage of decisions in villages in Palpa District (Western Development Region of Nepal), however it is the appearance of consensus that is significant in what is often a decision taken by a senior male in the family (1990 :112).

Ethnographies of Hindu communities in Nepal such as those of Bennett (1983) and Gray (1995), have focused on gender divisions in adult work, but lack a thorough analysis of children's work responsibilities and decision-making whilst they are, at least in theory, 'at home'. To address this bias, a team of researchers from Actionaid conducted a six month study in two mixed-caste Hindu villages in Sindhuli district (Johnson et al. 1995). They employed a range of participatory techniques through which children could record their activities and viewpoints. The study showed that children were making decisions in their everyday agricultural tasks, but decisions regarding children's work and schooling were made by the male heads of household. Finding that boys' opinions are listened to seriously by adults only after marriage and that girls must sometimes wait longer, the researchers concluded that children's "responsibilities far out-strip their decision-making rights" (Johnson et al. 1995:43).

As has been reported elsewhere, girls were shown to spend more time working and less time at rest or play than boys (Acharya and Bennett 1981:xxxv). Interestingly, while girls in Sindhuli perform a large proportion of their tasks on their own or with family members, boys tend to work in groups of friends (Johnson et al. 1995:47-48). This raises the possibility of a gender difference in children's experiences of work as either restrictive and authoritarian or involving a form of social interaction in which

they can make decisions for the future. While boys also may find work restrictive and be prevented from taking opportunities, it is important to appreciate these broad gender disparities as part of the context to boys' decisions to leave home.

The normative picture painted of Hindu sons is that they are primarily orientated towards their family and caste group in readiness for their future role as providers and protectors of the family. These ideals are evident in the short novel by Shesharaj Dali about Sanu, a Newari boy who faces a dilemma about his involvement in a family dispute in which his aunt falsely accuses his sister of stealing a money purse. Sanu wonders whether he should silently bear any injustice done to his section of the family, whether his parents should contest the accusation and what might be the consequences of his own intervention. According to the author, Sanu's primary consideration is to avoid any breaches in the joint family (Dali 1993:77). However, Dali's is an adult perspective and likely to contain some idealisation of the child's thoughts. Boys in Salme and Kathmandu did not emphasise an allegiance to their family in these terms. My impression was that although their positions in the family remain important, boys were also investing in relationships with friends and contacts outside the immediate family setting in a similar manner to young Limbu (Sagant 1996).

### 3.3.3 COMPARING NEPALI CHILDHOODS

In Bista's definition, the Limbu are one of Nepal's 'ethnic' groups whose non-Hindu orientation would produce very different childhoods to those of the Bahun-Chhetris he describes. On the basis of my observations in Salme and the accounts of children's village experiences given in Kathmandu, I suggest that there are parallels between a Limbu childhood and those of many other groups in Nepal. Sagant asserts that while Limbu boys in theory live with their parents, they actually spend much of their time in "their own space that is not crossed by the paths of their fathers and mothers" (ibid.:51). Similarly, Salme boys spend the majority of their time with friends or relatives outside their own homes, and visit the homes of others frequently. According to Sagant, while herding with friends and engaging in labour exchange, Limbu boys are outside the family environment and have opportunities to subvert adult decisions (ibid.:54). Limbu parents are aware of this possibility but do not actively try to prevent a son acting independently as long as he conceals it from their view. For example, after a trip to the town or an all-night dancing session with a group of girls, teenage boys appear for work on their father's fields as usual. If a father remains ignorant, then he is blameless of his son's actions and does not have to discipline him (Sagant 1996). A son's autonomy does not threaten his

father's authority because a son's duties are never openly negotiated. It is not that the Limbu, and even groups orientated towards Hinduism, do not have a family basis to ideas about children's behaviour, but that these remain implicit and hence can tacitly acknowledge that friendships and individual wishes also influence children's decision-making.

I often heard parents blame their children's misbehaviour on the negative influence of friends. In Nepal, the notion that a child's moral standing cannot be divorced from that of his or her family partly explains the ambivalence surrounding the input of friends in children's lives. By interacting closely with persons outside the family, children expose themselves to poor treatment from non-kin and at the same time endanger the family honour (ijjat). In reality, pragmatic concerns usually override the ideals that serve to maintain family unity and a child's physical presence in the family. The reason for this is that parents and children are aware that such ideals cannot be maintained if one wants to improve one's quality of life in the face of deeply rooted social inequalities. It is widely recognised that when resources are limited within families, the opportunities for improved quality of life are available through personal connections to those of high-status, regardless of whether they are part of one's family or caste group. Given that alliances with non-kin have the potential to lead to credit or employment (of parent or child), we can suppose that teenage boys are expected to look for opportunities beyond their immediate kin group.

## 3.4 CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF HOME LIFE: A CONTEXT TO DEPARTURE

In the previous section I showed how attitudes towards children are interconnected with cultural notions of personhood and family membership that vary within Nepal. I will now build on this ethnographic framework and focus specifically on children's perspectives of their everyday lives. I will compare the characteristics of 'home' that street boys (khate) speak of, with the experiences of children living with their families in both Salme village and Kohiti squatter settlement in Kathmandu[14]. Although these two locations cannot, of course, represent the diverse range of communities from which the khate originate, they provide an important insight into the experiences and views of poor children and their families who have in some way been involved in migration. The long history of labour migration in Salme means that

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[14] Data from Kohiti squatter settlement consist of interviews undertaken during the 1993 comparative study and my on-going observation during 1995.

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children have grown up with the movement of persons—young men in particular—in and out of the village[15]. Moreover, most Salme boys with whom we spoke had travelled beyond the village for trade purposes or schooling. They therefore evaluated their experiences and talked about their aspirations in the light of the differences they perceived between the village and what lies outside.

### 3.4.1   A WORKING ROLE IN THE FAMILY

Raj Kumar, now a rag-picker in Kathmandu, explained the reason why he left his home in a hill village at the age of twelve:

> At home I don't have parents, just my mother. There are enough people to do the work at home and in the fields. I didn't like living there.

As evident in our prior study (see chapter 1), most boys living on the streets have both parents at home and Raj Kumar's family situation is relatively uncommon. It is interesting that he comments on his family's labour resources and justifies his departure with the fact that he is not needed at home. Clearly he regards his own agricultural and domestic labour at the age of twelve as potentially important to the family should they have been short of workers.

In Salme, most families have access to enough land to be self-sufficient in crops providing that they have the labour to cultivate them. The demanding agricultural regime consists of planting five cereal crops per year plus tubers in small terraced fields ranging from 1350 to 2500 metres (plate 3.3), and grazing livestock on the high pastures as well as in harvested fields (Panter-Brick 1989:207). In general, the higher the number of able workers in a family, the more food it is able to produce. Difficulties arise for married couples who do not have the help of parents, siblings or older children, as described by Yoghale, father of four children:

> The two of us, my wife and I, face a large problem to do with labour. We are alone—one father and one mother—and the children must be clothed and fed. The fields must be worked for them, the animals must be tied up and herded, and the fodder collected.

The central role played by children in the family economy is recognised in the well-known Nepali proverb: "the riches of the poor are their children" (Lall 1991:ii).

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[15] Over the last decade, 19% of Salme's population of 460 adults have left the village and returned only for short visits (Ripert, pers.comm.). Of these, 22% migrated to Kathmandu, 20% to India, 16% to local villages (mostly women at marriage), 12% to Trisuli (the nearest town), 12% to the Terai and 7% to the army (ibid.).

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Plate 3.3 The hill environment and children's tasks
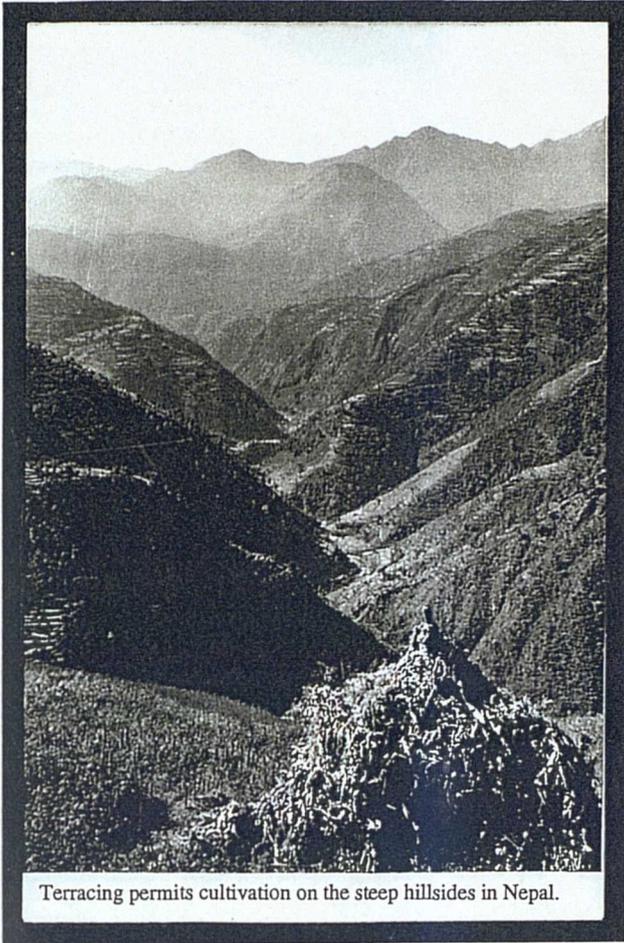


Terracing permits cultivation on the steep hillsides in Nepal.
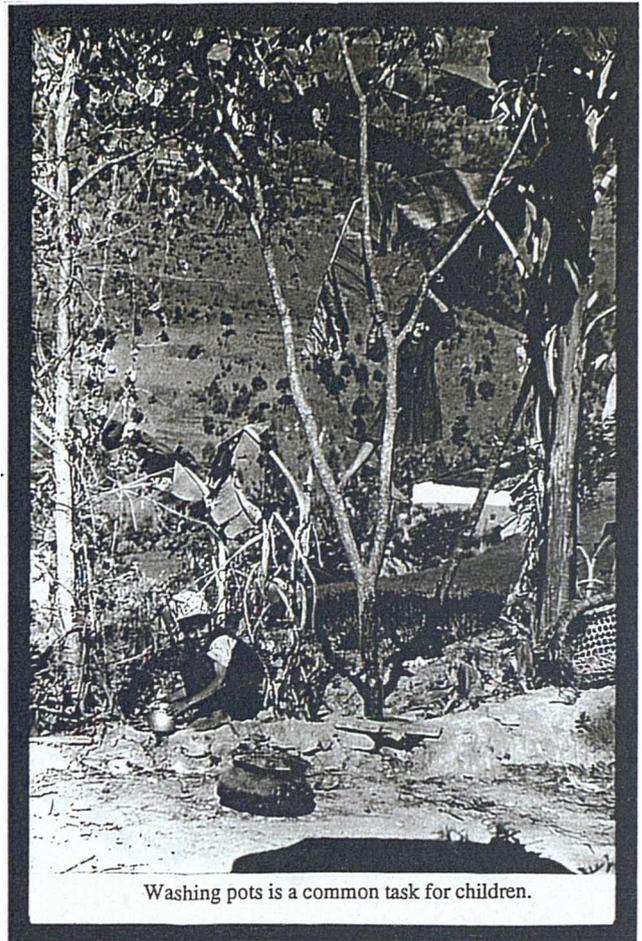


Washing pots is a common task for children.
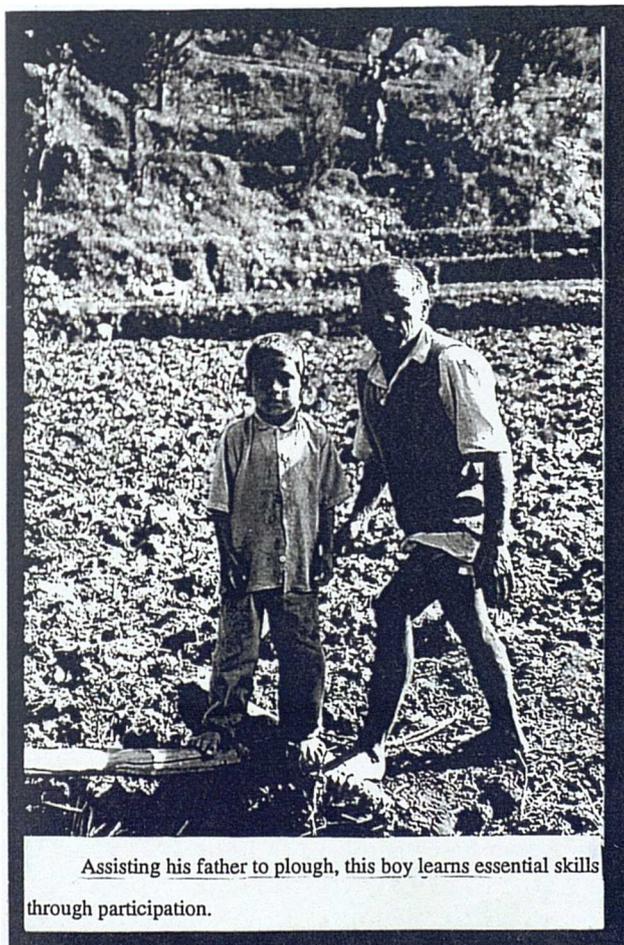


Assisting his father to plough, this boy learns essential skills through participation.
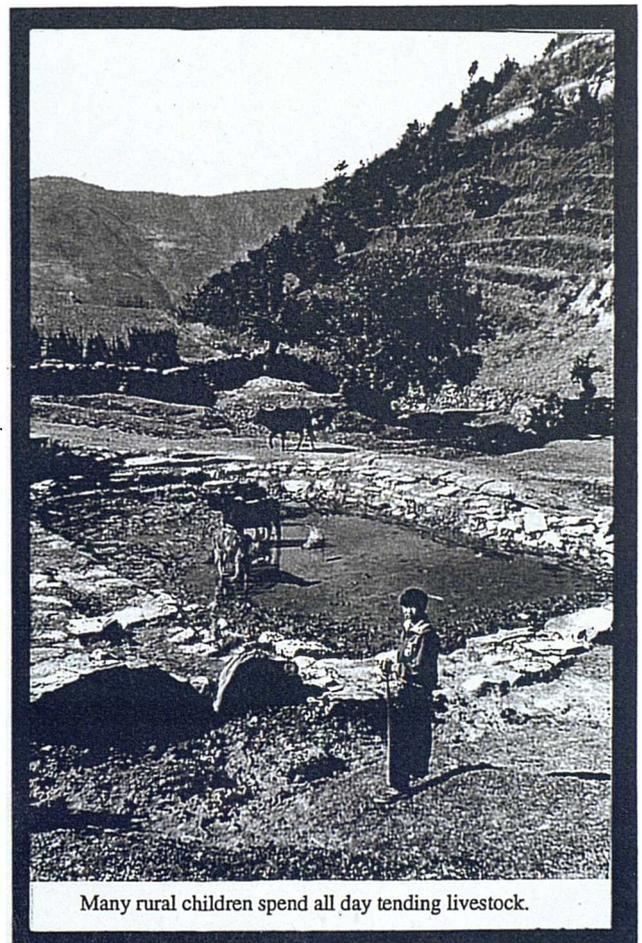


Many rural children spend all day tending livestock.

Squatter children sell vegetables and spices on the bridge above the settlement.
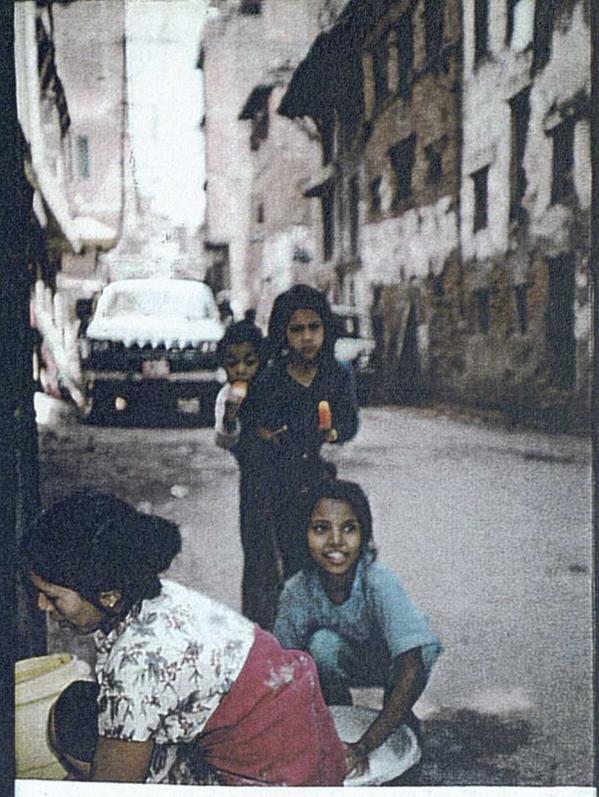


Girls assist their mothers with multiple domestic tasks and care of younger siblings.
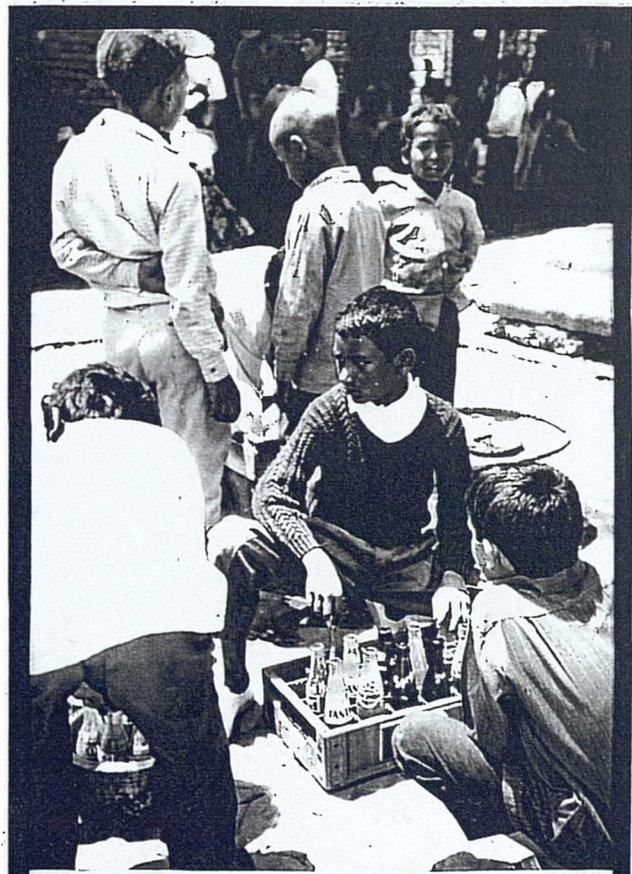


Boys enjoying the freedom to earn for themselves.

However three of Yoghale's children, all of whom are under eight years old, are too young to be able to do more than fetch and carry for their parents. His eldest son left the village with an older cousin to look for opportunities in the town and in due course, I will discuss Yoghale's feelings about his departure.

As soon as they are physically able, Salme children are involved in domestic tasks and accompany parents to fetch water and fodder for the livestock (plate 3.3). From the age of about six years they herd the cattle in small groups of siblings and/or friends. Parents rely on them to look after each other and make sure that the cattle do not raid or trample crops. Boys over the age of about twelve sometimes stay alone in the *goth* (temporary shelter used while herding or farming in the fields) for several days, cooking their own meals and in sole charge of the animals (plate 3.3). From this age they are considered old enough to plough and able to contribute the labour input of an adult. Similarly, children living in Kohiti squatter area help their mothers with domestic tasks from about five years. Those only a few years older are put in charge of roadside vegetable stalls although relatives are normally in the vicinity (plate 3.4).

In the previous section I suggested that gender differences in the type and amount of work given to children by their families enabled boys to act more independently than girls. In addition to their preparation for future domestic responsibilities (plate 3.4), girls are given tasks within the home to ensure good marriage prospects. Amongst Hindu groups, girls who have wandered outside the home confines are viewed with suspicion by parents aiming to find a match for their sons. Even amongst Tibeto-Burman groups orientated towards Buddhism, girls are usually chaperoned at fairs or trips to the bazaar (Sagant 1996, Ripert pers. comm.). Should their income be required by the family, parents endeavour to protect daughters by arranging their jobs through relatives or personal connections. Boys, by contrast, roam further with family and friends both within the local surroundings and into nearby villages and towns for important ceremonies or trade purposes (plate 3.4).

Despite these gender differences, children may not view their work solely in terms of its restrictions. Amongst the Tamang and other Tibeto-Burman groups, boys and girls over the age of 13 participate in *parma*, a group-based reciprocal work arrangement (Panter-Brick 1993:228, Macfarlane and Gurung 1992:24). In Salme, young people join the adult groups and work on each family's land consecutively. In contrast, Limbu girls and boys of about fourteen years arrange their own groups and work apart from the adults. Long evenings of dancing follow the day's work and

Sagant illustrates the significance of these groups as social fora in which young people can demonstrate their suitability as potential marriage partners and take steps towards securing the arrangement without their parents' prior consent (Sagant 1996:55). Evidently, young people generate camaraderie through their participation in work activities which play a vital role in the process of maturation and the formation of social identity.

It is nonetheless important to place these potential long-term benefits of children's working roles in the context of their views of everyday tasks. In Salme there was little indication that children questioned either their ability to complete the tasks assigned to them or the fact that their families required their contribution. Some boys spoke of their own economic returns and many reported the personal satisfaction they derive from working. Som, aged 13, expects to be given two or three sheep in five years time as payment for working in his uncle's *goth*. Moreover, in the company of friends or siblings, herding can be very sociable and there are plenty of opportunities for target practice with the catapult. Most boys thought that being alone in *goth* with lots of different tasks was harder than working from home. Others, like Dilman, find herding 'restful' and enjoy the freedom and detachment of working in the *goth*, not to mention the ready supply of fresh milk. Overall, when compared to school work, domestic and agricultural tasks were seen to require much more effort. Several boys said that attending school is "easy—because you can sit down all day", and that it was fun to play with friends between lessons.

External measures of the impact of work on children's quality of life fail to assess the impact of domestic and agricultural work for the household. For example, the recent national population census states that 18% of children aged between 10 and 14 years work for remuneration in cash or kind for more than six months of the year (Thapa et al 1997:6); no mention is made of the proportion engaged in non-remunerated tasks. Despite the gap in knowledge of family-based labour, it is instructive to consider the links drawn between the incidence of child labour (defined as remunerated work for more than six months of the year), levels of poverty and literacy across Nepal's seventy-five districts (Thapa 1997). Thapa's study showed a lower incidence of male child labour in districts where overall literacy is high, whereas it was only in the few areas with high female literacy that rates of female child labour were reduced. His results suggest a further gender bias towards males in access to and benefits from education (ibid.:11) and paint a bleak picture of girls' prospects. Yet the question still remains as to whether schooling can realistically replace or run alongside the work demanded of poor Nepali boys.

### 3.4.2 WHO CAN GO TO SCHOOL, OR WANTS TO?

In common with a large proportion of Nepal's poor children, boys who live on the streets in Kathmandu have had little or no schooling[16]. Nepal still has some of the lowest school attendance and completion rates in South Asia, despite a significant increase in numbers of schools throughout the country in recent decades (CBS 1994:123). Urban areas continue to be favoured and rural schools often serve a large and scattered population. According to UNICEF, children's education is hindered by the frequency with which pupils fail to move into the next grade, miss periods of the school year or drop-out at an early age, as well as high rates of inattendance by teachers (UNICEF 1992).

As has been illustrated, families are often unable to spare a son or daughter who can work, particularly in the seasons of intense agricultural activity. In Salme village, there are 163 children registered at the primary school but only 80-90 attend on a daily basis (Ripert, pers.comm). Thirteen year old Harka explained "I go to school, but sometimes I don't go because my mother wants me to stay at home. So when there's work to do at home, I stay and do it". Research into children's work and school lives in Sindhuli district show that a child's gender, caste and birth position within the family affect his or her chances of beginning and continuing an education (Johnson et al. 1995:47). Family security and wealth, when measured in terms of land ownership, were identified as determining factors to children's access to education in a rural survey (Baidya et al. 1981). This study showed three quarters of the landless families did not have a child in school, whereas one or more children from over half the land-owning families attended school (ibid.:177). In addition, the hidden costs of 'free' primary schooling provided by the state prevent poor children from pursuing their studies.

Birendra, a street boy who now begs from tourists in Kathmandu, attended school as well as fetching fodder while he was living at home. When studying in grade 3, illness prevented him from going to school and he was taken off the register. His parents were unable to afford the cost of re-registering. Even if children sustain attendance, the regular cash expenditure on stationary and uniform required for a state education is often beyond the means of poor families and children drop out.

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[16] Of the homeless children surveyed in 1993, 42% reported never having attended school and among those who had, the majority completed less than three years of education. Recently CWIN reported that 63% of all the 1370 children registered have either never attended school or completed one year and are therefore defined 'illiterate' (Statistical Information on Kathmandu's Street Children 1989-1995, unpublished report).

Recently, the government has increased its efforts to provide a basic education to all children and particularly those in rural areas. Until 1995, there were no tuition charges in primary schools until grade 7 (when pupils are usually 12 years old) in rural areas, whereas charges began in grade 5 in urban areas (Skar and Cederroth 1997:126). Now, the government does not charge school fees anywhere for children up to and including grade 10, however parents must still pay for uniforms, stationary, snacks and perhaps transport. Usually pupils in grade 10 sit an exam to attain the School Leaving Certificate which is required for further education or government jobs including primary school teacher (ibid.:79).

Obtaining an education is no easy task even for children who attend school regularly. Govinda, who spent two years rag-picking on the streets, connected his departure directly with his failure to succeed at school in accordance with his parents' expectations:

> Once I failed the English exam. My father scolded me and said "you are fit only for cattle grazing". Then I took 500 rupees from him and ran away to Kathmandu.

As far as one can tell from the account, Govinda's father makes no allowance for the fact that school work can be difficult and we are not told of the physical conditions under which he was studying. In the hills of Baglung district, a significant proportion of pupils walk for over two hours to and from school each day. I observed these children in the evenings, heads bent low over their schoolbooks, doing homework by candlelight. At school, conditions are inconducive to learning: class sizes are large, the equipment poor and teachers inconsistent in their attendance or prone to physically punishing children[17]. Striking children for bad behaviour and laziness appears to be an acceptable and common practice in most schools (see for example, Shivakoti 1996:88).

The perseverence demonstrated by pupils in the face of these difficulties is suggestive of the high value placed on education. Thirteen year old Dilman is teased by his peers and thought of as rather a simpleton, because he no longer goes to school. He explained his decisions as follows:

> When I went to school, the master used to hit me because I couldn't read the books. So I don't go any more. I work at the *goth*—cutting grass, fetching wood, putting in the cattle stakes and making rope.

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[17]The poor salary and lack of training or resources available to teachers should not be overlooked.

For Dilman and others like him who struggle at school, there is rarely any provision of extra tuition and once reprimanded for 'stupidity', they are naturally drawn to agricultural activities in which they are competent. However there was little indication that these skills are valued as highly as literacy amongst children or adults, in spite of their economic benefits to the family. Schooling for village children can be a means of levelling differences created by traditional gender, caste and state hierarchies, but at the same time it produces new lines of status distinction. Research conducted in a village in Central Nepal revealed the sharp contrasts drawn by children and adults between un-educated and educated persons. The un-educated were said to be living in a "traditional, superstitious and conservative world", like that of the previous generation which was oriented towards farming and local affairs (Skinner and Holland 1996:280). In contrast, an educated person whose "eyes had been opened" to personal opportunities and the prospect of "development" in the community, is able to look outward and forward beyond the village present (ibid.:282). The association between going to school and a 'bright future' (*ujjalo jivan*) is another indication that formal education has become a source of symbolic capital, through which the 'educated' can claim superior status (ibid.:274).

The prestige accorded to formal education in recent years has created a new reference point for the negotiation of the responsibilities of both parents and children. While parents consider it their duty to educate their children, the flip-side to this is that children are expected to perform well. Due to the associations between education, a 'good' job and future security, this applies to children from wealthy high-caste families as well as those from poor families. Failing at school can therefore have greater ramifications in a child's relationships with his parents than disobedience on other accounts. These are demonstrated in Lhakpa's account of events prior to his arrival on the streets. When asked why he left school, he replied:

> My father died...who could pay for my schooling then?...later my mother put me in school again, then my grandmother, but how she used to shout when I didn't go—at my mother especially! So I left their house with my mother and we went to her mother's house, and of course I left school. Then when I went back to school later on, I lost my school books. My mother screamed at me, so I fled.

Evidently there are inter-personal tensions within Lhakpa's family which, in his eyes, centred around the costs of his schooling. It is apparent that his family considered his education important and that his own actions have been interpreted as a rejection of a valued opportunity. It is reasonable to suppose that Lhakpa has disappointed his mother who invested heavily in providing what she, and others, may well regard to be the best means of escaping the poverty they now face. The

pain of letting his mother down, as well as the fear of being punished, may well have triggered Lhakpa's departure.

The signboards posted outside the growing number of private boarding schools in Kathmandu give an impression of a general cultural consensus that education is *the* best guarantee of a child's future success. But is it the case that every parent prioritises education and that every child aspires to 'become educated'? If so, we may assume children living on the streets would rather have remained at home and at school, than travel to the city. However, some boys who attended school in their home village do not report economic or family-related prompts to their departure, indicating that this decision was made in an attempt to seek a better life outside the village. Evidently, these boys did not think that their schooling would provide the opportunities they desired and they opted to seek elsewhere.

In Nepal's villages only a handful of jobs including mayor and health worker require training beyond secondary school level[18]. These positions tend to be held by those from high status or wealthy families, incomers from the towns or those who have returned with money earnt elsewhere. There is little tangible evidence that education alone will guarantee success. Several Salme boys related their wishes to be school masters or have an 'office job' in the city with the prospect of an 'easy life' and a regular salary. Yet children's aspirations are tempered by their awareness of the high costs of boarding in secondary schools. Pragmatic concerns were also expressed by parents of school-going children who conveyed an underlying worry about the current and future value of education to their children. Salme parents were critical of school teachers, claiming that they did not really care whether their children learnt all that they should and teachers in turn criticised parents for not prioritising their children's schooling (Ripert, pers.comm.). In conversation with Bina, a squatter mother, I asked about the age she considered children able to work in the house:

> I would say from the age of about ten, that is if they listen to their parents—
> but you know it's different nowadays compared to when we were young.
> Then, eight year old children were told to do things by their parents and they
> did them. Nowadays children go to school, so if you ask a fifteen year old to
> go and get some water they refuse saying that they don't know how to. They
> say that they have to study and have no time for housework.

Like parents in Salme, Bina sees the current cost of school attendance to herself and other workers in the family. Moreover, later in the conversation, she reveals an

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[18]Although changes are planned, those who have passed the School Leaving Certificate are qualified to be primary school teachers (Skar and Cedderoth 1997:79).

underlying worry shared by other parents that her children will be unable to find a salaried job even having completed an education. This possibility affects children's future livelihood and that of the family, for the two are intimately linked.

By exploring the ideals surrounding education and relating these to actions taken by children and parents, this section has added context to children's departures from home. I have shown that decisions by children and adults relating to school attendance are made with some scepticism as to whether education will be of greater benefit than other courses of action. Interestingly, YoGhale, the Salme father quoted in the previous section whose thirteen year old son left the village with his cousin, had the following to say about his departure:

> A son has got to travel. Only after travelling will a son think of coming back. By travelling a certain amount, we gain that much knowledge—just staying here is no good. It is not enough to learn things from a book, so we must go to different places. There, the eyes can see and the hands can learn to do.

Such assertions of the value of experience-based learning tend to be over-shadowed by the high profile given to formal schooling. The pervasiveness of migration in village life in much of Nepal raises the possibility that parents regard their sons' education as one means to securing a good job outside the village and returning with money—in other words it teaches them to be better migrants. If this is the case, then schooling is only one of a number of the possible steps to such a goal. Others may include cultivating friendships with those connected to employers in the town, or simply having the initiative to accompany a friend or relative and make the best of opportunities that arise.

### 3.4.3 RESPONSES TO TENSIONS WITHIN THE FAMILY

Without exception, research conducted with Nepali street children has identified family conflict as a major trigger to children's departure from home. A recent national survey of street children commissioned by UNICEF cites "breakdown in the family support system, domestic violence, and parental neglect and abuse" to be the primary reasons why children left their homes (CWS 1996:194). The resulting explanatory power given to family conflict in media and NGO reports can convey the impression that it is unique to street children rather than part of the everyday experiences of the wider population (CWIN 1990, 1993). Clearly this assumption is without basis, however it cannot be tested without comparative studies of the forms of family conflict tolerated by children who stay at home. To my knowledge, such studies do not exist and hence my aim in this section is to investigate children's experiences of family relationships within the home and ask where their limits of

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toleration might be. Such an enquiry requires me to consider 'conflict' as part and parcel of everyday life in the family setting.

In a previous section, I discussed the importance of family membership in the formation of an individual's social identity and drew attention to research findings relating to the role of non-kin alliances. These imply that thinking about Nepali families as cohesive units and thereby excluding the positive role of non-kin associations, is to falsely construct 'the household' and 'the family' (see Campbell 1996). As noted by Onta-Bhatta (1996:194), there is a tendency amongst scholars and members of the dominant classes to espouse a "homogenized notion of the Nepali family as the site where 'pure' Nepali culture remains supreme". Given that the accounts of street children undermine such positive notions of the family and that these children have rejected the family by living independently, the tendency amongst officials to treat them as a separate category begins to make sense. My interest here is in the views of children and parents who have experienced what is retrospectively labelled as pathological family conflict.

It is, of course, impossible to generalise about the composition of homes across Nepal. In addition to ethnic and rural-urban differences, the presence and absence of various family members can be expected to vary during the period in which a child is living at home. As I pointed out earlier, studies have tended to focus on the presence of biological and step-parents, and overlook the part that members of the extended family might play in caring for children and strengthening the family group. Observations in one of Kathmandu's squatter settlements showed that the presence of one or more grand-parents or an aunt had several important benefits to children and their families. For example, there is the possibility of at least two regular incomes which can be sustained even if one adult has to stay at home to care for a sick child (Valentin, pers. comm.). In addition, where there are sufficient adult family members to enable one to stay at home, children are relieved of some of their responsibilities for younger siblings.

Although caring for siblings cannot be assumed to be beyond children's capabilities or detrimental to their well-being, there was general consensus amongst squatter parents that the supportive presence of an additional adult is advantageous to both carer and infant (ibid.). Finally, even a small extended family is better able to host visitors and maintain the links through which support may be sought, than a nuclear family. For example, the village-based relatives of squatter families visit on occasion and are a vital link into a social network of 'our people' (*afno manchhe*) who can help financially at times of crisis and may therefore protect children from having to seek work. It should be pointed out that research in India indicates negative as well as

positive effects of an extended family structure on mother-child relationships[19]. The research findings outlined above suggest that family composition influences children's experiences of home life and thus the relative attraction of moving away from home. However, on the basis of available evidence, we clearly cannot assume that large extended families are more likely to prevent children from leaving.

As far as I am aware, there are no census data available to document household composition across Nepal. Yet even if data existed, a cross-sectional survey would not accurately reflect the changes that many children experience by the age of twelve years. Observations in Salme village and Kohiti squatter area indicate that the temporary or permanent absence of a biological parent is but one aspect of the fluidity of 'home' in terms of the physical presence of its members. Migration for work can take parents away from the family home for a proportion of each year or for several years. Notably, parents are better able to undertake temporary labour migration if there are members of the extended family who can care for their children and maintain the farm.

A parent's attempt to maximise family security through increasing the number of adult workers in the family is one explanation for the high rates of parental remarriage evident in the accounts of street children. Remarriage is likely in the event of a spouse's death or elopement partly because it is difficult for single parents in Nepal to acquire an income or status[20]. In socio-economic terms, a father needs a woman's labour to run the household and raise his children. The outcomes of widowhood or divorce for women vary between ethnic groups, however the majority practice patrilineal inheritance. As a result, a divorced or widowed mother is likely to struggle to provide for her family's current needs and future inheritance without a husband's cash income and assets. Hindu women are particularly dependent on their husbands because, unlike Tamang women, they do not receive

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[19]Lower levels of maternal warmth in extended family households than in nuclear family households recorded in northern India have been attributed to the crowded conditions and lack of privacy in homes of extended families (Rohner and Chaki-Sircar 1988:154). However a study based in Orissa extended its focus beyond the mother to include the collective care-giving by other relatives and neighbours and concluded that "the mother's positive affect increased as households increased in structural complexity from nuclear to extended" (Seymour 1983, in ibid.).

[20]Nonetheless, as is common in analyses of family dynamics in the South, the prevalence of lone-parenting in Nepal may well be underestimated because this type of data are excluded from demographic profiles (Boyden, pers. comm.).

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an inheritance (*pewa*) when they leave home that remains theirs regardless of the outcome of their marriage (Fricke 1986:135)[21].

As noted in chapter 1, stepmothers feature more prevalently than stepfathers in street boys' accounts. This bias is in line with the relative frequency of remarriage amongst men in the squatter community as compared to women. Despite being illegal, polygamy is still practised and men usually take a new wife in addition to, rather than as a replacement for, the existing wife. Men with several wives tend to live with the woman they most recently married, but visit those living in the village or other parts of the city. It appears that divorce, although a legal concept in Nepal, is rarely experienced as a final separation by spouses and their children. Yet regardless of the specific features of the relationships that are maintained between spouses, boys like Govinda who are sons of first wives (now absent or superceded) report the effects of the changes on their place in the home:

> Before my mother eloped, then I was happy at home—but she left when I was just two years old. Then my stepmother came. She dislikes me—she gave food to her son but none to me. So then I went to live at my friend's house and I was happy.

Boys living on the street commonly describe rejection by a step-parent[22] in terms of the discriminatory manner in which food was allocated and punishments given. As described earlier in the chapter, the giving or withholding of food and material gifts also featured in Salme children's evaluations of the degree of love and care they receive at home. The significance of food allocation in kinship and wider social relationships is common to many societies. In her study of Fijian hierarchy, Toren notes that the giving of food in a hierarchical household "connotes authority in its benign and nurturing aspect" (Toren 1990:168). Govinda's words quoted above show that parents and particularly mothers, can use their power to give or withhold food as a tool to maintain dominance over their children. In Nepal, and especially amongst Hindu groups, the order in which persons are served the main meal reflects the family hierarchy. Generally it is the senior male who is served first, followed by other adult males, very young children, older children, and finally the junior mothers, daughters and daughters-in-law. To be denied food is therefore to be denied one's place in the social nexus of the home.

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[21]According to Holmberg, divorce greatly hinders a Hindu woman's prospects for remarriage yet does not have this effect amongst the Tamang (1989:60).

[22]Interestingly, girls who work in the sex trade in Kathmandu and in India report similar maltreatment by their step-parents (Gurung, pers.comm.).

Some street boys cite persistent disparagement (*hepnu*[23]), scolding (*galli garnu*) and beating (*pitnu*) that made life at home so miserable that departure became the sensible, or perhaps only conceivable, option. Adult men in Salme also spoke of leaving their homes and even the village when they were children as a result of discriminatory treatment from their stepmothers (Ripert, pers.comm.). The general notion that stepmother-stepson relationships are inherently problematic is illustrated in the comments made by one Salme man about a neighbouring family. He held that the father had decided not to remarry after his wife's death because he loved his son and therefore did not want to risk the problems that a stepmother might cause him.

The scope of this thesis permits me only to indicate the interactive role of economic, psychological and social factors that influence children's experience and expression of conflicts with step-parents. For example, maternal prioritisation of natural children must be understood in the context of material poverty and partible inheritance in which a previous wife's sons are entitled to a share in assets and land. The intense mother-son bond found in Hindu groups may enhance conflict between boys and their step-mothers (Kakar 1981:83). However, girls are less able to express or act upon maltreatment by stepmothers because they are more confined to the domestic sphere than boys.

There is no doubt that poor relationships with step-parents contribute to the discomfort children experience in the home. Nevertheless, a focus on the socio-economic and psychological factors that may cause conflicts with step-parents risks overlooking the wider implication of 'stepmothering'. The manner in which boys refer to 'stepmothers' suggests that they are a cultural trope representing a much more complex set of family tensions. In the previous chapter I alluded to the benefits of bringing a stepmother into a personal account of home-life that were pointed out to me by street boys. I was reminded of the 'evil stepmothers' central to the plots of English fairytales and noted their similarly stereotyped role in Nepali folk stories[24]. These observations prompted me to compare the perspectives of a stepmother and her stepson on the conflicts between them. The analysis that follows draws on the views of Dorje (one of the boys quoted at the start of this

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[23]The common verb *hepnu* is not easily translated into English but the sense is of domineering, belittling or looking down upon others.

[24] Although Nepali adults and children spoke of the 'wicked stepmother' characters in traditional stories, I was unable to find references to stepmothers within the relatively small proportion of folk literature that has been written down and translated into English.

chapter whom I have known for three years) and his stepmother concerning the circumstances surrounding his departure[25].

Dorje explained his departure in terms of the floods that took the family's land and prompted their move to Kathmandu, his mother's illness which drained the family budget, his father's subsequent remarriage and the maltreatment he received from his stepmother (see quote in chapter introduction). His focus is on a series of events that put pressure on the whole family and resulted in personal problems for him at home. While living on the street, Dorje visited home every few months and on one occasion when I accompanied him, his stepmother, Suk Rani, explained her point of view:

> If I ask the children to work hard at home, the neighbours think that because I am a stepmother I am always asking them to do this and that. When I speak to the children softly they don't listen to me, so I have to shout at them....then people say that it is because I am a stepmother. But I don't treat Dorje any differently to my own sons.

Here Suk Rani demonstrates her sensitivity to the potential assumptions of others, including myself, regarding her treatment of Dorje. This was made even more apparent in her later assertion that she loves Dorje as if he were her own sister's son. Although in this case the claims of stepmother and stepson are contradictory, my interest is not so much in whether or not Dorje was beaten by his stepmother, but in their perceptions of their relative positions and the choices open to them. Unlike Dorje, Suk Rani is not subordinated to adults on the basis of age. However social norms require her to defer to her husband's authority and these should be considered when reading her explanation of their respective efforts to guide Dorje:

> When my husband comes home tired at night, the neighbours complain to him about his son. He lets Dorje off a few times but if he keeps misbehaving then my husband punishes him. But he is not a hard man, he is soft. Whenever I ask the children to do something the neighbours accuse me of being unfair because I am a stepmother so I say to his father "they think it is because I am a stepmother that I shout at Dorje, so you must tell Dorje to behave well". I stopped telling Dorje what to do and the neighbours kept on complaining about him. Only when his father sees with his own eyes that Dorje is doing bad things does he beat him—every few months or so".

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[25]Due to the inherent bias in data that largely comprise children's accounts of leaving home, I sought opportunities to hear alternative perspectives on the same event so that I could analyse a boy's transition from home to the street from the perspective of the household and wider community. According to Kearney, these perspectives have been too frequently overlooked by scholars of migration and have constrained understanding of the social dynamics of movement (Kearney 1996:334).

Interestingly, the reactions of neighbours that Suk Rani uses to support her claims, as well as the indication that Dorje is also beaten by his father, indicate that Suk Rani was only one player within the family dynamic. It is only by widening the frame of analysis to include the perspectives of several players that I am able to contextualise situations of apparent extreme interpersonal conflict that prompt a boy's departure from home.

Efforts to determine factors that place children at risk of abuse from family members have turned their attention to the effects of recent socio-economic pressures on 'traditional' forms of social organisation. Karim argues that "poverty associated with a social disruption in family and social organisation is directly associated with child neglect and abuse" (Karim 1993:168). Common to these analyses is the notion that the form of poverty experienced by urban immigrants and squatters produces 'social ills' that affect children, for example alcoholism. Boys spoke of leaving home after being beaten by relatives—usually fathers—who were "crazy from drinking". Squatter children too complained that their fathers drank too much and as a result would come home very late, scold them and quarrel with their mothers (Valentin, pers.comm.). Given that alcohol consumption drains the family finances and reduces a family's status within the community, its impact on children is clearly greater than the immediate physical and emotional pain of being hit by their fathers. Drunken and abusive parents also featured in the accounts of boys who fled rural homes, thus cautioning against the assumption that family conflict involving alcohol is a modern, urban phenomenon.

In concluding this section I reflect on the possibility that changing social trends in Nepal have caused more children to leave home in recent years. Drawing on her experience in the Philippines, Silva suggests that the stresses of urban living are linked to the "disappearance of certain cultural safety valves" (Silva 1996:281). She asserts that husbands no longer fear the uncertainty of living outside their lawful families and that a decline in religious sanctions has contributed to the disintegration of community and family support structures. The first problem here is that rural communities are portrayed as static and comprising of close interpersonal ties that protect children. Prevalent migration from Nepal's villages refutes the first proposition and the second reflects ideals that are commonly projected onto rural life. While ethnography of a recently urbanised Gurung population documents the advent of family tensions during adolescence (Macfarlane and Gurung 1992:15), friction between parents and their children is described as part and parcel of growing up in Limbu villages in East Nepal (Sagant 1996). The second probem with Silva's conclusion is that positively valued trends, such as increasing provision for

education and migration to the workplace, are not evaluated for their role in altering the expectations and priorities of family members. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, families disperse in an attempt to educate their children and raise their social and economic status. Often it is these movements that prompt the second marriages and family tensions more readily cited as causes to children's separation from the home.

### 3.4.4 TRAVELLING TO THE CITY

The family's history and current circumstances form the basis to children's journeys to the city. Many like Dorje, Bhim and Surje, have moved with their families from hill areas in their efforts to secure land or work in the plains or city[26]. Some homeless boys described accompanying their parents to carpet, brick and textile factories, working alongside them and then running away. Others came from hill villages to work as porters in Kathmandu with an older relative in order to earn cash during the slack months of the agricultural year. One could argue that the experience of moving with relatives gives children the knowledge of the urban environment and confidence to seek work independently. However, the fact that most children remain with relatives in the workplace suggests that the prompts to independent flight are negative experiences, or perhaps a positive opportunity, that are particular to the individual child.

A family's need for cash or obligation to repay a debt are the primary reasons why children travel to the city with an agent. Research into the recruitment process in the carpet industry found that 8% of children were bound to their job by family debts (CWIN 1992 cited in Sattaur 1993:34). In all likelihood, the agent is well known to a child's parents and offers 'opportunities' to children across the village. For example, in Beltar village in Sindhuli district, the local broker was a village resident and thus able to assure parents of direct payment for their children's labour (Johnson et al. 1995:57). According to Sattaur, parents are sometimes offered a loan by the broker and if they are unable to repay it or pay the interest, the broker "may strike a deal to 'train' the son or daughter in the city"(Sattaur 1993:28). When their child's wages

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[26]Many families' decisions to migrate are not driven by destitution but by the desire for better employment prospects, health services and schools. Interviews with squatter parents revealed that the prospects of a better education for their children was a primary reason for their move to the city. Moreover, these patterns are not restricted to the poor. Research in Gulmi and Agharkanchi districts showed a positive association between out-migration and land area owned, suggesting that wealthy families are dispersing, perhaps in order to meet changing educational and material 'needs' (Panter-Brick and Eggerman 1997:197).

are taken as interest on their loan, parents have very little power and should news of their child's maltreatment in the factory reach home, they may not be able to do anything about it. Circumstances like these contribute to children's decisions to run away from what may be intolerable working conditions (see chapter 4).

Nevertheless, children's reports of positive experiences in jobs in the city should not be overlooked. Girls in Andheri village, also in Sindhuli district, said that they would prefer to be in the carpet factory than at home because work there is easier than the tasks they are given at home (Johnson et al. 1995:57). When girls working in the factory visit home they persuade their friends to join them and there is now no need for an agent in the village (ibid.). Stories about life in the town recounted by returning migrants excite children just as they do adults. Children in Salme spoke of the motor vehicles, televisions, big houses and tasty food that could be found in the city, as well as the prospect of earning money. In spite of the economic pressures that force some parents to send their children to work in the city, such a move is viewed by parents and children alike as having the potential to benefit the individual child now and to lead to further opportunities in the future. In the next chapter I focus on migrant boys' experiences of working and living in Kathmandu and address the influences of street living on their relationships with relatives and the home.

## 3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has covered a wide range of issues relating to children's experiences in the home. Its purpose has been to contextualise boys' departures from the family base in order to better understand the process of becoming a street child. In conclusion, I briefly summarise the chapter's main points.

Children throughout Nepal are socialised as family members, the precise meaning of this role depending on ethnicity and religious orientation. From the age of about five years they are expected to work within the home and learn the techniques through observation of their elders and practice. Before their mid teens children are given little say in decisions relating to their work and schooling, although boys in some communities are able to subvert parental authority without provoking conflict. Children face difficulties in achieving what is generally expected from a school education. These arise from socio-economic factors including caste, wealth, gender and birth order affecting their attendance, as well as the incompatibility of a school routine with work demands. Furthermore, children are under pressure to succeed in a mode of learning that has little relevance to their current lives and dubious

potential for the future. In this light, migration for work is an attractive option. Far from being an alien experience, travel to find work is familiar to many children either through prior migration with their families, or through interaction with returning migrants in the village.

In view of the historical and cultural precedence of migration, boys' departures from home, whether sanctioned by their parents or otherwise, can be seen as emulations of 'adult' behaviour. The ethnographic data presented in this chapter show that boys who prove their capabilitities at work are permitted and even encouraged to travel and earn money outside the home context.

Boys from the age of about twelve are deemed capable of working on their own and are often expected to contribute cash to the family budget through employment in the city. While parents may arrange their son's job on a temporary basis, for example, in order to pay off family debts, it is generally recognised that the city offers young men many more opportunities than the village. Such pragmatic reasons behind a son's departure challenge certain aspects of his ideal role in the family unit. Thus, it is all the more important that some form of connection with the family is maintained. A son is expected to be loyal to the family in order to maintain its prestige in the community as well as care for his parents in their old age. His decisions to leave home concern the wider family group, and the onus is on a son to ensure that migration fulfils certain expectations. In this light, to conceive a child's 'rights' in terms of individual decision-making is inappropriate in Nepal where normatively at least, the onus is more towards individual responsibiliy to kin and the fulfilment of roles ascribed by one's seniors.

I have shown that poor children's relationships within the home and the expectations of family members can prompt them to leave home and seek a livelihood in the city. The question then is whether family connections continue to be important for street boys on an everyday basis and in their efforts to find respected jobs. How do their roles compare to those of Kathmandu residents who form close relationships with boys? In the next chapter I pursue an enquiry of the support offered to *khate* through their participation in social networks in three city locations.

# CHAPTER 4
## LIVING AS A *KHATE*

## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes children's movements from formal employment to work on the streets, and the ways in which they learn how to support themselves. It examines the relationships that boys form with those more powerful or knowledgeable than themselves and traces their entries into three different 'street' settings. These are Durbar Square, an open plaza in the city centre; Kohiti junkyard, situated in a squatter settlement and finally the Common Room, a drop-in centre for street children run by the NGO named CWIN (see map 4.1). I aim to show that boys become part of a localised social dynamic within each of these settings, while maintaining the option to move on and draw on resources found elsewhere. I describe prevalent notions about who *khate* are and what they do, showing that the manner in which boys define themselves in relation to their ascribed identities varies according to the context.

In this chapter I present a substantive part of my ethnography of boys' daily lives on 'the streets' in Kathmandu. In rooting my analysis in their words and actions, I have attempted to present an account that is child-focused, at least to the extent possible for an adult researcher.

## 4.1 EXPERIENCES OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE CITY

> Child labour is so commonplace that, to many Nepalis, it is unremarkable and therefore invisible. (Sattaur 1993:9)

In common with other child migrants to the city, boys who later went to the streets rarely chose their first job[1]. Whether placed in work by a relative or recruited by a stranger met in the bus park, boys had limited knowledge of what their job would involve. Those with whom I spoke had been domestics in a wealthy household,

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[1] Of the 27 boys who participated in the network interview, 16 had worked in paid employment prior to rag-picking or begging on the streets and 9 of these were jobs arranged through relatives or village contacts.

assistants in a cheap restaurant, carpet weavers, assistants on a bus or *tempo*[2]. Many recounted a remarkable series of jobs prior to and between periods of work as a *khate* (see for example Govinda's interview and autobiographical account in appendix IV). The success of these appears to depend largely on the nature of boys' relationships with their employers. Where good rapport is established and boys feel valued and secure as employees, work can be a positive experience for children and support them for several months or even years. Yet if such relationships are lacking, boys look elsewhere for a source of livelihood[3].

The causal factors to quitting a job identified by children are precisely those earmarked as exploitative in studies of child labour in Nepal and across South Asia (for example CWD 1994:41, Sattaur 1993, Chatterjee 1992:17). The series of abuses to children's physical health, mental well-being and rights as employees that are documented in these studies are mirrored in street boys' complaints about the conditions under which they had to work. Many never received the wages they were promised and were persistently criticised by those who had been there longer. As well as being undervalued, harrassed and even beaten, some boys spoke of the poor physical environment in which they worked. Without adequate food or opportunities to go into the open air, they were expected to work from early morning until late into the night. The unremitting work routine, even when employers provided pocket money and allowed occasional trips to the cinema, was one major problem described by children working in a carpet factory who have migrated from Sindhuli District (Johnson et al. 1995:57). Another was not being able to get help when they needed it. Although the type of help is not specified, it is worth noting that working children's lack of access to health care and education are widely reported by campaigning organisations and have been the focus for recent intervention (CWD 1994:8, Sattaur 1993:28). The important point here is that

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[2]A *tempo* is a motorised three-wheeler that functions like a small bus travelling along set routes in Kathmandu. Despite attempts by the government to prevent children working in such hazardous conditions, many drivers still employ boys to collect money from passengers and bang the roof to indicate when people wish to alight.

[3]In chapter 3 I pointed out that the proportion of poor children who stay at home far outweighs that of runaways. At this point, it is important to add that of the large number of children who begin supervised work in the city, relatively few leave and take up street work. Despite the recognised inaccuracies of population estimates, we can safely assume that those in recognised employment (usually referred to as 'child workers') outnumber the children working in the streets. A recent estimate puts the numbers of urban Nepali child labourers in all sectors at 300,000, but the basis to this figure is not given (CWIN 1996:16). It is perhaps more meaningful to compare recent estimates for the numbers of street children in Kathmandu (1,500) and of children working in restaurants and lodges (7,665) (both figures calculated by CWIN, the latter cited in Sattaur 1993:30).

children in supervised employment are rarely in a position to change these aspects of their working environment. The regular shelter and food provided are small incentives to continue in such jobs, especially for those who are unpaid and doubt whether their parents are receiving their wages.

Ganesh, an experienced rag-picker who used to work in a small roadside restaurant, concluded that employers are "always nice to you at the start...then they do not pay you". He described his experience and means of coping with the situation as follows:

> The boss treated us well. But in every place you find people who will speak badly about you to the boss, and there was someone like that there—all he did was tell bad stories about us. Countless times my friend and I used to try to steal from the money box—why lie about that now? You have to be clever you know! We would take out a couple of rupees and buy chewing tobacco, or save a few more and go to the cinema after our duty ended at eight o'clock at night.

Here Ganesh identifies two very important resources upon which many working children rely. The first is the presence of a friend and the second is the personal quality of being clever (*chalak*). Together these enable boys to seize opportunities to subvert the system or reject it by running away, as did Ganesh and his friend in due course. Girls on the other hand are much less likely to flee the workplace because, say boys, they work indoors much of the time and do not consider the possibility of running away[4].

Some boys reported leaving their jobs when a vital source of support disappeared. Ramesh, a thirteen year old rag-picker described his arrival in Kathmandu thus:

> My father brought me and told me that I would work in one of these big houses and that I could study. We arrived at my older sister's place and I didn't want to go elsewhere. So I worked in the same house as her, doing dishes and washing clothes. She worked downstairs and I worked upstairs...My sister got her own wages, but father came to collect mine.

Ramesh went on to explain that he ran away from the house after his elder sister left her job to get married. Like Ganesh, he was to some degree dependent on an ally in the workplace and the employer's provision of wages, food and shelter was insufficient reason to stay. On these grounds employment itself cannot be described as a safety net that prevents children from arriving on the streets. Rather, children appear to benefit only when they are supported in patron-client type relationships with employers who extend their provision beyond wage payment to protection and

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[4]Gender distinctions in work and behaviour are discussed in section 4.7.

security[5] (Wolf 1977:174). In their retrospective accounts of employment, boys either depict a trap from which they tried to escape, or assert that they were replaced by another worker (see Govinda's interview, appendix IV). In both cases, they understood that their employers neither valued them as individuals nor felt responsible for their well-being in any way.

There is no way of knowing the extent to which children weighed up the security their job provided against the relatively unknown alternatives in the city. It was clear from the interviews however, that boys ran away from employers when they could no longer tolerate the working conditions despite doubts about where they would go next. In their recollections of these departures, none mentioned worrying about specific dangers in the streets, but some spoke of their lack of personal contacts (*chinneko manchhe*) or the company of a friend also taking this step. Vulnerability was thus expressed in terms of being alone or 'disconnected' from those in influential position who could offer support.

## 4.2 APPRENTICESHIP TO STREET EARNING

For many boys the first few days on the streets are miserable. Reluctant to start begging, or ignorant of its techniques, they sleep on empty stomachs. Once in contact with other street boys, newcomers quickly learn the skills of survival. Govinda was taught to beg by a boy who approached him in Thamel, an area in the city centre geared towards tourists where he soon learnt of other resources available to him:

> There I met a tourist who bought me rice, noodles or meat and gave me 20 rupees every day—sometimes even clothes too. Then he showed me the CWIN centre where I met a boy called Bal Krishna who taught me to rag-pick.

Rag-picking is an activity that needs explanation and some instruction. Like Govinda, Kumar became an apprentice rag-picker[6]. The story he told began when he

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[5]Systems of patronage have been widely debated by anthropologists particularly with reference to Mediterranean societies (Gellner 1977). Here I draw on general definitions of patronage in which relationships between patrons and clients are asymmetrical, involve continued exchange and have a distinctive ethos, which although not illegal or immoral, "stand outside the officially defined morality of the society in question" (Gellner 1977:1).

[6]The term apprentice is not one used by the boys themselves but is one I have chosen to describe entry into *khate* work and its accompanying social identity. Following Lave and Wenger (1991) I use the concept of apprenticeship to refer to learning based on participation. This concept grounds my forthcoming analysis of the social contexts and relations of control in which boys learn to be *khate*.

was working in a roadside restaurant in Kathmandu. There he got talking to two boys who came regularly for early morning tea, often leaving full sacks of scrap outside the door. Fed up with not being paid and curious to know how these boys made money, he asked what they did. A few days later, attracted by the possibility of earning cash, he ran away with them and was taught to rag-pick.

Apprentices soon find out that there is a price to pay for their instruction. Newcomers are told to carry the sack of older or more experienced rag-pickers or to sift through particularly foul-smelling piles of rubbish. While new boys are shown the street corners and skips where good scrap can be found, their instructors benefit economically. Often an inexperienced boy's earnings are siphoned off by his instructor who, after taking charge of the sale of both sacks of scrap, buys his apprentice a meal, then pockets the remainder. If the two boys are of similar ages an equal working partnership may develop in which they look for scrap together and share the income. Where there is a large age gap, younger boys usually escape to earn on their own. On occasion, I observed a patron-client relationship continuing between an older and younger boy. It was rumoured amongst NGO staff that such partnerships sometimes involve sexual as well as financial aspects, but because sex was never discussed in my presence in the junkyard I cannot comment on the boys' perspectives on this subject.

Although the prevalence of these forms of control remains unknown, there is clearly an exploitative element to learning to be a *khate*. It is therefore misguided to consider street living as necessarily offering freedom from the kinds of domination and humiliation that children experience in the work places described above. This point is well illustrated in the account given by Bikas, aged 13, during an interview conducted by his 15 year old friend Amir who also rag-picks in the airport junkyard. Amir asked Bikas how he became a rag-picker in Kathmandu and he responded:

> I was taken to Dharan by my parents and they left me there. I stayed in a place called Chyama and when I was walking about on the streets I met some *khate* boys. "Would you like to do this job too?" they asked and I said "I'll do it". So I worked. I earnt money and came to Kathmandu. When I arrived in Kathmandu I met a carpet factory owner (*malik*) who asked "will you come with me and weave carpets?". "I'll weave, sir" I said. So then he taught me and I learnt how to weave. I wove for 6 months and then they started to dominate me with insults (*hepnu*). I had to weave until midnight, so was it surprising that I messed up the design? By that time I was nodding off at the loom. The next day after rice at ten in the morning I ran away. I started to do *khate* work again. At first I didn't know much about it and one boy cheated me. "Glass is worth 12 rupees per kilo" he said, and I said "is it really?" "Yes" he replied. So then I started to collect glass and took it to the junkyard. "How much is glass per kilo?" I asked, and the owner said "12 anna per kilo" (approximately half a rupee). So little! I asked him "how much

for 10 kilos?" and he replied "I'll give you 10 rupees"[7]. So then I asked him the prices of hard plastic (*gudiya*) and plastic milk bags. When he told me I said "From now on I'll collect those" "Ok" he said. Then after that I met a friend and we ate rice. At around ten o'clock I went to work, came back, weighed my scrap, and fell sound asleep. That's it *dai* (elder brother).

Bikas described two occasions in which he was approached by strangers and taught to earn a living. It is significant that he narrated a similar reaction to the carpet factory agent's offer and the invitation from the rag-picker boys. On both occasions he followed people who had the know-how and the personal contacts needed to make some money. The fact that one was an adult and the other a child was irrelevant to Bikas, thus indicating that children's dependence is not simply a matter of adult-child status differences in Nepali society. Rather it is about reliance on those with access to a livelihood and the willingness to 'foster' a newcomer in such a way that he gains entry to networks of knowledge and support.

In the above account, Bikas positions himself as a passive apprentice whose future lay in the hands of his instructors. He voices the struggles he faced in terms of deception by others. However does this mean that he viewed himself as totally powerless? While he took decisions to flee the carpet factory and to collect more valuable scrap, he was only able to do so once aware of the situation. Having trusted the owner, Bikas learnt that the job offer was not a personal guarantee that he would be well treated. He was later deceived in a similar way by a rag-picker boy. Considerable emphasis is given to personal connections by other boys in discussion about past experience and future opportunities. Although they rarely spoke directly of fate (*karma*), boys' accounts reflected the more general notion that relationships with others, particularly one's seniors, are more beneficial in life's struggles than personal capabilities or attributes. Bista suggests that Nepali children are socialised to rely on others (see chapter 3), and that individuals who demonstrate personal competence are isolated because they contest the fatalist perspective (1991:82). Although overly-generalised (see chapter 3), Bista's arguments offer one interpretation of Bikas' experiences, namely that his primary problem was one of failed connections.

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[7] The fact that the price of 12 annas (the equivalent of 48 paisa or 0.48 rupee) does not correlate with the owner's offer of 10 rupees for 10 kilo could be a result of numerical confusion on Bikas' part or a generous offer by the owner to attract a newcomer to his junkyard.

## 4.3 MAKING USE OF THE CITY'S RESOURCES

> This morning I was surprised to meet Bhim and his three friends in the junkyard. All four were warming their hands round the fire and explained, with shy grins, that they had run away from 'Annie's house' (a hostel run by a Belgian woman). "The exams were over and we felt bored, so seven of us ran away together. We went to the CWIN Common Room and sir gave us 30 rupees" (fieldnotes 30/11/1994).

> Cycling through Thamel I saw Bhim begging from a group of tourists. He waved and I stopped to talk. "I went back to 'Annie's house" he explained, "but I got kicked out for beating one of the smaller boys, so now I'm living just over there with some friends in a shelter we built out of plastic sheeting" (fieldnotes 10/1/1995).

Gaining expertise on the street involves learning to use the various resources that the city affords. The ability to use a number of places to live and make money is considered part of a successful street child's versatility in a number of countries (Aptekar 1994 (Brazil), Beazley 1997 (Indonesia), Lucchini 1996b (Uruguay)). While this might seem an obvious conclusion to come to, it raises questions about the way certain city spaces are used by *khate* and the range of support mechanisms available to them.

As indicated in the initial comparative study, the principal sources of income for *khate* are begging and rag-picking. Given the seasonal changes in weather and numbers of tourists, boys who are able to beg and rag-pick, or have access to other jobs such as street vending, are better placed to earn sufficient income throughout the year. They are at a further advantage if they are familiar with the facilities offered in the NGO centres established to support boys who beg, rag-pick and sleep rough[8]. Notably, boys tend not to rag-pick and beg simultaneously because they require very different uses of the physical spaces and social environments collectively termed 'the street'.

Begging is understood by the *khate* to encompass both the passive receipt and active extraction of donations from the public. A few children beg passively at the doorways of temples or by shrines, sites where destitute individuals and families receive coins and food from devotees. Others sit outside a popular ice-cream parlour situated amongst a group of five-star hotels and visited by a steady stream of wealthy customers of every nationality. In these settings boys may wait for handouts, or may identify and pursue a potential source of donation, tugging at a

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[8]In 1995 the following NGOs were each running a centre in a different part of Kathmandu that provided a range of health, educational and social facilitities to visiting street children: CWIN, CWS, EPHC and PIN-Nepal (see appendix I).

shirt or bag. Estimations of average daily earnings would be meaningless because actual cash income varies between individuals (often depending on their appearance) and from one day to the next. Moreover, within pairs or groups of friends the high earners share out their income and in turn gain status on the streets. Boys who beg tend to congregate in busy places, for example near shops selling luxury goods, temples for devotion or admiration or open areas with food stalls. To generalise broadly, occasional large donations of cash are given to boys begging in tourist spots or city centre shopping areas which benefit friends too. In contrast, the few boys who beg near temples receive smaller, more predictable amounts which they use to feed themselves. Unlike rag-picking, begging does not involve 'going to work'; boys earn, eat, play and sleep within the same physical and social space. The general bustle of city centre space and the presence of certain key individuals provide security to children during the day. The popular tourist spots offer company and handouts later in the evening; yet even here only dogs and police vehicles roam the streets after eleven o'clock at night[9].

For rag-pickers, certain physical spaces are used for work and others for leisure. Streets in the city centre and residential suburbs are used as economic resources. Areas are known for the type and amounts of scrap one might expect to find. Thamel, for example, is known for plastic containers discarded by tourists who use large quantities of shampoo, camera film etc. Residential areas yield a range of recyclable scrap metals. The majority of rag-pickers work early in the morning, some beginning before dawn in order to be the first to search through the night's rubbish. By mid-morning, when the city centre is bustling with people going to work and school, most boys have returned to the junkyard to sell their scrap. Younger and newer rag-pickers earn the least (about 30 rupees) for a morning's work, whereas experienced boys in the junkyards familiar to me often earn between 60 and 100 rupees. Boys in their late teens with the physical strength to carry large loads over a

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[9]During an earlier period of fieldwork (1992), I was told that gangs of street youths walked the city streets at night, occasionally fighting one another over issues of territory. Latterly fewer references were made to these groups, however boys spoke of being woken, beaten and forced to hand over money when they were sleeping on the roadside. Older street youth, 'gangs' (whose members may be local to the area) and the police are blamed for these incidents. I should point out that much of the night-time activity is likely to have taken place near Thamel; an area that I chose not to concentrate on in my later fieldwork. Reasons for my decision include the suspected higher rates of illegal activitity that posed problems to an outside researcher and the understandable antipathy with which boys who beg in Thamel greet research. In the light of past experience, boys question the applicablity of 'research' that will not bring any significant changes to their lives.

long distance can earn more than 150 rupees in one day[10]. As a comparison to these figures, adult construction workers employed on a daily basis usually earn about 50 rupees per day. Depending on the morning's success, a second work stint may be undertaken later in the day. Of course, the work timetable varies with the weather, the route an individual plans and his need for cash. Age and experience also influence the timing and destination of rag-picking excursions. While I often met boys below the age of about fourteen rag-picking in the city centre in the middle of the day, older boys tended to work on the city's periphery or late at night. There are economic reasons for the latter work pattern but, for reasons that will become clearer, it is also important for these boys to preserve as much anonymity as possible. For rag-pickers, the streets in their literal sense, are a work site in which it is neither expedient nor desirable to engage in social interaction. Once work is completed, rag-pickers relax with friends in and around the junkyard and visit other areas of the city for leisure purposes.

Having observed the different ways in which *khate* use the city spaces, I was interested in their knowledge and use of resources in the city to cope with health problems. To this end I designed a research technique based on group discussion and visual diagramming, which informed me of the range of health complaints suffered by boys in different street settings, their implications for quality of life and the actions they took to address each type of problem (Baker 1996) [11]. There was a general consensus amongst boys based in the junkyard and NGO centres on the nature of the health problems they face on the street. In addition, all street boys agreed that wounds should score the maximum for frequency of occurrence and degree of pain. Unlike dog bites, fractures and fevers which boys said prevented them from working, wounds were scored low for their effect on income. Although boys continued to rag-pick with open sores on their arms and legs, they recognised the risks of infection and said that they seek treatment at the CWIN clinic if they have a bad wound[12]. The squatter boys reported a very similar range and frequency of health complaints to the street boys, showing the significance of poor sanitation

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[10]The approximate rate of exchange during 1995 was 75 rupees to £1, meaning that the daily incomes of rag-pickers ranged from £0.40 to £2.00.

[11] The method is described in chapter 2 and examples of the health diagrams given in appendix III. The 4 groups comprised boys who rag-pick and live in a junkyard, those who rag-pick or beg and use the NGO centres regularly, and finally those who live with their parents in the squatter settlement. The locations were Kohiti junkyard, a room in the squatter settlement and two NGO centres, namely the CWIN Common Room and CWS Bal Kendra.

[12]Their assertions correlate with the relative proportions of various health complaints treated by the CWIN nurse and indicated in the clinic's annual records.

and other factors affecting all the urban poor. However as we would expect, squatter boys are largely treated with medicines from the pharmacy bought by their parents.

For certain work-related problems (including dog bites and cuts), or common conditions (such as coughs and diarrhoea), some street boys reported seeking help from junkyard owners and shop-keepers who would buy them medicines from the pharmacy. In such cases, street boys may receive the same medical treatment as squatter boys. However we cannot assume that these adults provide the care of a parent who could look after a child at home. Boys' responses showed that their street friends play a vital care-giving role; bringing food when they cannot work, keeping a close eye when they are very sick and even taking them to the NGO clinic in a taxi. Clearly there are immediate sources of support available when street boys fall ill, the most heavily used being the free NGO clinics[13]. My observations in two NGO centres supported street boys' assertions that they usually seek treatment in these centres. In general, the discussion participants were well-informed about the health risks they face on the street. As well as providing a treatment service, NGOs appear to be boys' principal source of information about various illnesses and conditions, the types of treatment needed and where this can be obtained.

The critical factor that enables boys to cope with health problems while rag-picking or begging on the street is knowledge of, and access to, those people who can provide treatment. The boys who participated in these health research exercises live and work near a number of NGO centres offering basic health services. It was therefore important to understand the social factors influencing their use of these services and assess the degree of support available from elsewhere.

In this section I have outlined the various ways in which the occupations of *khate* influence their use of the city's physical spaces. Already, significant differences in the social fabric of these various settings are emerging which confront outsiders' preconceptions that 'the street' is a homogenous environment. Boys' perspectives on their physical health and their use of local contacts and NGO clinics suggest that a more detailed analysis of social relationships on the street is required. The next section describes social interaction in three settings where *khate* live, focusing on

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[13]Despite this service, the fact that boys report leaving common illness such as diarrhoea, worms and fever untreated unless they became unbearably painful and prevent them from working, raises concerns about the long-term effects of chronic infection on their physical well-being that cannot be addressed here.

their rapport with others in the locality and on relationships amongst the boys themselves.

## 4.4 DURBAR SQUARE: FEELING COMFORTABLE IN A SPACE OF DIVERSITY

Our nation is here, there is food here, there is fun here

(*Hamro rastra yahan ho, khanna pani yahan, moj pani yahan*)

This was the response of 13 year old Surje when, during a discussion with three of his friends who also beg for a living, I asked him why he liked living in Durbar Square. Located near the city's commercial centre, Durbar Square supports about a dozen boys who sleep rough. Most consider themselves to be *khate* and have lived for short periods in NGO centres and schools. However a few have families in the locality but spend much of their day, and some nights, with 'homeless' boys in the square. To explain such a strong magnetism to this area, I recount my observations of activity in Durbar Square.

A mid-afternoon walk through the square reveals a diverse collection of people. In the open area stall-holders display tourist memorabilia and a group of men pour tea and cook *roti* for shop-keepers and a motley collection of back-packers, some of whose dress and air of detachment from the world earn them the description of 'hippie'. At the other end of this open space are some impressive temples, one of which houses the human goddess Kumari, a pre-pubescent girl. Market vendors sell fresh produce from the lower steps of the temples and the level of activity is generally high. Small groups of tourists and Nepalis sit on the top steps surveying the scene below. Tour parties occasionally pass through, followed by hawkers offering tiger-balm, beads and wooden flutes, and a blue-uniformed policeman stands static amidst the general hubbub (plate 4.1).

Durbar Square is a honey-pot for visitors and locals alike and its concentration of tourist facilities draws people from widely distant origins for business and leisure purposes. Liechty views Durbar Square, Thamel and certain other spots in the city centre as "spaces in which a variety of Nepalis and a variety of foreigners interact, playing roles (wittingly or otherwise) in a space where multiple imaginations of 'others' meet" (Liechty 1995:4). Such fluidity of social interaction means that life is never dull for boys who spend their days and nights in the square. There are plenty of distractions, but are there also networks of support for these boys?

Plate 4.1  Durbar Square, Kathmandu
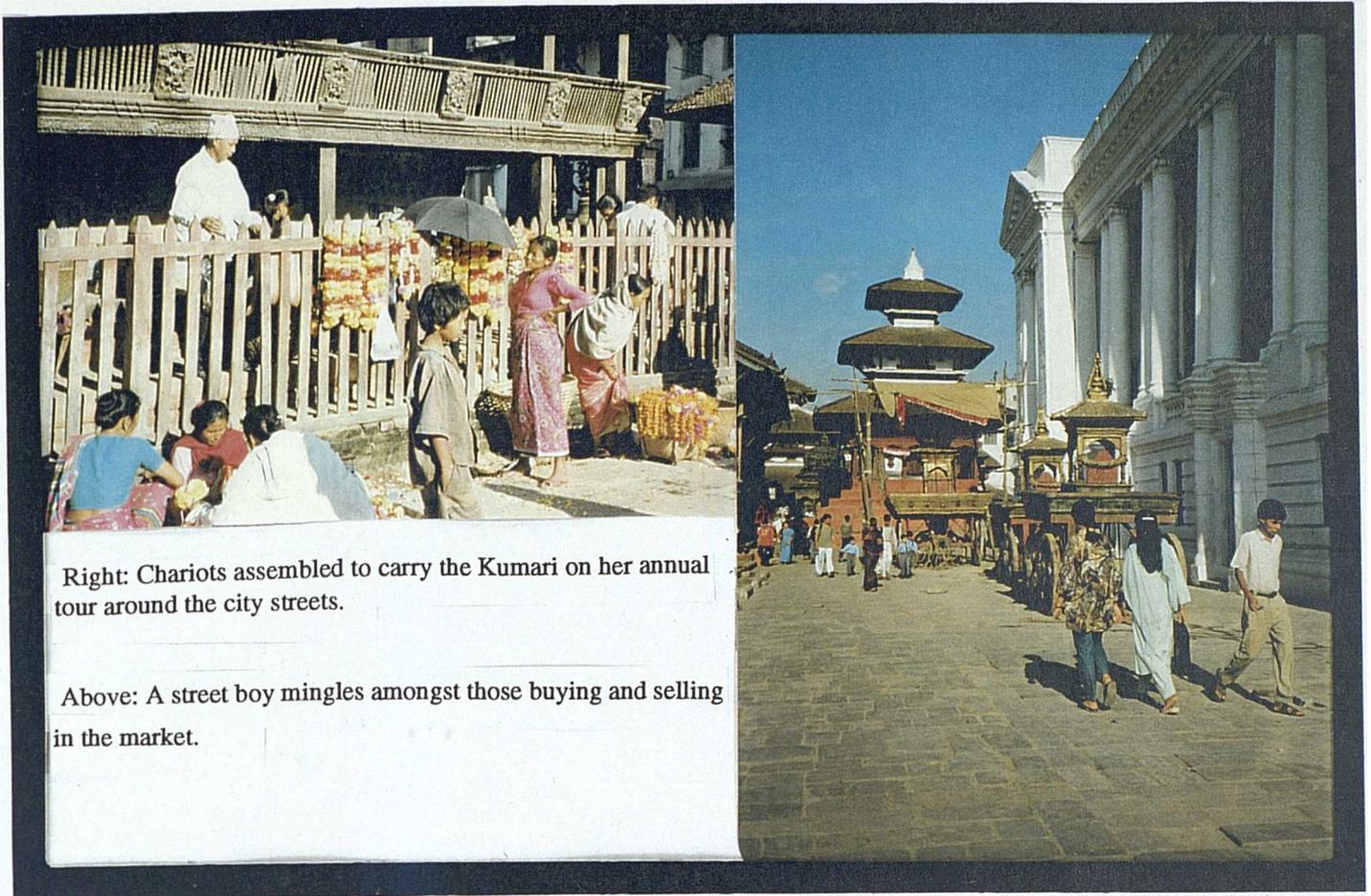


Right: Chariots assembled to carry the Kumari on her annual tour around the city streets.

Above: A street boy mingles amongst those buying and selling in the market.



Street boys sit chatting with a tourist who is teaching them the English alphabet

Although many people pass through Durbar Square intending only to buy provisions or view the temple area, over time I was alerted to the regular presence of certain people with whom the street boys interact. The most obvious were friends of their own age with whom they play marbles, ride bikes, hassle tourists for snacks and bed down on the pavement under flattened cardboard boxes or sleep in a nearby room (see below). The results of the network interview indicate that of the various people in the street and home with whom they are connected, these friends play an important support role. Friends (sathi) were the most frequently identified as providers and recipients of boys' care, as well as daily companions in work and leisure time. Although rarely visible, family members were also cited in boys' responses. Mothers provide care to several boys who spend time in Durbar Square, making the occasional visit home. Their attraction to the square was further explained by their associations between fear of being at home and conflict with a father or brother.

Owners of the stalls selling souvenirs sometimes lend money to the boys or buy them snacks in exchange for errands, and some offer them opportunities to make money by selling trinkets to tourists who wander around the temples[14]. Every so often, certain children are successful in striking up a more lasting relationship with tourists who 'foster' them for the duration of their stay. Boys are taken to tourist cafes (tandoori chicken and chips being an often quoted favourite dish) and on excursions to the city sites where they may act as guide. They are bought new clothes and occasionally stay in the hotel. During 1994/5, more regular support was available from two European men living in the city who, in entirely separate initiatives, offered boys rooms to sleep in at night and provided daily tuition or arranged school registration. One was later accused of paedophilia[15]. The

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[14] Participants in the network interview said that local vendors and tourists offer help in times of need. Some said they would seek help from older boys if in a difficult situation but spoke also of conflict with these individuals. Thus the protection available to boys in Durbar Square role should be considered in the light of the exploitation that can take place in these relationships. In marked contrast to participants in the network interview who rag-pick, only one boy included an NGO staff member in his responses.

[15] Recently concern has been openly expressed about the sexual abuse of street children that can arise in relationships that appear to be based on the provision of basic needs. In August 1996 two European men were accused of sexually abusing steet boys but could only be detained for commiting an offence against the public order because there is no specific law relating to paedophilia in Nepal. Both had been 'supporting' a group of street children; one inside a home and the other by renting a room in Durbar Square for boys who beg in the area to sleep in. Sex is not something that is ordinarily talked about in public, or at least not in an NGO centre. However, boys seem to be increasingly confiding in each other or a male NGO worker, and their accounts plus questionaire data indicate

interpersonal relationships existing under the guise of 'welfare work' were very complex and, at times, involved various forms of exploitation.

Areas of the city are sometimes used by boys as a means of identifying an individual's current social group, and to underline differences between the sort of boys who beg in Thamel, and the sort who beg in Durbar Square; 'them' versus 'us'. Surje's description at the head of this section indicates that boys in Durbar Square regard the area as their territory. For instance, they spoke about the possibility of being mugged if they went to another busy tourist area named Thamel, because boys who beg there consider it their territory. The many different ways in which boys in Durbar Square are able to make money show a mastery of the environment that one normally associates with home. But do familiarity and expertise necessarily mean that children feel that they belong in a place?

As I have shown, boys are able to meet their immediate daily needs in and around Durbar Square. They do so by making use of the diverse and partly transient population which allows them to beg, pick-pocket, sell, act as guides and gamble. Undoubtedly the stimulating range of activities and the liberal social dynamics in this setting enable boys to interact with others on their own terms. They speak of a sense of freedom in Durbar Square, which is unsurprising given the domination many have experienced in the work place, school or at home. Yet such feelings can also be explained by their position as 'street children' in the eyes of tourists and locals in this setting. Using Turner's conceptual framework, it can be argued that tourists and begging boys are drawn to each other by their respective liminality from the wider social system (Turner 1974). Many 'travellers' come to Kathmandu with the intention to rediscover fundamental human values (comparable to Turner's communitas) and a spirituality that they feel to be inaccessible in their home countries. Turner argues that the type of liminality represented in the levelling and removal of structural status "draws on poverty for its repertoire of symbols" (ibid.:245). I observed that boys in Durbar Square were not always denigrated and advised to go home or find a 'good job'. The 'hippies' who sat for hours in the open plaza bought boys tea and tried to strike up conversation without any intention of acting to change boys' lives. Their empathy indicated a desire for what they saw as a lifestyle characterised by 'simple poverty' and supportive friendships.

Of course, as elsewhere, the very presence of children on the street challenges urban middle class norms that specify children's place to be at home with their families

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that several boys have experienced a series of short term sexual relationships with tourists (Azad 1995:25).

and dictate that people should not live on urban thoroughfares (see Bourdillon 1994:527, Glauser 1990:139, Swart 1990 and chapter 5). However, within middle class responses about boys' needs to change their ways there were hints of envy of a lifestyle that appeared unfettered by responsibilities (as evident in the fable of the pig, section 6.1.2). These observations are consistent with what Turner describes as secret envy amongst the middle classes of the poor, who appear to be less restricted by materialism and social obligations (ibid.:243).

When I asked teenage squatter boys what they valued about living at home, they spoke of not having to ask anyone's permission to eat or use something. In Durbar Square, boys' decisions about how to spend their time and money are largely their own. Moreover, there is no indication that their material quality of life is worse than that offered by their homes[16] and although they are vulnerable to actions of police, drunkards, junkies and abusive tourists, we cannot assume that similar abuses are not part of home life. The evidence suggests that a viable alternative to home is created on the streets of Durbar Square. Nevertheless I am hesitant to suggest that these boys have recreated 'home' in the streets for the following reasons.

In my opinion, the boys themselves would find the very idea of 'a street home' absurd. For them, living in Durbar Square represents everything opposite to living at home. Even those who occasionally eat and sleep with their families speak of a home-based lifestyle as one that is very different to the one they are engaged in. Prakash sleeps at home most nights and moves between the Durbar Square locality and the NGO centres during the day. He makes money for food and for hiring bicycles, his favourite pastime, by finding coins on the road and winning games of marbles with other street boys. While we were talking I asked him about school and his family. He said that he once went to school but has no desire to study. His younger brother, on the other hand, stays at home and goes to school. When I asked Prakash what advice he would give his brother, he said: "Now I tell him 'study well, do not come to Durbar Square. If you want to ride a bicycle I'll bring one home for you to have a go'". His reply is evidence of the polarity in boys' perceptions between a responsible home-based life and the corruptive potential of the streets. There are striking parallels here to the dichotomy between home and street life expressed by street children in north-east Brazil (Hecht: 1998), although the factors that underlie children's notions of two moral spheres differ in certain ways (to be discussed later in the chapter).

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[16]See section 3.1 for an account given by Kesab, father of the brothers Bhim and Surje who now live on the streets, of the steps taken to avert poverty and his inability to provide for his son's needs.

One interpretation of the attraction of places like Durbar Square and Thamel would be that they do not constrain children to particular caste or family roles, and at the same time do not demand their investment in long-term social relationships. In other words, due to the diversity of people and impermanence of relationships in these areas, they are places where one can exist but not belong. By avoiding commitment to specific people and drawing support from a range of relationships, boys reduce the risk of failing others and disappointing themselves. They gain some reassurance from the presence of other drifters who appear to be coping less well, for example the drug addicts and destitute adult beggars described by Liechty (1995). Sometimes boys mock these individuals or express a mixture of disgust and pity; indicating that they consider their own position to be different and somehow closer to acceptable standards. Only occasionally in everyday conversation did I hear boys openly reflect on the possibility that their lives might chart a similar course. In the immediate situation they, unlike the junkies and destitutes, can use their age, charisma and detachment from home to attract the sympathy of tourists. They thrive on the financial donations of tourists and the boost in self esteem that their intense, but brief, interactions engender[17]. Boys who occasionally acted as guides to tourists spoke of the 'friendship' they formed, referring to the tourist as 'my white person' (*mero kuire*) and recounting examples of reciprocal loans and presents. Very occasionally tourists take children home with them. These cases are popular topics of conversation but my general impression is that few children hold out a genuine hope, or even a wish, that they would have this option.

My picture thus far gives a rosy view of living as a *khate* in Durbar Square. This is not because I believe their lives to be free and easy. Rather, I decided to postpone my discussion of the difficulties children face in order to avoid approaching their lives as a set of problems. To do so would be to follow the dictates of those who assume that the streets are unsuitable for children, and thus to have ignored the information that children themselves provided about their living environment.

When asked about the problems they face, boys invariably talked about the police and the occasions when officers patrolling the street woke, beat and chased them at

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[17]Much of the disrepute afforded to Freak Street (or Jhochen, a road running off Durbar Square) and Thamel stems from the presence of drug users and pushers who openly advertise their goods. Liechty (1995) suggests that junkies and other socially marginalised people are drawn to these localities because they are able to escape reality through a complex range of symbols. Both tourists and Nepalis, he asserts, are free to "enact the scripts and roles playing in their own imaginations" (ibid.:4). However, while tourists can journey onwards, junkies and other poor Nepalis are only able to do so in their imagination.

night. I was told that if boys did not run away quickly, they were caught, asked questions and warned of a fine should they be found on the streets the following night. A comparison of several boys' accounts revealed some liberal embellishment of these stories and it was therefore difficult to determine exactly what the police officers' intentions were or indeed the extent of their violence towards boys. Although boys were clearly worried and annoyed by police interference, there were alternative sleeping places available to them[18].

In general, the boys who beg in Durbar Square and Thamel are adept at charming or eliciting sympathy from tourists, or they have mastered pick-pocketing or other techniques considered morally dubious. The few who do not have these skills are dependent on their friends' charity and appear especially vulnerable to domination by exploitative adults[19]. Their minimal self-confidence is further eroded by the taunts of other boys and they are likely to be excluded from support offered amongst peers. At such times, boys turn to other potential sources of support. They may visit an NGO centre or collect some scrap and take it to a junkyard. On the occasions I met boys from Durbar Square in these locations, they appeared to be making reconnaissance visits to find out what might be available to them.

## 4.5   A JUNKYARD HOME?

It is not easy to spot a junkyard from the street. They are normally hidden by make-shift walls of corrugated iron or just do not stand out amongst the ramshackle low quality housing in which squatter and other urban poor groups live. Yet the business conducted in the junkyard (*kawad*) leaves tell-tale signs; piles of scrap metals, plastic containers, stacks of bottles and a large pair of weighing scales. Owners of the junkyard purchase recyclable goods by weight from anyone who has been collecting from the street rubbish piles ('rag-picking') and sell them to an agent who transports them to factories in Narayanghat, a town in the Terai and India. The

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[18]It is difficult to judge whether boys considered the facilities available to be real options. There are two NGO centres that offer over-night shelter within half an hour's walk of Durbar Square. Also, at the time of this discussion, the boys usually slept in a room rented by the European later accused of sexual exploitation. Although he never slept in this room, instead taking individual boys to his own home, he exerted a lot of influence over the boys. Sleeping in the streets may have been an attempt by boys to distance themselves from him. .

[19] A recent documentary produced by Danish Television (September 1997) described the serious threats made to boys who had been sexually exploited over long periods by three Europeans. In the experience of NGO staff and others trying to help these boys, it was the least confident in the group who remained silent for longest on these matters.

various types of metal and plastic fetch different prices[20] and these fluctuate according to demand from the recycling industries and seasonal differences in the moisture content of scrap (van Beukering and Badrinath. Warmer Bulletin 1995:6).

In the last 25 years, the recycling of scrap has become a profitable business in Nepal. The first scrap dealers to operate in Kathmandu are said to have been Indian entrepreneurs looking for a source of livelihood during times of famine (The Independent 29 November 1995). Without the intense competition in scrap dealing found in Indian cities, they made significant profits. One junkyard owner of Indian origin is reported to have a net income of 7,000 rupees per month (ibid.), which is almost three times that of a middle ranking civil servant (Shrestha pers.comm.). There are now over 200 junkyards in the Kathmandu valley, the majority of which are owned by Indians[21]. Until recently, junkyard owners did not have to pay any tax and thus benefitted from high profit margins[22]. The scale of junkyards varies widely from small family operations based in squatter houses to businesses run by several men on large areas of open land. These larger enterprises are able to command higher prices from agents because they can supply scrap regularly and in bulk. Although profits are high, the low caste status of many junkyard owners constrains their use of this wealth in achieving upward social mobility[23].

I have chosen to focus on the social interaction in and around a large junkyard in Kohiti in order to provide an in-depth perspective of its impact on boys' livelihoods

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[20] Prices also varied between junkyards and it is therefore difficult to accurately report the income potential for rag-pickers. In March 1995 the boys in Kohiti junkyard quoted the following prices per kilo; hard plastic (of the type that buckets are made) 15 rupees, iron 4 rupees, aluminium 80 rupees, brass 90 rupees, copper 120 rupees, cycle parts 22 rupees and piping 32 rupees.

[21] According to a junkyard owner in Kathmandu, approximately 10% of junkyards are owned by Nepalis (Nielsen pers. comm.), however boys state their preference to sell in these over Indian owned junkyards for reasons that will be explained in section 4.7.

[22] In 1995 however, export tax of 1 rupee per kilo of scrap metal was charged by the District Development Committee to junkyard owners or larger dealers who transport scrap to India (The Independent 29 November 1995). Recently, the police have been collecting an annual 'tax' of between 4-5,000 rupees from junkyard owners, although the official status of this is doubtful. According to the owner of Kohiti junkyard, the precise amount is decided on the whim of the police. There is every likelihood that larger 'taxes' are charged for protection from raids for stolen property.

[23] Rather than buying land or building property like many migrant workers, the two junkyard owners known to me were expanding their investment in local enterprises (for example pig-rearing and renting out rooms to older *khate*) and spending large amounts of cash on alcohol. Both are low caste Newaris whose wives are municipality sweepers. One pays for his three young children to be educated in one of the cheaper private schools. For low caste groups who may not be welcomed if they moved to a prestigous area of the city, children's education represents the best route towards upward social mobility.

and negotiation of the *khate* identity[24]. Until it was demolished in 1996[25], Kohiti squatter area, one of the oldest in Kathmandu, was situated on the bank of the Vishnumati river only five minutes' walk from Durbar Square. According to a recent survey, many of its 410 residents were migrants from Charikot, a hill area within a day's travel of the city (Flatheim and Skjorestad 1993:91). The caste composition was mixed with a large proportion of low caste groups including *Pode* (sweepers), *Damai* (tailors) and *Kasai* (butchers) (ibid.:112). As well as pursuing these occupations, residents earned a living from a variety of informal activities such as pavement vending of cheap plastic toys, clothing or vegetables scavenged from the wholesale outlets (see plate 1.1).

Unlike the boys who beg in Durbar Square, those who sell their scrap in Kohiti junkyard at first appeared to interact only minimally with local residents. The junkyard itself is an enclave rarely entered by those unconnected with the business. Parents reprimand their small children who wander in out of curiosity. Over time, it became clear to me that the nature of the business and the activities of its workforce are considered morally questionable. The small but perceptible distance maintained by local families who did not have to ragpick for a living, can be partly explained by "the general aversion to waste in the Nepali culture", which is rooted in Hindu notions of its polluting potential (van Beukering and Badrinath Warmer Bulletin 1995:9). Public opinion associates junkyards with illegal or immoral practices and their owners keep a low profile. In 1994, several kilos of stolen gold were found when police raided a small junkyard in the Kohiti vicinity and about half a dozen teenage rag-pickers were jailed for their suspected involvement. The effects of the recent political debate surrounding the banning of child employment in carpet factories have rippled into other sectors making junkyard owners sensitive to accusations of exploiting, or sometimes merely employing, children. Yet, despite their involvement in illicit activities, it became increasingly apparent to me that boys based in Kohiti junkyard have economic and interpersonal links with members of the surrounding community (the significance of which for their future prospects is discussed in chapter 6).

My first impression of daily life in the junkyard was one of a relaxed and unhurried communitarianism (plates 4.2 and 4.3). It struck me that boys were doing many

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[24]I draw also on my observations and discussions with boys based in a junkyard near the airport.

[25]The large junkyard concerned was still functioning shortly after the surrounding illegal housing had been bulldozed. Use of the ethnographic present, while primarily for the purpose of continuity and contextualisation, is therefore not entirely anachronistic.

things together; sorting sackloads of scrap, playing cards, building a shack for shelter or sitting round a fire chatting. I could not see anyone telling them what they should do and when they should do it. Moreover, unlike in Durbar Square, these boys were not commanding the attention of others in the vicinity. The signs of being at ease in their surroundings indicated a sense of belonging to this particular social nexus that made me consider the parallels between the junkyard and a family home.

With regard to fulfilling one's daily needs, the facilities available to boys in Kohiti junkyard are of similar quality and availablity to those used by local families. Boys sleep in self-built shacks made of plastic sheeting within the junkyard compound which are only marginally less weatherproof than some of the huts of poorer squatter families. Owners of other junkyards, including the one near the airport, provide a room in their own house in which boys sleep and store their clothes and other possessions. Some also provide food and deduct the cost of meals from a boy's earnings. Where no such formal arrangement exists, it is common for boys to use a cheap local restaurant that allows them to eat on credit. Stand-pumps and public latrines are as available to boys living in the junkyard as they are to families in the neighbourhood. In Kohiti, the river bed is a more accessible and widely used sanitary resource, a contributory factor to the high rates of infection in the area. Certain junkyard owners, who boys judged to be of good character, make efforts to address the the health complaints of those who are based there (see section 4.3).

The above observations suggest that few differences exist between the material quality of life of *khate* based in a junkyard and that of squatter children living at home. Indeed one might argue that *khate* have a better quality of life because in working to support themselves as opposed to their families, they have far greater choice in how to spend their time and money. Given that within six months, eight boys returned to Kohiti junkyard after running away from an NGO centre, school placement or home, and that squatter parents express concern lest their their sons be drawn to full time rag-picking, the *khate* lifestyle seems to have considerable benefits. However, in exposing the nature of relationships between boys and junkyard owners, network interviews showed a more complex picture. For as well as identifying the care boys receive from junkyard owners, participants' responses suggested that owners exert considerable control over their daily lives.

Thus to assume that junkyards simply offer boys a security similar to that potentially found at home, as well as economic freedom, would be to simplify grossly their social dynamics and to misunderstand the importance given to non-material aspects of lifestyle by the *khate* boys living there. The following

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concept has been completely replaced by the notion of a 'site for walking.'[197]

A few instances were noted above in which the subordinate details of this type of form appeared to add up to a higher-level structure of a kind with which a Western listener could feel familiar, and which could even be classified on occasion, as in the 'ternary' forms of *Requiem* and *Rain Tree Sketch*, or the 'variation'-like episodes of *Rain Coming*. These occasional oblique references to 'Western' models, however, only throw into starker relief the absence of such patternings in the greater majority of Takemitsu scores. In these cases, the various elements of the score do not sum up to yield some overall formal pattern at a higher level: rather, the sum of elements simply *is* the formal pattern: a whole layer of intermediary conceptualisation is absent. This is a point to which further attention will be drawn in the conclusion of this thesis[198]; for the moment, it is perhaps sufficient to point out that it once again suggests a fundamentally 'Oriental' structural æsthetic. As Koozin has pointed out, 'The beauty of the moment and of the individual elements is not subservient to a larger formal design in many works of traditional Japanese art.'[199]

Takemitsu's method of treating certain repeated passages as units which are then operated upon wholesale – transposed, reversed, spliced together, etc. – is clearly an exploitation of the 'non-directed' quality of twentieth-century atonalism (or, at least, of non-functional free chromaticism) to provide a context in which events can be subjected to such abrupt, unprepared transformation without the damage which would otherwise occur to an ongoing 'tonal' narrative. This is especially true, of course, of retrograde schemes; and Takemitsu's indebtedness to the principal twentieth-century exponents of atonality in the use of this device is made explicit by its origins in his brief experimentation with serial technique in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties.[200] But, while Takemitsu's 'palindromic' constructions obviously recall their equivalents in Webern (and Alban Berg in his more hermetic moods), it should not be forgotten that this device also figured in Messiaen's musical vocabulary. In *Vocalise*, for instance, the second movement of Messiaen's

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[197] Takeda, Akimichi: 'Manazashi no Ongaku: Saikin no Takemitsu- Sakuhin o Meguru Shōyō', *On-gaku Geijutsu* 52/12 (Dec. 1994), p. 19

[198] See below, Section 9.3

[199] Koozin (1988), p. 42

[200] See below, Section 3.4

Plate 4.3 Kohiti junkyard (II)
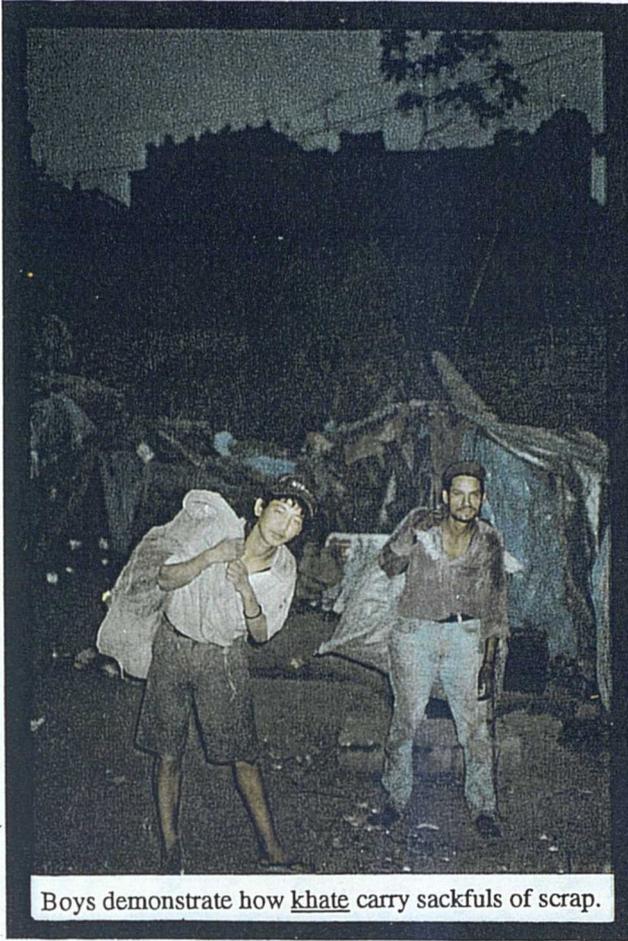


Boys demonstrate how khate carry sackfuls of scrap.
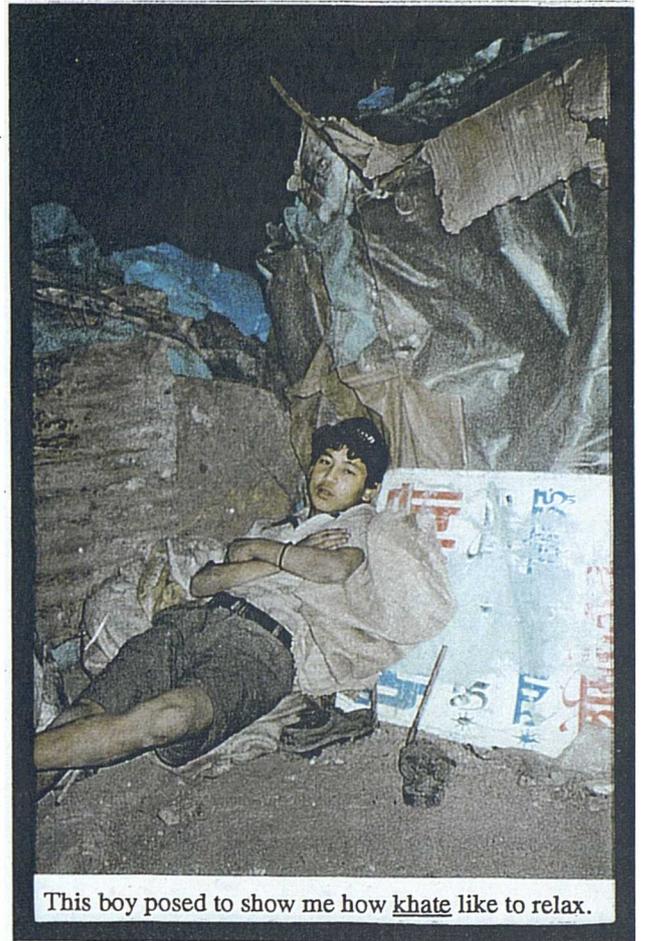


This boy posed to show me how khate like to relax.
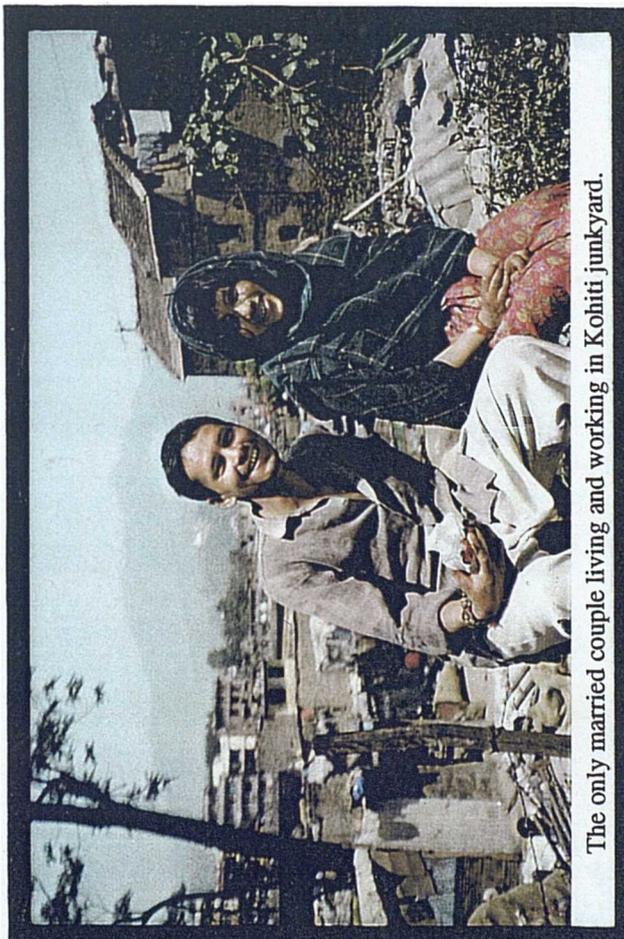


The only married couple living and working in Kohiti junkyard.
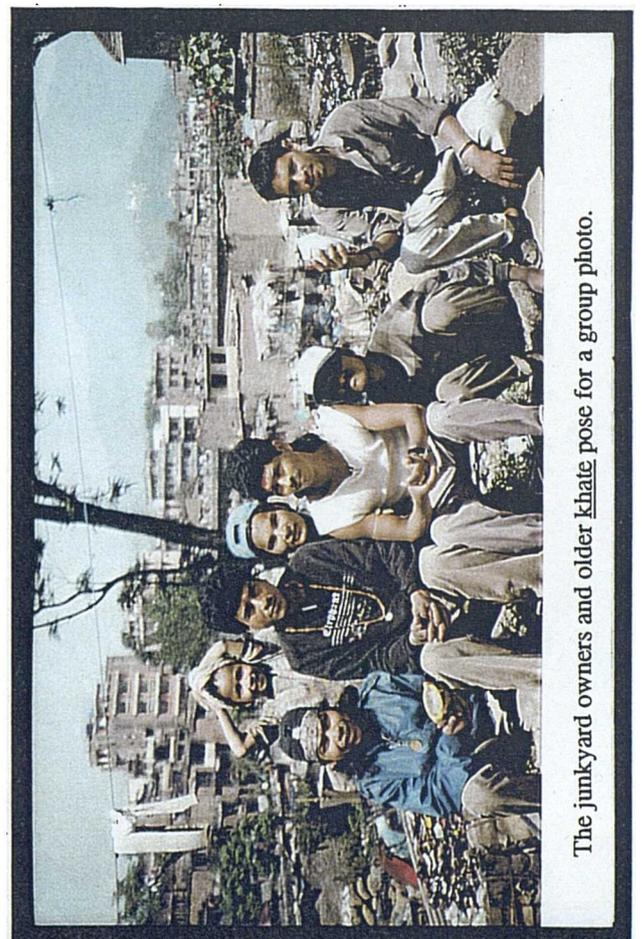


The junkyard owners and older khate pose for a group photo.

descriptions of boys' interactions with junkyard owners and with fellow *khate* will illustrate the mechanisms of control that structure their lives to a greater or lesser degree.

The procedure of sorting and weighing scrap is never without debate; sometimes the focus is on unusual findings—a torch with a built-in radio, the insides of an electrical appliance—but much of the banter concerns the current prices offered by the owner and resulting calculations. Each boy's earnings are carefully recorded in a ledger so that all transactions are made accountable. Some boys take all the cash earned on a morning's collection and perhaps top it up by adding to their loan from the owner. Others ask for a proportion for food and a trip to the cinema, the remainder then offsets a little of their debt. Most boys have very large debts, as was emphasised to me by the owner of the airport junkyard on my second visit: "Look, here it is, one boy owes me 1300 rupees, another 2500 rupees and even 3000 rupees—altogether the boys owe me more than 3 *lakhs* rupees (300,000 rupees)". Why, I wondered, did he allow boys debts to grow so large?

Before pursuing this question, it should be noted that boys often accused junkyard owners of trying to cheat them both by reducing the prices of scrap and by inflating their debts with the addition of zeros to the accounts (Nielsen, pers.comm.). Although the extent of such inflation will never be known, there must still be significant benefits to owners who continue lending money to boys selling scrap in their junkyard. As will become evident, these arise from the need to maintain a workforce. Anthropologists studying systems of patronage have pointed out that credit plays a role in creating dependency and clientage (Waterbury 1977:336, Arn 1997:7, Carrier 1994). In order to understand the nature of boys' clientage to the junkyard owner, I first consider their perspective on the debts they accrue.

Bearing in mind that boys usually earn sufficient to cover their food costs after half a day's rag-picking, it is necessary to consider how boys use the money they borrow, as well as the benefits and costs of being indebted to the junkyard owner. When poor weather conditions or illness prevent them working, credit is necessary for food. However, borrowed cash is more often spent on cinema tickets, tasty food (for example meat with the rice meal), cigarettes and gambling at cards, marbles and karom board[26]. The phrase much-repeated by boys; "money comes in quickly

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[26]Karom board is a game based on the same principle as snooker and played on a flat wooden board. It is a popular amusement amongst *khate* and expert players can win large sums when gambling for money.

and is gone quickly if you are a *khate*" sums up what they see as their inability to resist spending money immediately. As has been argued elsewhere, the habit of spending all one's income on food and recreation is central to the *khate* identity (Onta-Bhatta 1996:174). Boys speak of their spending habit as one of the moral failings of being a *khate*. Their assertions can be understood in the light of the value ascribed to saving amongst the middle classes in Nepal, whose ideals feed into judgements of street children's behaviour (as will be explained in the following chapter).

Studies of poverty and marginalisation in many regions of the world have noted that strategies of the poor that make survival possible are often dismissed as irrational and indulgent by the middle classes (Eames and Goode 1996:379). With regard to street children in particular, these sentiments have been expressed towards behaviour that is oriented solely in the present. In Brazil, street children are said to demonstrate such behaviour, termed *imediatismo*, and therefore thought to be incapable of planning for the future (Ennew 1994:417). Yet, like the *khate*, Brazilian street children spend money on food or cinema tickets for friends who will reciprocate when money is short in the future. Some peer friendships develop into close pair bonds, described by boys as 'just like brothers' (*dai bhai jastai*), or literally 'just like older brother and younger brother'. These were the words used by Mahesh, a 14 year old rag-picker participating in the network interviews to describe his friendship with Bharat. Mahesh's references to 'Bharat-*dai*' (older brother) in over half the interview questions indicated that his friend had a caring, advisory, controlling and protective role in his everyday life. When I asked who gave him food when he was hungry, Mahesh said:

> Bharat did...once when I was ill he went to New Road to steal bread buns and gave them to me. Then he went to search for scrap while I slept. He fed me and loved me like a brother.

It is significant that friends of the same age refer to each other using the inherently hierarchical term 'older-younger brothers' (*dai-bhai*). Implicit in these words are notions of authority and nurturing on the elder's part which are evident in Mahesh's description of Bharat's role. In terms of everyday living, there were few observable status differences in their relationship, and ready demonstrations of their mutual care. Nevertheless it is significant that their friendship only lasted while they were both rag-picking. Recently they have gone separate ways, each pursuing a number of different activities on the streets and in NGO centres (see chapter 6). One explanation for the endings of this and other peer friendships lies in boys' understandings that such relationships cannot help them achieve long term security or upward mobility. Despite their immediate practical and emotional benefits,

friendships with others their own age are associated with learning the 'bad ways' of the streets. Like their parents and the public, boys explain their adoption of *khate* life in terms of the bad influence of friends that drew them away from the positive attributes of home life. Thus, to restrict one's social relations to *khate* friendships would be to conform to the stigma of dubious morality and reject opportunities to move into other social arenas.

It is for these reasons that boys looked towards cultivating relationships with more senior figures in the social hierarchy such as older rag-pickers and junkyard owners. Like boys' expenditure on 'extras' for themselves and their friends, their requests for loans from junkyard owners and shopkeepers are interpreted by outsiders as a habit that perpetuates poverty. A second look at internal dynamics of the junkyard shows that debts bring security because they confirm a boy's status as a worker and a worthwhile investment for the junkyard owner. Moreover, having established a relationship through the debt, boys are able to call upon their creditor in times of hardship and receive further assistance[27].

Despite the many short term advantages of a loan, boys are obliged to sell in the junkyard belonging to their creditor, even when higher prices are offered elsewhere. Boys who had been based in Kohiti junkyard for over a year explained this to me as follows:

> Bishnu:"Did you know that the owner spends about 300 rupees per day on *chang* (home-brewed beer)? That is purely from the profit he makes by paying us such low prices. In other junkyards the prices are higher you see. For example, here they give only 60 rupees per kilo for aluminium but elsewhere its worth 80 or 90 rupees."

> RB: "So if prices are that low, why do people sell things here?"

> Bel Bahadur: "We have debts...how can we go elsewhere if we haven't paid our debts?"

> Sanjay:"There's a place to stay here also, otherwise I would have gone elsewhere."

Owners also provide extra perks that could be interpreted as altruistic generosity and may indeed express a genuine affection they have for the boys. Yet it would appear that the feast shared at *Dasain* festival and the late-night glass of *chang*

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[27]This function of credit has been described in relation to the ties that existed between shopkeepers and customers in nineteenth century England (Carrier 1994:9). Newcomers to the area had resticted access to credit because its provision depended on personal knowledge of the customer. Over time, however, credit was part of a reciprocal relationship in which it was "expected that each would support the other in good times and bad"·(ibid.).

given to older boys, aid the Kohiti owner[28] in maintaining a level of satisfaction amongst his workforce. An interesting example of his patronage was the arrival of an Indian family who built a shack in the junkyard compound. The father, an old friend of the owner's, cooked rice meals for all the rag-picker boys living there for several weeks. In one respect the owner was providing a service to boys, who were assured of two meals a day. However his strategy prevented them accruing larger debts with the local small restaurants and functioned to increase his control both on boys' expenditure and their relationships outside the junkyard.

On occasion I heard NGO staff refer to rag-picking as a form of 'bonded labour' on the basis of the junkyard owner's strategy to tie boys into his workforce with loans. While the instances described above show the potential for an owner to exert power over boys through loans, to dismiss this as exploitative 'bonded labour' would be to ignore half the picture. Arn has critiqued the assumption often made by development workers in India that moneylenders are merely exploitative (Arn 1997). She points out that unlike the banks, moneylenders lend poor farmers large sums of money, can top up loans on a daily basis and offer other forms of credit when requested (ibid.:7). There are clearly strong parallels between the flexibility that the middleman's credit offers an Indian farmer, and the benefits that *khate* perceive in their loans from junkyard owners.

In a similar vein, Sicular (1992) has challenged previous analyses of scavengers (rag-pickers) that position them within a capitalist mode of production as self-employed workers who are being exploited by middlemen and industrial consumers. Sicular suggests that relations between scavengers and middlemen are pre-capitalist in nature and rely on specific personal relationships based upon dependency (ibid.:5). His argument usefully highlights the interdependence evident between owners and rag-picker boys in Kathmandu's junkyards. However, in order to appreciate how boys experience these relationships it is necessary to examine the potential for boys to manipulate this reciprocity to their own gain.

The boys in Kohiti junkyard described a number of measures they used to avoid outright domination or to protect themselves from its consequences. One possibility is to run away and sell scrap in another junkyard, but this entails the loss of local support networks and any status achieved amongst friends in the junkyard. Bishnu, who is now twenty and has been rag-picking for six years, described the strategy he developed after receiving a severe scolding from the owner for selling some scrap at

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[28]During 1994/5 Kohiti junkyard was owned by three men, two of whom are brothers. Due to the clear seniority of the elder brother, I refer to him as 'the Kohiti owner'.

another junkyard where the prices were better. He now sells the bulk of his pickings in Kohiti junkyard but stores pieces of valuable scrap in his room (rented from the owner) and every few months sells what he has accumulated elsewhere. When I asked whether the owner knew of his strategy, Bishnu responded:

> Yes, he knows, but there is nothing he can do. If he asks me about it I would quote the prices I can get elsewhere, then all the other boys would know. That is why he stays quiet.

Although boys' assertions that the numbers of people rag-picking in Kathmandu are increasing indicate that the owner will not face a labour shortage, he clearly relies on the allegiance of a few older boys to bring in valuable goods (through strength or theft) as well as to bring on younger boys as apprentices. As boys become established, their debts increase and take on greater significance in relationships of social as well as economic interdependence (see chapter 6). When very young boys (below about ten years) arrived in Kohiti junkyard, the owner suggested they go to an NGO centre rather than stay with him and rag-pick. He appeared keen to gain the allegiance of boys aged about eleven years and above who demonstrated competence as rag-pickers. When boys in their early teens left the junkyard to live in the NGO centre, he was quick to complain about the amount of money owed to him. As illustrated in the incident below, the owner took certain steps to protect his business interests when threatened by losses in his workforce.

Before relating the events I observed, I point out that Bikram, who is very small even for his thirteen years, had been working in Kohiti junkyard for several months but in the weeks prior to this occasion began to visit the CWIN centre every few days. It would not have been in his interest to mention these visits in the owner's hearing, but he is unlikely to have been able to prevent the reduction in the amount of scrap he brought in from being detected. As a general rule in patron-client relationships, "when a mutual trust relationship does break up the debt *has* to be paid off" (Mars 1982:173 cited in Carrier 1994:9). In the light of fears that Bikram might run away, the owners' demands for repayment serve to discipline him and, should he leave, to obtain the money owed. I arrived in the junkyard to witness Bikram's reaction to the owner's demands:

> Standing up with the accounts ledger open, the owner was indignantly pointing out the size of his loan to Bishnu. Sitting nearby was Bikram with his head buried in his hands sobbing audibly. I turned to Sanjay and asked him what the problem was. "It is about his debt, don't say anything" he replied. My impression was that Sanjay knew of the shame Bikram would feel if attention was drawn to him at this moment, and wanted to protect his dignity as much as possible (fieldnotes 14/3/1995).

It could be argued that the above event is no different to the discomfort experienced by all young people during the transition from childhood to adulthood. The only peculiarity would therefore be that it is parents or formal employers who usually exercise discipline over children negotiating their independence, and that these two parties do so on rather different terms. The junkyard owner plays roles akin to surrogate parent and employer, yet without the ties of kinship or contractual employment, we might expect his ties to be weaker.

However, the owner's demand has caused Bikram considerable distress, some of which can be attributed to the real threats of physical punishment[29]. A more serious prospect for boys who did not see NGO centres as an option and had built up social networks in the junkyard arena, is that of ostracism from a group in which they have some status. The incident demonstrates that we cannot assume from visits younger boys make to NGO centres, that they feel either unfettered by claims to their allegiance by the owner, or able to adapt to living outside the junkyard in the immediate future (for reasons to be discussed in chapter 6).

Nobody stood up for Bikram and he appeared isolated in his predicament. Evidently, neither the previous benificence of the 'older brother' with whom he learnt to rag-pick, nor his current friendships with two boys his own age, stretched to helping him repay a debt. Due to the supportive role of peer friendships evident in everyday interaction and responses in the network interview, it is important to understand where the limits lie in relationships that are built on shared experiences. I explore this issue in the sections below by considering how hierarchies amongst boys work on an everyday basis, and then exploring the meaning of the *khate* identity in the wider social arena.

## 4.6 NEGOTIATING STATUS IN THE JUNKYARD

Older boys who take on a younger 'apprentice' teach him about rag-picking and ensure that he is not cheated. Outside these pair bonds, I observed older boys in Kohiti junkyard helping young boys build a shelter and advise them when they were sick. It was my impression that a tacit consensus exists among experienced rag-pickers that the work and lifestyle of a *khate* demands certain physical

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[29] Although I never witnessed more than cuffs on the head, boys spoke of being beaten by the owner when he was angered by debts and drunk. He claimed that he could do little if boys ran away because he would not know where to find them (M. K. Nielsen:pers. comm.). However, it was clear to me that boys did not believe they would necessarily escape any retribution.

characteristics. When a small boy of about ten years turned up, having run away from a children's hostel, the teenage boys deemed him to be too young and weak to be able to do *khate* work. Believing that he should not stay in the junkyard, they gave him food and asked me to alert the NGO staff of his presence. Attitudes are different towards those small boys whose experience and charisma enable them to rag-pick successfully. For example, the half a dozen boys at the younger end of the spectrum of regular residents in Kohiti junkyard (all aged under 14 years) are very much part of the card games, junkyard chit-chat round the fire and shelter arrangements. Their pranks are the source of amusement and there is affection expressed in the playful wrestling matches between boys of various ages. Nevertheless, all the younger boys are frequently reminded that they are of lower status by cuffs on the head, demeaning remarks and jokes at their expense.

The attempts of older boys to dominate smaller, usually younger boys, was most evident in the relative contributions of individuals to the discussions I recorded in the Kohiti junkyard. Usually when we began, a few younger boys showed an interest and sat in the circle. However they tended to drift off to do other things. When they did participate, older boys would sometimes interpret their actions and words. For example, on one occasion debate turned to the recent arrival of Dawa and Lhakpa, twins aged twelve, shortly after having run away from a boarding school. Before the twins were given a chance to explain their reasons, one older boy dismissed them as having "no mind" (*buddhi chhaina*) because they did not recognise their chance to improve their lives. The twins said that they were beaten by teachers in their beds at night without reason. They did not attempt to challenge the assertions of older boys that they had perhaps been asked to do some studying, and refused, so were justifiably beaten. Interestingly sixteen year old Raju, whose position was somewhere in the middle of the internal hierarchy, accorded greater credibility to the twins' response. He asked me and my assistant why teachers who encourage boys to study beat them for no reason.

Perhaps Raju was able to imagine himself in a similar situation because he too has run away. Of course, so have the older boys—on countless occasions—and could present a whole series of good reasons for doing so. But given that the discussion in which this interchange took place was focused on the lack of NGO programmes for older boys, it was clearly expedient for older boys to point out that should they be given the chance, they would apply themselves seriously to study (an issue taken up in chapter 6).

While running away from authority is tacitly understood amongst boys to be a wise move in the short term, cheating or deserting friends is seen as unacceptable, yet at

the same time inevitable. For example, when one of three boys who had pooled their earnings towards a trip to Delhi ran off with their joint savings, I heard his two friends curse and threaten him with violent punishments. He did not return to the junkyard for several months. Such incidents reveal that individual interest often overrides the pooling of resources and mutual support that exists in *khate* friendships. This boy's action was described as *bhagio* (running away) and the same word is used for leaving institutions or jobs. At one level it is disapproved of, because it implies an evasion of responsibilities. Yet its frequent use in conversations about other *khate*, gives an impression of the expected or even normal state of affairs. *Bhagio* is something that *khate* just do and of which they must bear the consequences. Like immediate spending, this is a trait portrayed as hindering *khate* from improving their quality of life. From the perspective of those encouraging children to leave the streets, it prevents boys settling into a structured routine. Many boys share these views and worry about their futures. Although I take up this discussion in the forthcoming chapters, I point out here that the presence of self-interest in peer friendships indicates a greater concern amongst boys to improve their own quality of life than that of the larger group of *khate*. While entirely predictable, this pattern suggests that *khate* will not easily engage in the long-term group cooperation that is often cited as a requirement in the process of empowering marginalised people (Rowlands 1997, Young 1993).

Boys living in Kohiti junkyard tended to look to those with higher status for long term support beyond immediate daily needs, rather than their peers. Thus the emergent picture is one of a hierarchy of patronage in which the owner dominates older boys, who in turn exert certain forms of control over smaller boys. Before discussing the components of the *khate* identity, it is worth drawing attention to my observation of a more fluid social dynamic amongst boys of all ages in the airport junkyard. These individuals did not appear as concerned to debate the characteristics of 'khate' nor define themselves in relation to this category. A possible explanation lies in the detachment of the airport junkyard from the NGO centres—both in terms of physical distance and boys' interest in NGO activities—as compared to Kohiti junkyard, where there was much greater actual or potential interaction with these institutions.

## 4.7 MARKERS OF THE *KHATE* IDENTITY

I now turn to the factors which boys in the junkyard identified to be common to their *khate* identity, regardless of age and experience. These became clear to me through boys' descriptions of *khate* characteristics that stigmatise them in wider

society and occasions when they contested these negative images. The principal areas of their lives under negotiation are their work and daily lifestyle, but it is quickly apparent that these are driven by notions that *khate* are in various ways crossing moral boundaries with regard to participation in family and community relationships.

When rag-picking, boys are visibly engaged in handling other people's waste. Such close association with dirt contributes to the *khate* identity through implications of caste status and personal irresponsibility. Before *khate* work was associated with street children, rag-pickers were ascribed the untouchable caste status *Cyame* (Newari scavengers) through their daily dealings with rubbish (Hofer 1979:45, Onta-Bhatta 1996:171). Currently, this caste ascription is not made explicit and *khate* boys are known to come from a wide range of ethnic and caste backgrounds. However, as I have already pointed out, the issue remains sensitive because waste is a pollutant in Hindu thinking and junkyards are often located in low-caste communities. In defence of his work, one rag-picker said "people say *khate* are nobodies, but *Pode* (sweeper caste) do far worse work than *khate* as they have to shovel shit".

Boys further challenged dominant notions about their work by claiming that *khate* work is hard work and should be respected as such. They were quick to point out that unlike beggars, their work requires physical effort and does not depend on the charity of others. Their efforts to validate their occupation make sense in the context of wider attitudes that mark *khate* as lazy and irresponsible. A group of boys in Kohiti junkyard used these notions to explain why *khate* tend to get boils:

> Its because we *khate* have got into bad ways (*bigreko*) and we like to stay dirty. We are too lazy to wash our bodies or our clothes. When someone calls 'hey, come here!', we don't listen. That's how it is with *khate*.

These boys are aligning themselves with the norms of wider society in which laziness in personal hygiene indicates irresponsibility towards personal well-being and the codes of good behaviour. By acknowledging that they are breaching these norms, *khate* show an awareness that they must change their lifestyle in order to be generally accepted in society. It is worth pointing out that this type of response to the stigma attached to *khate* lifestyle was more common in discussions with boys than the alternative, namely to reject social norms and assert distinctly 'khate' values (Goffman 1968:154).

In order to minimise the repercussions of their stigmatised position in every day life, boys try to hide their identity in a number of ways. Older boys in particular

sometimes referred to their work as *kawadi* work (Hindi meaning 'junkyard work') or used the English term 'labourer'. They endeavoured to mask their personal involvement by wearing a cap with the peak covering their face. Eyes on the pavement, and stooped under the weight of their sacks, they are unrecognisable. *Khate* are often identified by members of the public by their *luga cyateko* (torn clothes). The nature of the job means that there is no point trying to prevent clothes getting dirty and torn. The important point here is that many boys (particulary those in their late teens) keep a set of clean and preferably trendy clothes stored in the junkyard to be worn on trips to the cinema, a temple, the city centre or to visit relatives. Dressed in these, boys are not suspected of being *khate* by those whom they meet. The relative ease with which boys can conceal and even transform their identities in Nepal is discussed in chapter 6.

As well as defining themselves against low caste groups and beggars, boys living in the junkyard asserted their identity as Nepalis. The insults levied by boys in Kohiti junkyard at the Indian family who cooked their meals were evidence of the anti-Indian sentiment they espoused. Their expression of a more widespread prejudice against Indians can be understood in the light of the Indian origins of the recycling trade and the use of the Hindi term *kawadi* (junkyard worker). Thus as rag-pickers they are associated with Indians who are generally resented for having 'cheated' Nepalis out of jobs that were rightfully theirs. In *khate* circles, Indian junkyard owners have a reputation as cheats who might rig the scales or fail to pay the price promised. Undoubtedly some boys have been at the sharp end of an Indian owner's 'shrewd business'. Nevertheless, there is an element of scapegoating for 'clever practice' that boys themselves employ, and are accused of by various junkyard owners. By casting such practice as 'something bad that Indians do', there is no possibility of having to admit that Indians sometimes show greater skill than Nepalis in business transactions.

During a discussion in Kohiti junkyard, boys explained to me that caste differences were of no consequence to "people in the city" and more particularly amongst *khate*. I was told that caste rules still govern work and food consumption in boys' home villages. Boys claimed that these had no relevance to their daily life because "anyone can work in the junkyard". While *khate* work was on the one hand portrayed as something people do just in order to survive, boys spoke as if they were living in a separate social sphere to that of home: "When we are among friends we eat food that has been cooked by *Sarkis* (untouchable blacksmith caste), but we don't at home".

The emphasis boys give to the relative flexibility in social behaviour within the junkyard is reminiscent of the general juxtaposition made between rural and urban life in Nepal and expressed by village school children in their associations between education, 'the modern age', 'development' and 'urbanization' (Skinner and Holland 1996:233). Like these educated rural children, boys in the junkyard claimed that they did not believe in caste distinctions because "everyone's blood is red". Nevertheless, conversations with rag-pickers showed that there is a flip-side to a city environment that is socially progressive and holds economic promise:

> Sunil "Did you know that Muna is educated and his family are quite well off (*sau ko chora*)? He didn't like living at home so he ran away, came here, and now he's collecting scrap!
>
> Kiran "Perhaps you didn't know that I ran away too"
>
> RB "No, I didn't. So is it better here or in the village?"
>
> Sunil and Kiran "In the village"
>
> RB "Why is that so?"
>
> Kiran "Because here you become 'bad' (*bigrinnchha*)"
>
> RB "What do you mean?"
>
> Kiran "Here you want to play, you have no wish to work and you fight with others. In the village you have to work properly (*ramro sanga kam garnu parchha*)"

This conversation shows the tension between two views of *khate* living in the city; the first being inclusion in the progressive, modern world and the second being vulnerability to the corruptive potential of the city. Such an uneasy ambivalence goes some way in explaining boys' opposing representations of *khate* illustrated in this chapter.

Differences in gender roles and family orientation are two further significant factors that distinguish *khate* from others. Family groups of women and children who rag-pick do not linger in the junkyard having sold their scrap and it is therefore almost exclusively a male domain. Interestingly, *khate* boys made reference to gender differences to explain why they were *khate*. Unlike boys, I was told, "girls do not fall into bad ways" (*ketiharu bigrinndaina*) or pick up bad habits such as smoking and use of foul language. A further reason why girls do not become *khate* is that they do not run away. Girls work in places where there are few opportunities to see the outside world, whereas boys can "walk freely" (*swatantra hinchha*). However, according to *khate*, differences in opportunity do not fully explain girls' avoidance of 'bad ways'. Their assertions that girls are disinterested in running away or earning

money to spend on themselves invoke a gender-based morality. Boys describe the 'good' behaviour of girls in opposition to their own, thereby using gender differences as a means of explaining their waywardness.

By framing behaviour defined by society as a personal failing within a gender-based opposition, *khate* boys align themselves with wider social norms relating to the greater freedom of boys and maintain some integrity in spite of their own 'bad habits'. However, the characteristics of 'girls' are also those of people who are orientated towards their families, a position that *khate* once held and aspire to some time in the future. As explained in the previous chapter, most boys who now identify themselves as *khate* left home with the intention of working and contributing to their family's income. Although boys recognise the external obstacles that have prevented them from achieving this aim, their representation of girls' loyalty to the family implies that *khate* feel in some way guilty of irresponsibility with regard to their families. The clearest illustration of the moral boundary crossed by *khate* lies in the feeling of 'shyness' (*laj*) boys describe when they meet family members or neighbours. Boys recounted occasions when they had spotted relatives or villagers in the city crowds and avoided approaching them. According to Uttam, a rag-picker aged 13, the sight of a neighbour from his village in the bus park prompted him to leave *khate* work and look for a 'good job' (*ramro kaam*) in a tea shop. During discussion with boys based in the airport junkyard about their connections with home, the incompatibility of *khate* living and active participation in family life was illustrated by Ganesh, age 17:

> We don't like to meet relatives or people from the village when we are here. If the news that we are working as *khate* reaches home, our parents' head will be bowed in shame (*ama bau ko shir ta jhukchha nai*)

Boys' disapproval of female involvement in rag-picking further indicated their adherence to widely held notions of 'honour' (*ijjat*) and 'shame' (*beijat*) that are intimately associated with the family (see chapter 3). Boys in their early teens often insisted that one should not marry as a *khate* because wives and family should not be involved in rag-picking and the shame it brings. When a destitute young couple built a shack in the Kohiti junkyard, the boys kept their distance and rarely even spoke with the wife. The couple's arrival exposed the idealism in boys' statements about the impossibility of being attached to a family while rag-picking, as well as presenting them with a scenario very different to the one they envisaged for their own future (see chapter 6). Their unwillingness to interact with the couple perhaps speaks of a fear that they will themselves end up in a similar position.

Two of the older boys who were regulars in Kohiti junkyard had married and rented rooms in the locality. Rajan went to great lengths to conceal his married status and his wife's involvement in rag-picking. Not once did I see her in the junkyard locality, despite the proximity of their room. After several weeks of daily visits to Kohiti I learnt of her nightly trips to the waste site near the central hospital to collect plastic syringes and needles. Rajan discretely sold her pickings and managed to protect them both from the extra stigma of being a married couple and *khate*.

The positive influence of family members is presented in opposition to the negative influence of friends (described earlier). Whereas friends, and particularly *khate* friends, are said to be responsible for leading boys astray, boys depict family members as exerting 'proper' influences on their behaviour. Surendra, a 17 year old squatter who rag-picked with friends for a year or so in his early teens, spoke of the problems this relatively easy and lucrative occupation can bring. He recalled his older brother's advice to "stop rag-picking and improve his life (*jivan saparnu*)" which he understood as protective of his own future and his family's reputation. Moral values which connect individuals through their efforts to preserve family honour evidently remain strong amongst *khate* in spite of the recent period of physical separation or estrangement. Prior to the *Dasain* festival, boys in the junkyard were debating whether to go home to visit their relatives, as is the tradition for all migrants. A number claimed that they could only do so if they had a set of good clothes and a respectable sum of money to give to their parents or buy gifts for the family. If this could be achieved, the 'bad habits' learnt through friends on the street could be hidden and no-one at home would suspect that they were rag-picking in the city.

These observations serve to illustrate the general perception amongst *khate* boys that their current lifestyle is incompatible with family membership. The 'bad habits' picked up from *khate* friends bring personal benefits but may dishonour their family. This point was demonstrated particularly vividly in the reaction of a sixteen year old boy to the unexpected arrival of his father in Kohiti junkyard. I was in the junkyard when Mingmar's father arrived asking if anyone knew of the whereabouts of his son. Receiving a positive response from the boys in the junkyard, he waited and Mingmar soon returned, bowed under the weight of a full sack of scrap. As soon as he spotted his father, Mingmar dropped the sack and dashed down an alley. After considerable coaxing from his friends, Mingmar emerged and spoke with his father. The conclusion drawn from incidents like this is that a *khate* needs to make some changes in his life in order to meet family expectations of a son who migrated to the city.

The positive value accorded to home life by *khate* resonates strongly with the attitudes and practices of street children (*moloqueiros*) in north-east Brazil (Hecht:in press). Brazilian children who grew up in the urban shanties (*favelas*) and who leave their poor families for the streets, regard themselves to have failed in their obligations to their mothers (ibid). Whereas Aptekar (1988) suggests that Colombian children who depart from home are conforming to the natural socialisation pattern of matrifocal society, Hecht's observations lead him to conclude precisely the opposite. For children in north east Brazil, "the street is not an acceptable *alternative* to the home, it is a *resource* for nurturing the home...(that is) used with considerable trepidation" (ibid.:107, italics are my own). The "trepidation" he identifies stems from children's notions that moving to the streets and participating in its vices, equates with rejection of what they term as the 'righteous life' (*vida boa*) associated with being at home with one's mother (ibid.:109).

In the light of cultural differences in family organisation, the similarities in Brazilian and Nepali street children's characterisation of 'home' and 'street' and the sense in which they hold themselves responsible for betraying the former, are all the more striking. As I will later show, social and cultural factors specific to each setting lie behind important differences in the opportunities available to street children to reverse this transition and rejoin their families or assimilate into urban communities (see chapters 6 and 7).

A remarkably different conclusion has recently been drawn regarding attitudes towards home of *kangali*, children who live on the street in Bangladesh (Blanchet and Biswas 1997). These children are said to "emphatically renounce the hearth and the objects which create homes, ...reject their family bindings and the hard work these entail, praising a 'freedom' which is said to be intoxicating" (ibid.:3). However, the analysis does not extend to the forms of 'freedom' children actually experience within particular street settings. Without such information, it is impossible to dismiss the possibility that positive statements by *kangali* about street life are attempts to boost their self esteem following rejections from a family member or employer.

In apparent contrast to the *kangali*, Nepali *khate* recognise and appreciate their relative freedom compared with girls and employees in other urban sectors. Although Nepali boys now living on the streets have also been hurt by members of their family in the past, most have not rejected the idea of a positive family environment. By visiting home or making connections with people with status in the various 'street' localities, they demonstrated their continued interest in affairs at

home and in becoming a full community member in adulthood. The omission of these aspects in the analysis of *kangali* life causes me to question the conclusions reached by Blanchet and Biswas. For in Brazil, Uruguay and Nepal, children's assertions of the benefits of street life were found to be a means of presenting themselves to outsiders, that in fact concealed an allegiance to social norms based on the home and family (Hecht:in press, Lucchini 1996).

The most vigorously contested aspect of *khate* identity is their association with theft and criminal activity in general. Any conversations with boys that included police activity were peppered with accounts about being chased, taken to the police station, unjustly accused of theft, then beaten and held for several days. If such police activity is as random as boys portray, then we can expect that some boys have been arrested and punished with little or no grounds. However, this is certainly not always the case[30]. In discussions and interviews boys usually pointed out 'the others' who were the thieves in an attempt to profess their own innocence. For example, Surje, a thirteen year old who begs in Durbar Square, contradicts himself with the following assertion:

> *Khate* boys steal. We don't, we beg...do you know Rabindra who used to beg here too? He stole 1000 rupees from his tourist friend. So that tourist threw him out and took in Balram.

When asked if he was ever forced to steal he replied that if he is hungry he goes to a restaurant and asks for food. Regardless of the details of exactly what is considered theft and the extent to which particular individuals are involved, the only reasonable conclusion to draw from the popularity of the topic is that it is common for boys to steal. Further evidence that this is the case is found in the focus of the slang used by *khate* boys. The boys in Kohiti junkyard translated the common terms for me and they include words for money, a policeman, a pick-pocket and even the verb 'to steal'. Moreover amongst terms referring to the types of scrap were those for valuable items such as a watch, bronze water pot and video deck, that one would not normally expect to find in piles of rubbish. Boys told me that slang words are useful because they allow one to talk about activities and goods of particular value without non-*khate* understanding.

The euphemism 'night work' (*night ko kaam*) was also widely used. Unsurprisingly, it was only boys I came to know well who were prepared to discuss their involvement

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[30]On occasion police have caught boys in the act of stealing from houses or have found evidence of their presence (for example a hat) after the event (M. Pradhan:pers. comm.).

in theft. If successfully concealed, theft of valuable items can boost a boy's income, his social status and his favour with the junkyard owner. Boys' stories tended to focus on past events in other settings, for it was clearly unwise to discuss activities in the current junkyard context which might implicate the owner and risk his retribution.

Boys are sometimes taunted when they are collecting scrap and publicly accused of being thieves. They are therefore acutely aware that this perception dominates other prevalent negative notions about their lives. The degradation they feel is expressed in the verb *hepnu* (to look down upon or insult), which is also applied to the treatment received by people of low caste and confers criticism that belittles a person and reinforces their low social status. The vehemence with which such suppositions are contested was apparent during a discussion about the NGO centres:

> At CWIN there are no *khate* you know. Do you know who is there? Only boys who steal, boys who beg and boys who pick pockets....There is not a single boy there who works hard like us.

The strong feelings expressed about theft are connected to negotations of status and moral worth between boys and those who they perceive to be judging them in some way. I often heard such feelings articulated with respect to the activities of NGOs who endeavour to provide services to *khate* boys but certainly do not condone thieving. The above comment should be interpreted as one directed to me, someone who was thought to have some influence on NGO thinking and had shown enthusiasm for facilitating an apprenticeship scheme. It was therefore in boys' best interest to use their stigmatised identity as a means of legitimising their claims to external support.

## 4.8  NGO CENTRES: THE OFFER OF SERVICES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO 'MAKE GOOD'

During discussion with boys based in an NGO centre, I asked for explanation of the term *khate* and Rajendra, a former rag-picker aged 14, replied:

> *Khate* are boys who sleep outside, who eat outside, and who spend whatever they earn on food. None of them can save. They are 'bad' boys...we who are here (in the NGO centre) have improved a little, but those who live outside cannot make good (*Bigreko ketaharu chhan...yahan basera hami ali ali sapriko chha, tara bahira basne saprinna sakdaina*)

The 'faults' he refers to derive from the perceived irresponsibilities of *khate* outlined in the previous section. The interesting point in his analysis is his juxtaposition between life 'outside' and life in the NGO centre. Where do such notions come from? One could imagine Rajendra's words on the lips of ardent welfare workers, determined to make *khate* see the folly of their ways. But he was not put on the spot and expected to 'tow the party line'. Rather he pitched in his view along with friends in an informal discussion and the distinction drawn was clearly one that made total sense to him. NGOs are evidently an important point of reference for *khate* in their understanding of self and group identities. In this last ethnographic section I give a brief snapshot of boys' everyday experiences in an NGO centre, before proceeding to a more detailed analysis of NGO ideology and action in the following two chapters.

Rarely did I meet boys who had never been to an NGO drop-in centre. The frequency with which boys visit is partly dependent on their proximity to places where they work and sleep[31], and partly on the services they provide. Earlier in the chapter I described boys' reliance on the free medical facilities in the NGO centres. These range from basic first aid (found in a small centre in Thamel) to treatment from a nurse who is present all day and a sickroom with four beds in the CWIN centre.

In conversations in the streets or junkyards I would sometimes catch wind of plans being made to visit one of the centres that day. Sometimes boys had specific intentions to ask for clothes, a small loan, or a ticket that could be exchanged for a rice meal at a nearby restaurant[32]. There was all the more reason to go if it was a festival day because centres often lay on games and a celebratory meal. Nevertheless, I had the impression that trips were often made to pass the time of day, meet friends and keep up to date with the activities of the centres.

I often wondered about the extent to which boys consider the NGO centres their own space. To an outsider, the long games of karom board, snoozing under blankets

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[31]The material presented in this chapter is primarily drawn from observations in two well-used centres; the Common Room run by Child Workers in Nepal in the south west of the city (about twenty minutes walk from Durbar Square and Kohiti junkyard), and Bal Kendra run by Child Welfare Society (ten minutes walk from Durbar Square and Thamel).

[32]Few boys visited centres purely in order to eat on a daily basis. Although the tea and midday snacks were seldom refused, many boys did not like the taste of *halua*, a dough made out of UN-provided mixed flour served with vegetables. Recognising this preference, Bal Kendra made an arrangement with a local restaurant whereby boys can exchange a ticket for a rice meal.

and ease with which boys come and go indicates that children are relaxed in the centres. Thus, one is tempted to conclude that being in an apparently egalitarian setting amongst other *khate* boys is felt to be reassuring. But are NGO centres the benign bolt holes that these observations suggest?

Arriving one day at the CWIN centre, I was surprised to meet Dawa and Lhakpa, the twins from Kohiti junkyard whose flight from school I have discussed above. Remembering that in the junkyard they had recounted a story of being beaten by a "CWIN boy" and their intention not to visit, I wondered if they had been brought by one of the staff. However their empty sacks by the gate told me that they had just dropped in before going to look for scrap. Lhakpa was playing on the swing and was clutching a torch radio, an item he recently found that drew much admiration in the junkyard. Dawa was inside playing bingo with the regular CWIN boys. A few minutes later Dawa went upstairs to the staff office and asked for clothes. His abrupt demand was reciprocated with a curt refusal on the grounds that he had recently been given a set. Dawa was then asked to explain what had happened to all the clothes he stole from the school when he ran away.

The twins' experiences illustrate several characteristics of the interaction within the NGO centres. Firstly, as in the junkyard, boys are conscious of a pecking order based loosely on age and attendance at the centre. Disputes sometimes arise when boys who have a high status on the streets try to exert influence in the centre. However these rarely evolve into physical conflicts because staff members or boys respected for their mediating abilities intervene. Secondly, staff have authority as adults but also as advocates of an alternative and 'good' lifestyle. Since joining the NGO, these adults have spent time in junkyards and the city streets. Boys know that staff are aware of their activities and that many of these are judged to be unhealthy for children or plainly immoral. This provides the basis on which centres operate; boys are expected to use the banking facilities, attend literacy classes and obey the rules that forbid smoking and dictate the provision of clothes. Various sanctions exist in order that centres function reasonably smoothly, but these also serve to maintain their position of moral authority.

Some boys find that the conditions placed on NGO provision can be too great and opt to use the resources on the streets. As well as disliking being told what to do by staff, I was aware that the discomfort of occasional visitors stemmed from a heightened sense of leading a dissolute lifestyle. In an NGO centre, one cannot negotiate one's own identity. All boys are viewed as *khate*, and the qualities of *khate* identity associated with work that are regarded positively in the junkyard, do not hold sway in the centres. The message is implicit but clear; boys should try to leave

the streets and begin by following some of the guidelines provided by NGO staff. Many boys make attempts to do so, but these are not straightforward transitions because living on the streets is not only about problems associated with one's job and lifestyle. Furthermore, boys doubt the feasibility of achieving change that will significantly improve their social status (see chapter 6).

Fifteen year old Yadav, for example, was a sporadic visitor to the CWIN centre while he was based in a junkyard (plate 4.4). His responses in the network interview revealed that, illness apart, his other needs are met by people in the junkyard. Rag-picker friends buy him food if he has no money, the owner looks after his possessions and he takes the advice of older boys concerning where to find good scrap. During the period that I was helping in CWIN's literacy classes, Yadav settled in the centre and joined the 'Kitchen Club', a group of roughly twenty boys which operates a commune-style system in the centre under the guidance of the staff. The boys sleep under blankets in one of the outdoor classrooms, have individual daily cleaning tasks and are required to pay 13 rupees a day towards food that is cooked in their own basic kitchen. One member is head cook for the week and others do the shopping. Each member has a bank account and after an hour's literacy class, mornings are spent drawing small pictures that are later mounted on cards. CWIN's payment of between 3 and 5 rupees per drawing enables boys to make what they need for the day's food and a little extra. Nevertheless, even the most talented and dedicated artists earn less than they could by rag-picking for a few hours. Boys like Yadav who do not like to draw, or who have the gift of the gab, are encouraged to earn their keep by selling the cards to tourists in Thamel and Durbar square.

CWIN aim to enable boys to run the club on a co-operative basis and hold weekly meetings between all boys who are members and CWIN staff. Over several hours of animated discussion participants make domestic arrangements, discuss problems, decide how boys who have misbehaved should be punished and review the general routine and rules of behaviour for members. Despite the flexibility that these meetings allow, some members find the rules and organisation of the club too restrictive. Yadav was one of these, and on several occasions he disappeared for a few days after pocketing the profit from the cards. Although the other members were angry, Yadav's good-humour and jokes usually staved off their animosity upon his return. His actions indicate an expert knowledge of the various resource

Plate 4.4 The CWIN drop-in centre for street children



Regular attenders at the centre made masks in 1992.



Kitchen Club members make postcards to pay for their meals (staff in background).



One Kitchen Club member jokingly reaches for his friend's food.



Khate continue to visit the CWIN centre for medical treatment and to play games
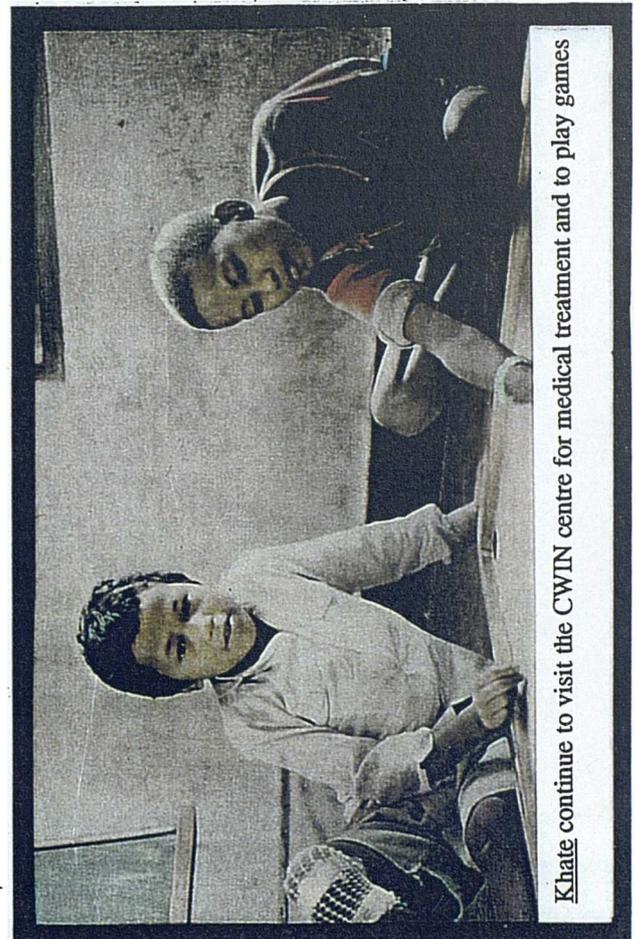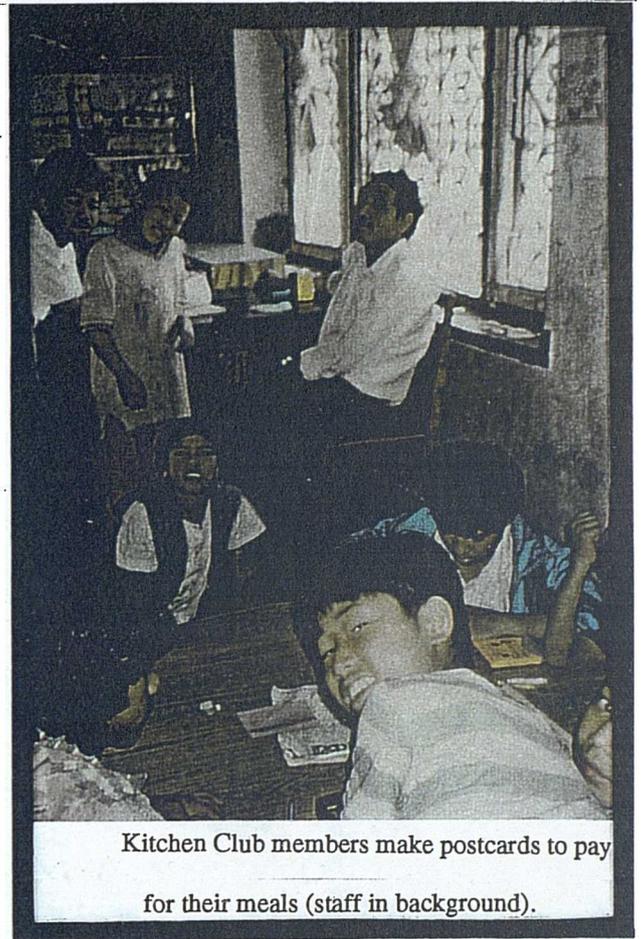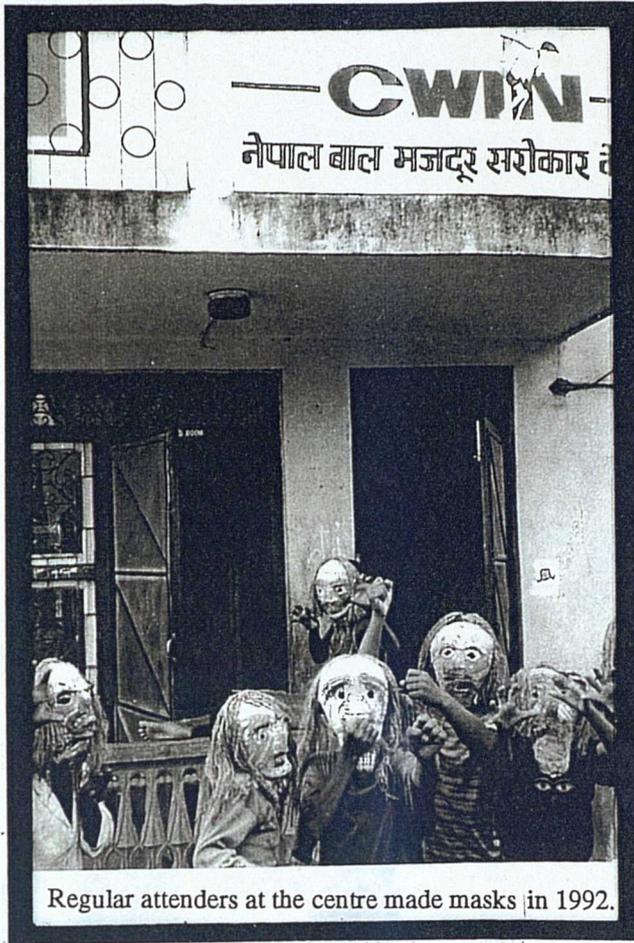
bases in the city, one of which is the CWIN centre. Yadav used the money he made selling postcards to enjoy watching a film, eating good food and hiring a bicycle, then once it was finished, he kept his distance for a few days before returning.

Knowing that he is breaking the rules and the trust of boys and staff, why does he persistently run off with money in this way? Fully aware that staff make decisions about boys' long-term opportunities on the basis of their commitment, he could not expect to be assigned a place on skill training or in school. Yadav did not envisage rag-picking as an adult and wanted to run a shop of his own. I wondered whether he believed that membership of the kitchen club would help him realise this goal. If he was in doubt, then keeping his options open by moving between the domains of the street, can only be viewed as sensible. In the network interview, Yadav described one of the CWIN staff as a mentor and as someone he would like to help him find a good job and to praise him for his future achievements. In this light, I question whether Yadav periodically runs away from CWIN because he has no current wish to get a better job, or because he doubts in his own capacity to make the changes required. The reasons for his doubts may stem from fatalistic notions that limit what any individual is able to do (see chapter 3). However, to my mind levels of self-esteem play a more important role in boys' efforts to move into a different job and lifestyle (to be discussed in chapter 6).

Not all boys manage the street environments as competently as Yadav. Those who are less well-connected or who have been ostracised by their peers rely more heavily on the centres for shelter, food and company. Given that staff at NGO centres are extremely knowledgeable about the pressures that children have faced at home, in work and on the streets, we might expect many boys to explicitly seek their protection and comfort. Deep and trusting relationships are formed over time between boys and NGO staff. However when I asked boys who visit the centres occasionally who they would turn to when worried, some said that they do not speak about their problems to anyone. They said they would try to forget their worries by going to watch a film alone or with a friend. Individuals who choose not to seek help from others avoid the risk of being let down. Such efforts towards self-protection are understandable given that once they have reached the NGO centre, most boys have been hurt by people they trusted. They will have found out that those with influence, usually adults, can reject. Is it therefore surprising that they are reticent to rely on individuals in an NGO centre just because they claim to have their best interests at heart?

Further discussion is needed if we are to understand the processes in which boys collude with, or reject, the plans of NGO staff to improve their quality of life. The focus of the next chapter is on aspects of NGO philosophy that are pertinent to their projects. I compare the perspectives of staff members and older *khate* who have some experience of these organisations. I am then able to look more closely at NGO projects as one route towards alternative work and living arrangements for *khate*.

## 4.9 CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the ethnography I have presented, it is fitting to reconsider the social relationships in which *khate* participate. Boys learn how to cope and succeed on the streets through relationships with those who are already competent. As apprentices, newcomers may be exploited by employers or more experienced *khate*. In time they learn the practical and social skills needed to meet their everyday needs in various street settings. But in order to make use of the range of resources available in the city, a newcomer also needs to learn what other people think about boys who beg, rag-pick or visit NGO centres, and how to use these opinions to their own advantage. Apprenticeship then, is also a process of learning about representations of *khate* that work for you in some contexts and against you in others.

I have shown that *khate* interact in a number of different physical and social spaces where they have particular roles. Whether they are workers in the junkyard, the beneficiaries of NGO services or fulfilling various expectations of tourists in Durbar Square, *khate* are tied into social networks as clients to those who have resources and power. Although they move between these locations, *khate* are evidently not as 'free' as they sometimes imply or as independent as outsiders seem to believe. Rather they are tied into relationships of interdependence with adults and older boys who provide cash and other services but may exploit them in the process. For example, boys living in Durbar Square are quick to seek support from a range of people, and clearly enjoy their relative freedom from the routines of supervised employment, school, home or even the NGO centre. Yet their peer friendships and rapport with NGO staff and/or family members are insufficient to protect them from adults who offer material goods in return for sexual favours. A similar power difference is found in the junkyard where boys who rag-pick are threatened with ostracism if they do not comply with the conditions of the owner's loans. However, boys soon learn how to subvert the owner's control and gain power as they become

more established in the business, thus demonstrating that dependence, and even 'exploitation', are potentially two-way processes.

Despite the evident restrictions placed upon boys within each of the 'street' settings described, we cannot assume that boys oppose these in an effort to maintain total control in their daily lives. The ethnographic material presented in this chapter demonstrates the attempts of *khate* to cultivate relationships of interdependence with those more powerful than themselves. In order to do so, boys learn how to be an acceptable client and how to dominate those junior to them, thus creating an internal hierarchy within each 'street' setting. Personal benefits are thought to accrue not from opposing a system of domination, but from subverting it and relying on one's relationships with those in a higher position. Although by no means exclusive to *khate* (see chapter 3), this approach to relationships works against any form of resistance through collective action. As I have shown, *khate* assert their collective identity when it suits, claiming that they are mis-represented in public opinion. However they more readily speak of the 'folly' of their ways and intimate that these must be changed in order to rejoin their families or acquire status within society.

To live as a *khate* therefore, is not to recreate 'home' on the street, but to survive and even benefit from an alternative to home or socially acceptable forms of employment. Arguably *khate* have greater decision-making power than children living at home or in the workplace, partly because they are able to build relationships with 'patrons' in a number of locations. However, their allegiance towards their own relatives, or at least to the values of a family-oriented society, results in efforts to connect themselves with people who have social status, rather than their fellow *khate*.

Such patterns of relationships indicate a potential for boys to move into a more acceptable lifestyle. To understand the extent of real possibilities open to *khate*, a longitudinal analysis is required. In due course (chapter 6), I draw on ethnographic material gathered over a 4 year period which includes boys' evaluations of the changes in their lives. Given the objectives of NGOs and state bodies in Nepal to improve children's lives, the next chapter examines the manner in which street children are defined and assisted by these institutions.

# CHAPTER 5
## CONSTRUCTING THE STREET CHILD IN NEPAL

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

> "The existence of abandoned or more particularly the street children is comparatively a new phenomenon in Nepal. Effective and radical measures have therefore to be taken today so as to prevent further deterioration of the situation" (His Majesty's Government, Nepal 1991:122)

According to this statement by Nepal's government, the recent appearance of children on the streets is a problem that must be addressed urgently. A brief look at Nepal's social history in the last decade reveals that the numbers of organisations working for children has increased in line with the supposed rise in the street child population. Problems of defining and counting street-based children make it impossible to judge the extent of actual increases in numbers of children living on the streets[1].

The population estimates that do exist may have been inflated by NGO and media debate that has drawn attention to 'street children' and attempted to distinguish them from other working children. Although little light is shed on the numbers of street children, the debate highlights a need to analyse the wider discourse behind the action undertaken for street children in Nepal. The aim of this chapter is therefore to examine the history, objectives and strategies of those who act for street children because they reveal a range of ideas about these children's characteristics and needs.

The reason for shifting my perspective from that of the *khate* to that of the wider public and more particularly NGO workers, is to examine the interactive roles of external opinion and boys' self-perceptions within the process of identity formation. In other words, I consider those who interact with street children on a regular basis to have an influence on children's perceptions of the way they earn, where they live, how they behave—in short, who they are. The first section describes the link between representations of street children and their self-identities. In tracing

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1 See chapter 3 for a discussion on rates of urbanisation in Nepal and children's participation in migration.

the history of state and NGO activity for street children in Nepal, I identify the political influences on their respective goals and activities. I then illustrate and analyse the three common themes to NGO actions, namely the protection, empowerment and correction of street children. In order to set NGO provision for street children in context, I discuss perceptions amongst NGO staff of their roles and comment on the development of a collective narrative of street living.

## 5.1 *KHATE* IDENTITIES AND PUBLIC OPINION

The previous chapter demonstrated that *khate* in Kathmandu are actively involved in creating their identities in specific localities. It showed that there are short term benefits for boys who are able to manipulate widely-held assumptions about *khate* in a number of different settings.

Using his own research in Brazil and Uruguay, Lucchini draws attention to the process of identity negotiation by street children in different geographical and social domains of the city (1996:245). He found that when on the street an individual child made reference to his membership of his family and when in an institution, he claimed that he belonged to the streets. Lucchini suggests that the reason children behave in this way is because they do not feel totally at ease in the street, the family or the institutions (ibid.). Some researchers warn that street children may face difficulties building their self-esteem because they are attributed with *too many* identities (Cussianovich 1997:6) or that they will suffer poor mental health as a result of identity confusion[2]. However, in Lucchini's opinion, their manipulation of various identities is an adaptive and healthy process. He argues that this multiplicity of identities does not disturb children themselves, rather it produces cognitive dissonance in adults who are trying to understand how an individual child can fit into a number of social contexts.

To understand his point, it is necessary to return to the psychology of Festinger (1962, cited in Aptekar 1988:48) who suggested that people experience cognitive dissonance when their beliefs are contradicted by what they observe. A pertinent example is when people who believe that children need the securities offered in a 'home' setting see children coping with, and even enjoying, elements of life on the streets. The only way they are able to cope with the incompatibility of these two

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[2] This assumption is embedded in psychologists' claims that young people with identity confusion "have difficulty taking responsibility for their own lives, ...are impulsive, disorganised in their thinking,...and their personal relationships are often superficial" (Mussen et al. 1984:513).

'truths' is to reject one and replace it with an alternative belief. In the above example, rather than change their ideas about home being the best environment for children, people usually assume that street children did not choose to live on the streets but were forced from home. I suggest that a similar dissonance arises when adults assume that children are exclusively either family-based, street-based, employees or recipients of NGO care, and are then challenged by individual children who adapt to some degree to each of these localities and roles.

These debates indicate that the potential problems for street children themselves arise directly from the way in which they are viewed by others in each city setting. Use of a number of identities and allegiances allows *khate* to exploit different resources, but what are the long term implications of this strategy? As pointed out in the previous chapter, boys in their late teens move between street settings less frequently and tend to specialise as rag-pickers, hawkers or regular members of an NGO programme. Clearly changes in physical appearance that come with maturity restrict boys' self-representations, but can we assume that older boys wish to maintain many identities? To answer this question it is necessary first to account for the historical and socio-political context in which 'street children' have become known in Nepal, and then to study the strategies adopted by *khate* as they grow older (see chapter 6).

## 5.2 THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN PROVISION FOR STREET CHILDREN

Key players in the process of identifying street children and meeting their needs include the state, local and international NGOs and the media. By far the most influential are the body of local NGOs, whose number and power has dramatically increased since the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990. Prior to this major political change, the government's role in provision for 'abandoned' children amounted to the operation of four Social Welfare Centres and overseeing three voluntary organisations running orphanages (HMG 1991:122). A similarly marginal role was played by UNICEF who, until 1995, had no clear policy strategy regarding street children in Nepal and proceeded by funding projects run by local NGOs (Onta-Bhatta 1996:177). Since 1990, the tight state control over the media has been replaced by a lively exchange of ideas about general social issues in Nepal, one of which is children's welfare and the responsibilities of the government, voluntary sector and general public in meeting their needs.

illustrates, such usages are invariably incorporated into the musical texture in the same fashion as the majority of Takemitsu's other modal references – that is, as more or less isolated events – rather than as extended passages lying wholly within the ambit of a particular mode and transposition, like some of the octatonic examples referred to in the previous section. The following extract from the score of *Asterism*, for instance, a celesta 'mobile' comprising all nine pitches of the 'third mode of limited transposition' in Messiaen's system, [0,1,2,4,5,6,8,9,10] (Ex. 53), is simply one of many layers of a vast and dense orchestral *crescendo* beginning at letter **D** of that work.



Ex. 53: *Asterism*, letter D (celesta)

The collection is also projected vertically in Takemitsu's works, for example in the final chord of *Requiem for Strings* (Ex. 54), which contains eight out of nine pitches of 'mode III'. This closing chord is in fact one of several variants of a harmonic type which functions as what is described below as an 'iconic' harmony in the context of this piece[238], all of which forms can be parsed as subsets of the mode III collection.

Just as the octatonic scale may be derived from the superimposition of two diminished seventh chords, so may the 'mode III' scale be built up by adding together three augmented triads. This property of the scale is partially illustrated

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[238] See below, Section 3.1.7

Street children frequently feature in the daily papers, sometimes in discursive articles praising or denigrating the efforts of NGOs to improve their lives, and other times in front page photographs whose captions explain little. Where photographs are expected to speak for themselves (plate 5.1), the media assume that readers understand who these children are, what they do and how others should respond to them. Yet how did this cultural understanding of street children develop? Given that the majority of media reports focusing on street and working children refer to NGO activities in some way, the statements made by and about these organisations evidently play a critical role in moulding public opinion of children's lives.

All NGOs aiming to serve street and working children are guided by philosophies that encompass notions of acceptable and feasible lifestyles for poor children. Whether implicit in daily interaction or stated explicitly in their literature, the objectives of NGOs focusing on street children in Kathmandu can be summarised as the protection, empowerment and correction of children. I will illuminate each of these objectives and the connections between them shortly, but point out here that threads of this triple objective are visible not only in writing about street children in Nepal, but also in literature produced in countries with very different cultural values and modes of social interaction. The pervasiveness of these objectives poses questions about the relative influences of external and Nepali conceptions of children and their social worlds. While the legacy of development in Nepal makes it impossible to delineate 'imported' and 'traditional' models of childhood, it is nonetheless instructive to examine the context in which NGOs evolved and formed their approach to 'street children'.

## 5.3 THE GROWTH OF A POPULAR MOVEMENT FOR WORKING CHILDREN

Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) is an NGO well-known for spearheading the recent movement for action to improve children's lives. Formed in 1987 by a group of friends who were active in student politics, it was clearly born out of the more general desire for equality, freedom and social justice that characterised the movement against the one-party system of government (CWIN 1995:4). In addition, one of CWIN's founder members attended a seminar in Bangkok about the problems faced by working children all over South Asia. Inspired by the activities of groups in the region, he alerted his colleagues to the role CWIN could play in raising awareness of the exploitation of Nepal's working children.

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In 1988, the first South Asian regional seminar on working children was hosted by CWIN in Kathmandu and attended by lawyers, independent researchers and social activists, as well as representatives from Nepal's state orphanage, NGOs from across South Asia and international organisations (including UNICEF, Save the Children, Oxfam and Terre des Hommes). It provided a forum to exchange information about children's work in neighbouring countries and develop common strategies to tackle what were then defined as critical issues. In the case of Nepal, these were agreed to be a lack of public awareness, legal provision and political commitment to children. CWIN defined its primary agenda as "action through advocacy", the guiding principles for which were those of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child (CWIN 1995). As shown in a report of the seminar's proceedings, the Declaration provided a common framework for analysis of children's position within the larger social picture in each of the participating countries. It was a source of regional solidarity and a raison d'etre for NGOs who were advised by the regional representative from UNICEF of their responsibility "to pressurise governments to ratify and abide by the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child", which was then being drafted using the principles of the existing declaration (CWIN 1988:42).

The adoption of the UN's ideology had implications for CWIN's early relationships with the state, as well as for their perceptions of working children's lifestyles and its own role in meeting children's needs (see chapter 6). By aligning itself with international bodies and the children's rights approach, CWIN's early activities were impeded by a lack of government recognition[3], but supported externally as part of the global focus on the rights of working children. Given the early and regular funding from Redd Barna (the Norwegian member of the Save the Children Alliance) and contributions from other foreign donors, we might expect the policy objectives of these international bodies to have influenced CWIN's approach to 'street children'. The following sections show how actions by the state and the legacy of imported 'development' initiatives have contributed to the three coexisting objectives of CWIN and younger NGOs targetting street children in Kathmandu.

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3 The Panchayat government prevented CWIN from registering in the Social Service National Coordination Council (SSNCC). This decision was made firstly because CWIN's proposition to eliminate the exploitation of children through campaigns for their rights ran counter to the welfarist ideology of the SSNCC, and secondly in view of its members' prior affiliations to the then banned communist party (Onta-Bhatta 1996:173).

## 5.4 THE EFFORTS OF NEPALI NGOS TO IMPROVE STREET CHILDREN'S LIVES

Very broadly, NGO objectives can be summarised as the protection, empowerment and correction of street children. There are two reasons for illustrating the kinds of debates surrounding each of these objectives. The first is to indicate the thinking of NGO staff that guides their approach to children in their centres and on the streets. The second stems from the fact that NGOs act as fora in which issues that are unresolved in wider society are crystallised and made apparent (Fisher 1997:449). Thus, it is likely that children will encounter similarly diverse reactions to their presence amongst the general public, as in their interactions with NGOs.

### 5.4.1 PROTECTING STREET CHILDREN

A recent CWIN article debating relationships between the police and street children amply illustrates the organisation's conceptions of children's needs and also the potential contradictions in trying to meet these (CWIN 1995:39-41). In referring to the indiscriminate arrests and torture of street children by police, and also to children's exploitation by adult criminals, the article drives home the vulnerability of street children. They are victims of abuse by adults who break the law as well as by those who are supposed to enforce it. The writer's response is to demand protection for children through a change in police behaviour and their cooperation in referring young or sick children to NGO centres. In the circumstances described, these demands make perfect sense. Yet, the construct of street or working child as 'victim' is one that has become problematic for the NGOs who use it. While effective when applied to children's exploitation by employers or relatives, the term 'victim' resonates more strongly with the state's 'welfarist' approach to children that was rejected by CWIN and others attending the 1989 South Asian seminar. At this event, it was proposed that NGOs should change their approach "from welfare organisation to conscientisation action groups which educate deprived/victimised groups about their rights so they become self-help groups and can also become activators themselves" (CWIN 1988:47).

How different were these new conceptions of working children and their needs, from those that had guided the actions of the state? Onta-Bhatta's (1996) historical account of the government's efforts to research and provide for orphans and child beggars, clearly shows that these children were not only seen as victims needing care, but as threats to social cohesion. Children who begged were distinguished from other working children who provided a service. Child beggars were also seen to

require 'improvement' lest they breed criminality and precipitate social degradation. Efforts by the government to refocus children's working lives included the establishment in 1969 of a vocational training centre for orphaned beggar children living in the streets in Kathmandu (ibid.:168). The objective of this scheme was clearly charitable and children were expected to accept offers of food and accommodation. However, newspaper articles written in the 1930s report destitute children rejecting assistance from the public and are early evidence of the conundrum this reaction poses to members of the wider society (ibid.:166).

The underlying moral framework evident here is similar to that described by researchers of street children elsewhere. In South America and Ethiopia for example, the presence of free-living children provokes a form of cognitive dissonance amongst members of the public (Aptekar 1988:48, Veale: in preparation). The rhetoric of CWIN and similar younger NGOs suggests that a rights approach moves beyond the restrictive moralistic ideology that dictates where children should live and what sort of work they should do. Yet, as will become clear, the theory that children will be empowered to define their problems, demand their rights and help themselves, proves problematic when put it into practice.

## 5.4.2 PUSHING FOR CHILDREN'S EMPOWERMENT

One of CWIN's first initiatives was to open a drop-in centre for street children named the Common Room (described in the previous chapter). Its initial aims were to support and socialise children through basic health care, food and a safe environment for play (CWIN 1995:8). It gained popularity, moved to larger premises, and in the subsequent 8 years has undergone significant changes in its goals and activities. In 1993, the objective of the Common Room was described as "to help protect and empower children at risk through education, socialisation and family reunion programmes" (CWIN 1993:10). Notions that NGOs should be in the business of equipping street children with skills to make them self-sufficient also appear in statements made by NGOs formed in the early 1990s. For example, the objective of the Education Programme for Helpless Children (EPHC) is "to provide an atmosphere where children who have been deprived their basic rights to education, health care and a caring environment, can learn to become self-reliant" (EPHC:1990).

NGOs for working children were not alone in their bid to empower those subordinated within traditional hierarchies. During the 1980s within Nepal, some teachers opposed the notion that development's primary goal should be national

unity, and suggested that it should be for equal rights to replace the patriarchal and caste based divisions in Nepali society (Skinner and Holland 1996:280). In the international development discourse, 'empowerment' has been a desired product of initiatives for the poor ever since 'social action' and 'self-help' were advocated globally in the 1960s and 1970s (Hinton 1996:3). The method of 'empowering' people has been commonly seen as involving them in decisions about their lives. This philosophy underpinned the shift in emphasis to 'community participation' as the proposed key to successful development work within Nepal and other developing countries[4]. Interestingly, a critique was made at the 1988 regional seminar of working children of the failure of externally initiated development projects to improve the lives of the poor despite their "rhetoric of people's participation" (CWIN 1988:188). Yet at the same event, participants were proposing to use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a tool for children's empowerment without discussion as to what 'empowerment' would mean in reality.

As in the broader development arena, NGOs use the term 'empowerment' without attending to the different definitions of its root concept, power (Rowlands 1994:1). Very broadly, depending on whether power is seen as a relationship of effect ('power-to') or of obedience ('power-over'), empowerment consists either of bringing those excluded from the process of decision-making into it, or undoing the ingrained social constructions that define certain individuals as incapable of participating (ibid.:2). If the former definition is used, it is conceivable to empower others through certain inclusive measures. This is the model that the Nepali NGOs have adopted in their work with street children and is one common in development initiatives which provide basic needs and hence have an element of 'relief' (Hinton 1996:25). A growing critique of this approach states that power cannot be 'given', but must be gained from below (Gardner and Lewis 1996:118, Rowlands 1997). According to this viewpoint, providing skills and channels for their use is the critical issue in empowering subordinate groups. As NGOs have found, efforts to give powerless children 'power-over' others to determine how they live, takes power away from those who previously made such decisions for them. It would seem, therefore, that NGOs desiring to maintain a degree of control over children's activities and behaviour might experience problems in translating empowerment rhetoric into

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4 In line with the late 1970s onus on community participation in the international health arena, community health volunteers were added to Nepal's rural health programme with the aim of improving local access to health services (Justice 1986:61). The result however, was merely to shift the responsibilities for delivery of health care from external provision to resources within the community.

practice. Further problems may arise, given the potential for different understandings of power relations in Nepal and their significance to street boys' lives. These issues are central themes of the following chapter.

In publicising itself as "a voice for voiceless children", CWIN suggests that children are powerless and need a spokesperson. Moreover, they assume that they are qualified to accurately represent the interests of children. This is an important issue because it is but a short step between striving to represent the interests of others and assuming one knows what is best for them (Porter et al., cited in Downs 1993:63). Their recent claim to have published only interviews with children in their magazine Voice of Child Workers, is cited as evidence for their commitment to finding out about children's everyday lives and prioritising their views (CWIN 1995:1). While very active in researching children's lives, CWIN and other NGOs in this field rarely examine or critique their research rationale and methodology. Even when not made explicit, the manner in which findings are interpreted shows that NGOs conducting research on children are guided by certain ideological assumptions. For example, the preconception that children are exploited in the workplace gives rise to research that seeks to document abuses of children's rights and may omit positive relationships with an employer.

Forums in which NGOs debate the living conditions of children and formulate action plans are ones in which there is scope to develop a common ideology and also to create 'facts' about certain types of children. A comparison of CWIN's early conceptualisation of street children with the report of the 1988 regional seminar reveals that as well as adopting the principles of the UNCRC, participants appropriated conceptions of working children based on statements made by others from elsewhere in South Asia. At the seminar, children in the region working as garbage pickers, shoe shiners and porters were described as "part of the self-employed sector...often homeless and leading a marginalised life where crime, alcohol and drug abuse, gambling, violence and police harrassment are an everyday reality" (CWIN 1988:40). Despite scanty and largely anecdotal evidence, this collection of attributes has since been frequently attached to rag-picking children in Nepal, to the extent of becoming components of the *khate* label.

At the same seminar, the observation by one participant of children's tendency to "organise themselves into small groups for security" was not discussed (ibid.). Furthermore, no reference was made to the possibility that children in self-employment might have greater control in their relationships with employers than those working in factories. Yet surely these aspects of children's lives are potential building blocks for NGOs in their efforts to 'empower' these very children.

The implication of such omissions is that empowerment of children is desirable only on the terms set by NGOs. Friendship groups on the streets are not considered to have the same positive function as 'social action groups' formed with CWIN's guidance. Logically, there is a problem here, for children are not 'empowered' to help themselves if they remain dependent on others to define how they may live. Although it is never explicit, peer solidarity on the street is unacceptable as a form of 'empowerment' because it is morally tainted. Children are understood to pick up "bad habits" from working in "morally spoiled" environments in just the same way that they catch diseases in unhealthy physical environments (CWIN 1988:84). The 'fact' that some street boys are involved in crime, drugs, alcohol and violence overrides any potential for others to benefit from their support. By an unspoken rule, self-reliance and empowerment cannot develop amongst others who have the 'bad habits' of the street. Apparently, the ideas about producing good and upright citizens, rejected by NGOs as repressive mechanisms of the Panchayat regime, fed into early efforts to translate NGO aims into practice. Examples of their continuing role are found in more recent NGO debates about the correction of street children.

### 5.4.3  WHERE CORRECTION IS THOUGHT FIT

> "Experience has proved that institutional care or forced reunification with their family are not practical solutions to [street children's] problems"(CWIN 1993:12).

There are numerous contradictions evident in NGO publications and media reports with regard to the appropriateness of disciplinary action for street children. Statements like the one above are juxtaposed with calls for a joint NGO and police effort to establish "reform centres for the relief, welfare and reformation of delinquent children"[5] (CWIN 1995:39). Notably, this suggestion was made in the article calling for protection of street children from police abuses (cited in section 5.4.1 above). It shows the co-existence of attempts to control street children that arise out of society's fear of their presence, with the bid to protect them (Bar-On 1997:65). In the above case, we see the consequence of pervasive beliefs that all street children are alike, and that unless society acts to reform them, "this population of misguided children can create an atmosphere of social unrest in the future" (CWIN 1995:39).

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5 In April 1996, the decision was taken to open a reform centre the following year by members of the Central Children's Welfare Committee, chaired by the Minister for Women and Social Welfare. The task force designated to implement this plan included representatives from the government, police, the NGO sector and a child psychologist (The Rising Nepal 22 April 1996).

Issues under negotiation here are the point at which children become accountable for their actions and the role NGO workers play in disciplining them. In the article cited above, no reference is made to age criteria, or to other characteristics that would qualify a child for entry into the prospective reform centre. Questions are left unanswered about the compatibility of children's understandings of 'theft' and responsibility with legal definitions and about who should arbitrate in such decisions. Although the assumptions about street children's criminality are not entirely unfounded, there is little empirical evidence that their involvement in crime is any more extensive than that of other young people in Kathmandu. As is common in the global literature on street children and homeless youth, their relative independence and unstructured free time lead to assumptions of delinquency that are rarely supported by reliable research (Ennew 1994a:7).

During 1995, discussions about the role of the police in action for street children were held between high-ranking police officers and representatives of NGOs working with street children (under the auspices of the Children at Risk Network Group CAR-NG). In presenting a new plan of action, the officers were acknowledging the failure of their previous approach, namely to detain street boys for several days or weeks in police custody in the hope that this would teach them a lesson6. The proposed plan was to create a register of all children living on the streets by bringing them into the police station, asking them questions about their family circumstances and taking their photograph. On the basis of this information, the police would decide how best each child could be rehabilitated. Those who had homes outside the city would be provided with a bus fare and escorted to the bus station, and others would be distributed to a children's home or NGO programme appropriate to their needs.

The NGO representatives felt the plan to be positive in that it should prevent continuing indiscriminate violence against street children. However, they thought the method unrealistic for several reasons. These included children's mistrust of the police, the attractions of street life and inadequate space in existing NGO centres. Moreover, NGO representatives showed extreme reluctance to commit their staff to assisting police in registering the children—an interesting reaction given their previous demands for greater coordination between the police and NGOs (see above).

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6 According to the boys, detention sometimes involved no other hardship than being kept inside, but on other occasions they were underfed, forced to work and physically punished.

The debate moved onto ways of monitoring children's movements between the centres and the streets. A policeman's suggestion of tatooing identity numbers on boys' arms was swiftly rejected. However, it was generally agreed that a centralised list of children and a telephone hot-line between NGO centres would enable staff to co-ordinate their efforts to place boys in families, schools and jobs.

The police proceeded with their plan and although I do not have their judgement of its achievements, there were no reports of its success available year later. According to a paper presented by Superintendent C.B. Shrestha to a workshop on legal frameworks for the management of juvenile delinquency and protection of children at risk, the "crimes" that street children are involved in include roaming around at night without work and running away from school (Shrestha 1996:9). The paper lays out the roles of members of the recently established Child Development and Child Rights Task Force (a group headed by the Assistant Minister for Women and Social Welfare, and including representatives from the police and NGOs) in curbing juvenile delinquency. It includes a discussion of the age brackets used in various legal Acts, pointing out that Nepal lacks a separate Juvenile Justice Act. After asserting that "there are definitely juvenile delinquents in Nepal", the author admits a lack of any accurate statistics on this subject and calls for urgent research (ibid.). Overall, the paper reveals attempts to bridge gaps in Nepal's legal system that lack clarity when applied to real life situations. For example, one of the recommendations made is to involve "street children—turned normal citizens" in the management of juvenile delinquency (ibid.:22). The police hope that this will yield "good results', but make no suggestions towards implementation.

Although all the above plans were voiced in terms of efforts to respect street children and meet their needs more efficiently, the emphasis given to surveillance by the police and NGOs reveals their persistent and deep-rooted concerns about children's mobility and criminality.

## 5.5   NGO STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE

> Come, help relieve the pain!
>
> Be conscious! Be unique!
>
> Be a Social Action Volunteer![7]

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7 This slogan heads a promotional leaflet for Social Action Volunteers, a Kathmandu based NGO working to improve the lives of poor children.

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Given that NGO workers have, by implication, defined themselves as the agents of empowerment, it is important to ask how they perceive themselves and their role in relation to street children. Most NGO workers begin as volunteers with personal concerns for children's livelihoods and once they are paid staff members continue to view their work as a vocation rather than a job (CWIN 1995:165-188).

Work in NGOs is generally termed 'social service', an occupation that is rooted in and legitimised by the country's recent political and social movements. Hence NGO workers are at the same time activists against old forms of domination and servants of the oppressed and needy. 'Social workers' are portrayed as people who do not seek the normal rewards in life of money and status, yet the unquestioned moral worth of their activities gives NGO staff a certain moral authority. Des Chene (1996:260) notes that the prevalent perception of development (*bikas*) as inherently 'good' validates it as an aim for all Nepal's citizens. Amongst village children researched by Skinner and Holland (1996:281), development activities are thought of as religious works. As will become evident in the next chapter, those who work directly with street children providing medical care or education derive some of their authority from the traditional power held by doctors and teachers (Justice 1986). Although this factor is not openly acknowledged by NGO staff, who claim to treat children on more equal terms, it has significant bearing on boys' efforts to move into socially acceptable professions (see chapter 6).

In 1995 an interview with the director of an NGO named Child Welfare Society, was published in the first edition of their new magazine named "Street Corner" (CWS 1995). He was questioned about the difficulties experienced by CWS in meeting the demands of *khate*, and in response he highlighted their aim to work on children's own terms. His words convey a recognition of children's competence in what they do and thus the necessity for those assisting them to respect their actions. The phrase, "(w)e like to be their elder brother, offering them things if they want them", suggests that children's values are regarded as congruent with those of the NGO or, if different, nonetheless valid (ibid:6). While he emphasises the aim to respond to needs defined by children, the analogy of their role as 'elder brother' suggests a loving mentor and carer, but also one who has ultimate authority in decisions.

Here we see evidence of the potential for NGO staff to play the role of patron to children with material needs, in a similar fashion to the village elite who lend money to the landless, low caste and poor, and to the junkyard owners described in chapter 4. As I will shortly demonstrate (in section 5.8 and chapter 6), the conceptions of self-reliance used by NGOs fail to account for well-practised forms

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of social interaction in Nepal and can therefore hinder boys' efforts to improve their quality of life.

To mark their 25th publication of Voice of Child Workers, CWIN produced a special issue that included profiles of its staff members (CWIN 1995). Within these short autobiographies there is evidence of allegiance to CWIN's aims and the part played by membership of the organisation in forming personal identities as part of a larger body working towards social justice. The accounts read as those who have found a mission in life and have consequently become more informed, effective, individuals:

> CWIN has been my second home and the best university. (It) gave me my identification, a mission for my life and made me the person I am today, with a commitment to the child's rights movement. (staff member CWIN 1995:166)

Many speak of the remarkable growth of CWIN as an organisation, referring to their activities in advocacy and direct provision for children, as well as their recognition in the national and international arenas of child-focused development. They have become known as a recognised authority on children's issues in Nepal, and while this is not without good reason, it again raises the question, empowerment for whom?

One perspective on the failure of development organisations to consider the local meanings of principles fundamental to their activity, is that they are in the business of empowering themselves over and above the supposed beneficiaries. A general criticism of NGO activity is that by producing research and action plans that do not threaten their own existence, they fail to live up to their participation rhetoric and are in fact supporting the social system that they claim to be fighting (Fisher 1997:456). Sceptics might suggest that terms such as 'empowerment' and 'participation' are co-opted from the international arena by NGOs in order to secure funding and status over and above others working towards the same ends. While I do not discount the possibility of this occurring to some degree, my experience of working with NGOs in Kathmandu is that they draw on several models of action simultaneously. As noted in NGOs working amongst refugees in East Nepal, the reason they do this is to maintain the flexibility necessary to deliver services to people with varying backgrounds and needs (Hinton 1996:26). Moreover, given the size of the task taken on by these organisations, the scope for 'failure' in the public's eyes and the availability of publications advising best practice in working with street children, it is not surprising that NGOs seriously consider implementing programmes that are reported to be successful elsewhere.

## 5.6 THE FORMATION OF A COLLECTIVE NARRATIVE OF STREET LIVING

As demonstrated above, NGOs have played a major role in defining 'street children' and the action deemed appropriate for meeting their needs. The force of their definitions is most felt by the children who attend their programmes or meet NGO staff on the streets. In this section I will demonstrate how the opinions of those working on behalf of street children, affect *khate* perceptions of their present circumstances and future prospects, even when their individual experiences of travel, employment and street living differ.

The popularisation of the term *'khate'* has increased as a result of television broadcasts produced by NGOs, the police and foreign film crews. Undoubtedly these have had a greater impact on sections of the general public than on the children who are the subjects of these broadcasts. However, recent public theatrical performances have reached a more diverse audience that includes street children, and their messages have been further dispersed through the press[8.]

Under the direction of three professional actors who had formed an NGO named Aarohan (see chapter 2), approximately twenty street children created scenes that reflected their own experiences while living and/or working on the streets[9]. The combination of well-constructed drama, the authority of 'the people's voice' and the directive role of actors working to improve these children's lives made the plays powerful tools in shaping the audience's opinion about street children. Their significance lies not only in shaping public opinion, but in affirming a collective identity amongst the street children who watch these performances. Many boys were taken by NGO staff (who thought the plays would encourage boys in their attempts to settle), and others came of their own volition. Observing boys' reactions during the play, I could see that they identified with its narrative. But, as I will shortly illustrate, it was during conversations and group work in the NGO centres that I became aware that this play was not merely a collective story of 'shared facts'. Rather it was a cultural story in which *khate* boys are positioned with respect to other members of society.

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8 Photographs depicting scenes of the play and reports of the informative, high quality drama appeared in many of the Nepali newspapers. One of these, titled "Aarohan helps urchins change their fate" (The Kathmandu Post,4th September 1994), focused on the change in identity experienced by boys acting in the play and living in the Aarohan hostel.

9 Although the cast was predominately male, some of the actors were girls who work as street vendors and return home to their families.

In 1994 I watched the Aarohan group's most recent play named 'Non-citizens of the Metropolis' (*Mahanagarka Anagarikharu*) which portrayed daily troubles on the street, the importance of friendships and boys' concerns for their futures. As the title suggests, an underlying theme was that of rejection by society and boys' resulting feelings of vulnerability. Scenes contained insults from passers-by and shop-keepers, unwarranted accusations of theft and rough treatment by the police. There were several depictions of what could be interpreted as denials of street children's rights. In one such scene, two *khate* watched children walking to school in their uniforms and commented on what life might have been like, had they had this opportunity. One then pointed to a skip full of rubbish stating "this is our school", and the audience applauded loudly. Later, a boy attempts to deposit his earnings in a bank, but is refused an account because he has no citizenship card. Here the onus is on the way in which society's rules prevent street boys from improving their lives even when they try to do so.

The play tells us that a number of experiences are common to the *khate* life-history and these can be summarised as follows: A series of misfortunes at home and at work leads boys to the street. There, solidarity with friends helps them deal with everyday difficulties but is constrained by competition for scarce resources and a prevailing social stigma against *khate*. Boys try to leave the streets but are prevented from doing so because social codes exclude them from securing good jobs.

Contrary to my expectations, the narrative did not contain demands for particular facilities or interventions for street children. Rather, it portrayed the life experiences of *khate* as complex and multi-faceted. Those presented as 'problems' included material deprivation, physical dangers and social exclusion; factors that cannot be addressed with 'quick-fix' solutions. Nevertheless, the audience were told explicitly that they could be involved in bringing positive changes to the lives of street children. After the play opened with brief personal testimonies from each cast member, one of the adult actors spoke about Aarohan's objectives. His specific request was that the audience should spend time with street boys because this would assist them in changing their own lives. Everyone, he asserted, can contribute to the general aim of integrating boys into society, or more literally 'making them social' (*samajik*). The implication here is that by listening to boys' explanations of their past experiences and aspirations, members of the general public are better able to contribute to their efforts to change. But what kind of change is meant here? The fact that the Aarohan actor did not define the precise changes he envisaged for street children is significant. It suggests that there are generally accepted notions of

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what 'becoming social' is all about and all that is required is for children to be assisted towards these goals (see chapter 6).

The central narrative of all the plays produced by the Aarohan group tells the audience that street children are a social project in which others who live more privileged lives should be involved. Thus the message delivered to street children who watch them is 'you are a project because you share some of these experiences'. The effects that these plays had in terms of legitimising the *khate* experience and cause were evident in small talk on the streets and within the NGO centres over the following months. For example, elements of the drama's narrative appeared when the boys resident in the CWIN Common Room were preparing sketches for a video that would depict the differences between street life and life in the Common Room[10]. The boys chose this topic and had free reign to invent ways to portray whatever they wanted. In an early scene, an older, respected boy approaches the group of rag-pickers and asks them where they come from, why they are now on the street and to describe some of the difficulties they face; a scene reminiscent of the opening of the Aarohan dramas. In addition, there were parallels in the content of short scenes constructed to illustrate life on the street, for instance being scolded by shop-owners, falsely accused of theft and taken to the police station.

One scene depicted the arrival of an NGO social worker in the junkyard and his vain attempts to persuade *khate* boys to accompany him to the centre, thus indicating the extent to which boys perceive themselves as the project of the NGOs. Within this scene, the banter about the centre's tasteless food (when compared to what you can buy on the streets) and boys' teasing of the NGO worker could be interpreted as evidence for on-going negotiation of values between *khate* 'beneficiaries' and NGO 'providers'. To explore this possibility, we would need to know the extent to which boys' challenges influence the actions of NGOs (see chapter 6). Alternatively, boys' challenges to NGO staff could be interpreted as the acting out of behaviour disapproved of within NGOs, such as smoking, making persistent demands for clothes and expressing ingratitude. From this perspective, boys are reinforcing the negative characteristics with which they are already labelled rather than asserting a positive group identity.

These issues raise broader questions about how performing these scenes affects the actors themselves. What impact did participating in the video drama have on boys' perceptions of their current lives and their sense of self-esteem? As has been noted

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10 The video project was initiated by myself and Lazima Onta as part of our contributions to CWIN's non-formal education programmes of CWIN (see sections 2.3.3 and 6.2.1).

elsewhere, life-story narratives have the potential to create a collective identity amongst those who narrate and are the subject of the story (Peacock and Holland 1993:372). The Aarohan plays and the video contained emotive scenes created collectively by boys from their own experiences, but were also produced within the context of an NGO enterprise to change their lives. Thus, I argue that they are particularly powerful examples of the transformation of collective story-telling to shared identities. Further evidence of this cultural narrative is found in boys' life stories written once they had moved from the streets to school (see appendix IV). They too illustrate the central feature of the collective *khate* identity, namely that it must be changed in order for street boys to participate as full members of society.

## 5.7 SHARED IDENTITIES: COLLECTIVE ACTION?

Given the indications of a sense a shared history and status amongst *khate*, it is important to explore the potential for these boys to act as a collective group. In Nepal, individuals are defined primarily in relation to others in their family and community (see chapter 3). As a result, each person is positioned within a hierarchy and social relations are characterised by interdependence. Stone (1989) points out the inherent conflict between in-coming development practitioners who advocated self-reliance and equality based on Northern principals of individualism, and the expectations of participants in a water project in Palpa district (Western region of Nepal). Her study showed that, on the basis of their prior experience, Palpa villagers believed successful development to have proceeded "through wealthy Brahman leaders who manipulated their connections in the external world of government power" (ibid.:212). The implication here is that the introduction of 'aid' during early development work in Nepal has reinforced the value of relationships with influential people who have access to external resources.

There are parallels between the scenario described by Stone and the relative positions of *khate* and NGOs in Kathmandu. Clienting is widely practised in various 'street' settings, although is a much more acceptable behaviour in the junkyard than in the NGO centre (see chapter 4). For, while offering services in much the same way as previous 'development' projects, these NGOs have adopted a Northern 'rights' approach that strives to overcome power imbalances between dependents and providers. Earlier in the chapter I highlighted the conviction amongst some development workers that people cannot be empowered, but can only empower themselves. This has prompted reviews of the 'empowerment' approach and one suggestion that emerged was that self-empowerment can only be realised with others in a group context (Korten 1990, cited in Gardner and Lewis 1996:118). But

how is this relevant in a context where 'empowerment' is experienced as a process of moving from client to patron in a dyadic relationship, rather than one tied to the actions of members of one's peer group?

The underlying social and historical factors described here suggest that collective action amongst *khate* is unlikely to emerge from the sense of shared identity described above. Nevertheless, a number of recent NGO initiatives have relied on a high level of group support. In the following two chapters I present the perspectives of participants and NGO staff on the success of these initiatives, and discuss the issues raised therein.

## 5.8  CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the social and political climate in which child-focused NGOs developed in Nepal[11]. Evidently, the social movements and international concern for street and working children during the late 1980s had a significant impact on the formation of NGO philosophy towards street children. Moreover, the paucity of state or INGO activity for Nepali street children left space for NGOs to define these children's needs and propose ways of meeting them. As a result, certain suppositions were made about street children's lives before NGO staff had undertaken research or designed programmes. Although NGOs have responded to their growing knowledge of children's lives with a range of different services (more details of which are given in the following chapter), they continue to face problems achieving their objectives. My point here is that these spring from the significant contradictions inherent in their particular understandings of the protection, empowerment and correction thought to be appropriate for street children.

As I have shown, the aim to forcibly correct street children is incompatible with efforts to empower them. Empowerment—defined as enabling others to achieve greater self-determination—requires the facilitators to take a back seat. It therefore raises the possibility that some children will choose not to follow the direction prescribed by middle-class norms and NGOs. Yet these children are not considered 'empowered' but deviant, thereby indicating that NGOs, like most of the rest of Nepali society, want to retain some control over children's lives. The question raised

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11 As stated earlier, I have focussed my analysis of CWIN because it was the first NGO to initiate action for street children and is still widely regarded as progressive in its approaches. My observations in inter-NGO fora showed that the smaller, newer NGOs working with street children have adopted parallel strategies and run up against similiar difficulties in achieving tangible improvements to children's quality of life..

here is what kind of children's empowerment is possible, or desirable, given the hierarchical relationships that structure Nepali society and enable people to 'move up' in life.

This chapter had demonstrated that NGO practice and advocacy affects individual children through their contributions to a cultural narrative of street children's lives. Expressed particularly powerfully in the Aarohan dramas of street life described above, the cultural narrative has been formed largely out of NGO statements and activities. These dramas reinforce the two reasons behind efforts to address the future of street children that are evident in the general rhetoric of NGOs described above. The first reason for action stems from the physical and emotional hardship to which boys are at risk on the streets. The second is the unacceptability of street living to other members of society that, paradoxically, is the source of many of the problems that are considered to be particular to *khate*. On the basis of how others treat them, individual children learn who they are in the public eye and where they 'fail' to live up to social standards. As outsiders, we might ask whether NGOs are able to confront such difficult issues in which they themselves play a leading part. A street child's question might be whether NGOs are able to better equip him to deal with such pervasive attitudes and move into a lifestyle in which he is considered to have dignity. These questions are of primary concern in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER 6
## GROWING OLDER AND MOVING ON

## 6.0 INTRODUCTION

During preparation for the video drama created in the CWIN Common Room[1], Raju, a former rag-picker, took a tape-recorder to a quiet corner and recorded the following song:

> Day and night the *khate* must walk with a sack
> One day without collecting scrap means being hungry for several
> Until when will we do this? What will happen in the future?
> We ran away from home because there was hardship there
> Once we became *khate*, people picked on us, some even spat on us
> Some beat us and others accused us of being thieves
> One person steals and an innocent person is caught
> Then he is beaten until he confesses to being the thief
> Sometimes the sun shines, sometimes the moon is out
>
> There are many *khate* in this big sea
> How good it is to be at CWIN; this is why we have come
>
> These hands and feet have toiled so hard
> We have worked so hard to keep our bodies alive
> Friends spoke badly and fights broke out
> These days were full of hardship and we wanted to change this
> Life is easy, life is hard (*jivan sukha ho, jivan dukha ho*)
> But what will our futures hold? This is why we have come

Two clear messages are given in this song. The first is that remaining on the streets will only bring more of the same hardships and the second, that organisations like CWIN offer boys an alternative lifestyle. It is important to point out that a song with similar wording was once taught to boys by CWIN staff. Thus, Raju's vivid descriptions of life on the streets go beyond personal testimony to common *khate* experiences. The link he makes between suffering on the street and coming to the CWIN centre shows his awareness of others' concern for children like himself. The overall impression conveyed in Raju's song is that adult 'social workers' and *khate* boys share similar ideas about the problems faced on the streets and the action needed to improve their future prospects. But can we be sure that both parties are

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[1] In this video drama boys aimed to compare daily life on the streets with their experiences in the CWIN Common Room (see section 5.7 for further details).

as aware of the potentials of family contacts and friendship networks in boys' efforts to improve their quality of life, as they are of NGO programmes designed for this purpose?

My aim in this chapter is to expose the various means by which boys try to fulfil their aspirations and to examine the factors that affect the outcomes of their efforts. To do this, I expand the temporal perspective adopted in chapter 4 to examine the changes that *khate* instigate with regard to their occupational status, social position and personal identity. For reasons which will become apparent, there is little documented evidence of what becomes of street children in Kathmandu. In 1995, I enquired as to the whereabouts and activities of all the street boys who participated in the 1993 comparative study. Table 5 gives some indication of changes and consistencies in their lives over this two year period.

### Table 5. Residence and activity in 1995 of 126 boys
### who were street-based in 1993

| Age in years in 1995 (N) | 8-13 | 14-15 | 16-19 | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **On the streets** | | | | | |
| rag-picking or begging locally | 6 | 16 | 10 | 32 | |
| rag-picking or begging elsewhere | 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 | |
| in police custody | 0 | 6 | 2 | 8 | |
| moving between NGO centres | 6 | 4 | 0 | 10 | |
| Total | 12 | 29 | 15 | 56 | **44** |
| | | | | | |
| **Moved off the streets** | | | | | |
| employed in the city | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | |
| living in an NGO centre | 3 | 8 | 2 | 13 | |
| at boarding school | 4 | 6 | 2 | 12 | |
| living at home with family | 2 | 2 | 1 | 5 | |
| home-based, earning on the street | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 | |
| Total | 10 | 19 | 8 | 37 | 29 |
| | | | | | |
| **No recent contact** | **5** | **15** | **13** | **33** | **26** |

Whereas NGOs in Kathmandu are keen to collect and present statistics on children's region of origin, family circumstances, activities on the street and use of the NGO services, data tracing their recent movements between various 'street' locations had not been collated[2]. Possible reasons for their omission include a reluctance amongst NGOs to produce figures which can be interpreted by the media as evidence of 'failure' on the part of NGOs to do the job they set out to do. These

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[2] To obtain the data shown in table 6.1 I asked CWIN staff who regularly visit the streets to tell me of the current whereabouts and activities of 126 boys surveyed during the 1993 comparative study.

concerns arise from the general problem of selective interpretation of survey data presented in tabular form[3].

Although table 5 shows the range of potential outcomes for boys who have spent time as *khate*, it fails to convey the fluidity with which individual boys move between 'street' and 'non-street' settings. This movement provokes disappointment and frustration amongst NGO staff, one of whom commented that the centres operate like a conveyor belt; placing children in homes, schools or training, only to see them reappear a few months later. Some felt that their programmes were totally ineffective in providing routes for children to leave the streets, and were looking for alternative strategies. In this chapter I investigate the reasons behind these unmet expectations and describe the ways NGOs enhance boys' opportunities that often go unrecognised.

There is insufficient information in the table to tell us whether it is the benefits of street life or the obstacles preventing change that are primarily responsible for boys' continued reliance on the streets. To pursue this question I examine attempts by boys based in Durbar Square and Kohiti junkyard to follow the routes offered by NGOs towards a 'better' quality of life. Although the figures indicate that most boys who have moved off the streets did so with the help of NGOs, some of those with whom staff have not had recent contact may well have used alternative strategies. Thus I enquire into the potential for *khate* to use family contacts and street-based networks to secure a job and a place to live.

The first section of this chapter focuses on internal and outsider constructions of a *khate* boy's future. After establishing a conceptual framework for discussion of boys' transitions into another stage of life, I compare boys' perspectives with those of the people who aim to help them achieve change. The second section moves from what is said by boys and NGO staff about ending street life, to boys' experiences of routes into formal schooling and skill-training offered by NGOs. Boys electing to follow these paths do not find them straightforward and factors contributing to their difficulties are the subject of considerable discussion on the street amongst friends and within NGO centres. Much of the debate hinges on ideas about the different responsibilities of boys and the institutions providing assistance. The section ends by comparing NGO rhetoric about what children should and should not do to improve their lives, with what occurs in practice. Drawing on similar

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[3] Due to this and other weaknesses in my survey, I have used it as a springboard for in-depth qualitative analysis of changes in boys and their interactions with those trying to assist them.

discrepancies reported in other development interventions, I question the precepts by which NGOs for street children are operating.

The aim of the third section is to examine the role of street-based networks in providing alternative work and the means of becoming an adult in the urban community. I discuss the pressures and opportunities that increasing age brings to beggars and rag-pickers. Through an analysis of the careers of two young men who married while rag-picking in Kohiti junkyard, I elucidate the manner in which they used the resources of the junkyard, local friends and family, as well as the support of NGO initiatives, in order to achieve upward mobility. A comparison of their actions with those of older rag-picker boys who apparently did not achieve the changes they sought, leads me to question what is actually desired by *khate* who make efforts to improve their quality of life.

## 6.1. PROSPECTS BEYOND THE STREETS

My original intention was to use the concept of 'career' to encapsulate the two transitions in the life of a *khate*. The first comprises their aspirations to mature into adults and the second, their attempts to move into an alternative way of life. At first, the concept of 'career' seemed appropriate to the task because it could encompass occupational change and alterations in behaviour, place of residence and sources of support which together form a different social status and self-identity. The sense of career that I wished to convey is similar to that first introduced into sociology by Hughes (1958) and later developed by Becker (1973) and Goffman (1968) in their respective studies on forms of social deviance. Although symbolic interactionism provides the theoretical framework for a number of recent studies of the social worlds of 'the street' (Lucchini 1996:168, Visano 1990), Visano's is the only serious attempt to apply the concept of career developed by these theorists to socialisation and identity transformation amongst street children. Her study was conducted amongst runaway children in Toronto and, as I point out below, 'career' is a more useful concept in the analysis of the adoption.and rejection of a street identity a North American setting, than it is for such processes in Nepal.

The reason why 'career' is an attractive concept lies in its use by sociologists to examine the interaction between the practices of groups considered deviant, for example drug users (Becker 1973), and dominant ideas about the life course in the wider community. According to Goffman, 'career' is a useful concept because it "allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public", thus

including both self image and the definition of a person's identity according to society's norms (1961:119). Becker alerts us to the problem individuals face in managing a career in the face of widely established judgements by others: "The career lines characteristic of an occupation take their shape from the problems peculiar to that occupation. These, in turn, are a function of the occupation's position vis-à-vis other groups in the society" (Becker 1973:102). In the case of *khate*, the word 'occupation' could be replaced with 'social identity'. As I have demonstrated, boys' evaluations of their street-based activities and relationships are influenced to a large degree by the reactions they receive from other people during daily encounters in a number of city settings. These reactions are not based solely on aspects of work, rather they allude to certain behaviours that put them outside the acceptable moral sphere. By seemingly 'choosing' to live in 'poverty' and outside the family realm, boys are challenging pervasive ideas about the primacy of the family as a nurturing ground and the source of an individual's identity.

Goffman develops the notion of "the moral career" in his analysis of the process by which stigmatised individuals learn about the implications of their stigma and how best to manage it in everyday life. His conceptual framework is useful in my enquiry about the particularities of the stigma attached to the *khate* identity. However, in its more popular usage, the term 'career' cannot encapsulate the transitions sought by *khate*. It is inadequate for the following reasons.

Originating as a term used amongst the North Atlantic middle-classes, 'career' does not refer to aspects of morality and social inclusion in an individual's progression through life. Rather, a person's future prospects are considered on the basis of their demonstrable skills in the workplace. Forecasts are made according to educational and vocational qualifications, previous experience and sometimes on personality traits (for example, being able to 'work well with people'). Thus, in the industrial North, issues of morality and social connectedness seldom feature in open discussion about a person's career, even if they have significant impact in career outcome.

In Nepal however, there are close links between occupation, social status and individual identity expressed in caste affiliations and distinctions. Although boys asserted that caste differences were unimportant to them in the city, they were evidently concerned about the moral connotations of their street activities in relation to their status at home and amongst those with social standing in the city. Local conceptions of social status and of the individual's ability to influence the future, cannot be encompassed in the term 'career'. Raju's song, set out at the opening of the chapter, conveys life as a series of hardships (*dukha*) and good times (*sukha*) that

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befall one. His words are consistent with Hindu philosophy in which individuals have only a limited influence on the way life pans out. The pervasiveness of these notions suggest that they are not merely constructed for outsiders, but are critical to Nepali ways of thinking about life in the present and the future.

The term 'career' is thus restrictive in its association with occupation and focus on personal endeavour as the means of altering the course of events. In addition, it assumes that one's career develops by enhancing the attributes already possessed, rather than by starting afresh. In chapter 4 I described how *khate* boys define themselves in relation to others and examined aspects of their daily life that lead some boys to define themselves as 'ruined' (*bigreko*). In accordance with common usage of the dichotomy *bigre*ko—*sapreko* (ruined—made good), many boys spoke about needing to improve or 'make good' (*saparnu*). The frequent usage of these terms by *khate* who wanted to make changes in their lives suggest that these concepts guide boys' decisions and are therefore more appropriate tools for analysis than the concept of 'career'. Boys also spoke about taking steps towards achieving a 'bright future' (*ujjalo jivan*)[4]. In their eyes, the means of doing so include finding a job with a regular wage, acquiring a room of their own and wearing good clothes, as well as disassociating themselves from those involved in the 'bad practices' of the street (such as gambling). In short, they expressed an aim to present a totally new face to the world.

Boys' desires to make such radical changes in their lives can be understood in the light of their apprenticeships to street life and the implications of being labelled '*khate*'[5]. Although the social identity ascribed to *khate* is based on ideas about their current activities without consideration of their connections to family, such relationships may be critical in some boys' attempts to move off the streets. It should be remembered that many boys leave home due to family poverty and low status resulting from caste affiliation or failure to attend school. Like their relatives, boys may have seen their departures as opportunities to address these social stigma by bringing money and good repute into the family. Where this was the case, the pertinent question for *khate* is whether they are able to fulfil the expectations placed upon returning migrants.

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[4] The term *ujjalo jivan* is often used by parents and children to sum up the expected result of education, namely a salaried job and a respected position in society (as discussed in section 3.3.2).

[5] See sections 4.2 and 4.7.

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According to Visano, prior awareness of the moral and social implications of the move to the streets, means that Toronto runaways knowingly "set themselves apart from conventional society" (1990:144). For *khate* however, the move to the streets is not such a clearly delineated turning point as was found amongst young people in Toronto. The majority of boys took up 'street' work in order to earn more money in a better working environment. Evidence that boys considered this to have been a positive move is found in boys' responses in the 1993 demographic survey. When asked whether they liked or disliked their work as rag-pickers and beggars, the majority of younger boys replied that they were contented. As I explained in chapter 4, some of the practices that boys learn on the streets, such as spending all one's money on food, films or gambling, go against their norms of good behaviour learnt at home or in school. Although it is difficult to disentangle boys' pre-existing moral codes from the value orientations learnt in the city, their experiences differ from those of the runaways in Toronto because they learn about society's view of *khate* at the same time as, or even after, they learn the practical skills of street survival.

Before proceeding to an analysis of boys' efforts to change their lives, the next two sections explore boys' perceptions of their own futures and those of the wider general public. I show that in normative terms the life-cycle of *khate* does not extend beyond late adolescence. Boys state that one cannot be a *khate* and marry, and according to members of the general public, boys should not be refining their skills to become better *khate*, but re-learning how to live.

## 6.1.1 *KHATE* VIEWS OF THE FUTURE

During an interview, Ram (a rag-picker aged 14) was asked about the 'good' and 'bad' people he knew, and about how he viewed himself. He replied that he was a 'bad' person and when asked why, responded:

> Because I am doing this now...I am only young so when I am older I don't know what I will do, how I will live when I grow up...that is what I feel.

None of the street children I met envisaged a future built on rag-picking, begging or sleeping rough. Their wishes for when they were 'grown up' (*thulo*) were to work in high status occupations, such as the army, police and business. But do boys consider these ideals to be achievable or are they merely wishful thinking? A reticence to speak directly about actual plans, and the tendency of some boys to respond flippantly with comments like "I want to be Prime Minister", imply underlying doubts about what the future might hold. In the light of the struggles

some have faced to find food, safe shelter or companionship on the streets, and the limited potential of *khate* living to meet these needs, it is not surprising that boys have misgivings about the future. These are evident in Tashi's responses during a structured interview conducted in 1993 by one of our research assistants (K):

K: Will you continue with *khate* work or will you get another job?

Tashi: I would like to do other work but...

K: What job would you like to do?

Tashi: I don't know about the future. I would like to be like other people...and to become big (*thulo*).

The changes sought by *khate* and other poor children are expressed in the two meanings of the term *thulo bhayera* (literally 'to become big'). The first is simply 'to grow up' because the word 'thulo' refers to physical size and age which will inevitably increase. The second is to become someone with social status; a *thulo manchhe* ('great person') is someone who has money and influence. When boys used this term to sum up their aspirations, it was clear that they regarded themselves as currently *sano* (small or weak/subordinate) and that the focus of efforts on their own part, and by others, should be on altering this social position. Like Tashi, most boys were pragmatic about the reality of finding work and it was clear that moving on meant finding an ordinary job and settling somewhere. Becoming *thulo* in terms of high social status is considered a bonus. Attending school, setting up a small shop, driving a rickshaw, seeking waged government employment or returning to live in their home village were some of the plans described by boys as both desirable and feasible.

The manner in which boys distinguish themselves from destitute adults rag-picking for survival or from older 'thugs' who hang around Durbar Square shows that they view being a *khate* as a temporary stage in their life. Although they have older friends who have married and continue to live as a *khate*, they often said that it was 'wrong' to do this. I was told that it is impossible to support a wife, raise a family, rent a room—in short be a fully social adult—if one continues as a *khate*. The question that remained unanswered was when and how to make the required changes. While the urgency of boys' wishes to leave the streets do not appear to be correlated with the length of time they have spent being *khate*, age (or visible maturity) does seem to have some bearing.

*Khate* in their upper teens and above spoke eloquently of their wish to find alternative jobs and places to live. The criticism they receive from the general public acquires an extra urgency amongst older boys, for it confronts them with the fact

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that changes must occur before they will be regarded as respectable adults. They are acutely conscious of a tension between what is easy and lucrative now, and what is desired for the future. Mahendra, a seventeen year old who has been rag-picking for four years described himself to be "both happy and troubled" (*ma kushi pani chhu, dukhi pani chhu*) in his current occupation and said that he would prefer to work as a municipal rubbish collector. As the occupation of the untouchable sweeper caste, this job has low social status in the broad social context. Nonetheless, it is recognised as a profession, paid by monthly salary and practised by many of Mahendra's local friends. Regardless of whether or not he is involved in criminal activities, a regular work routine could allay accusations of thieving and would position Mahendra more favourably within the local community than the unstructured activity of rag-picking.

However, for boys in their mid-teens and below who benefit from the lucrative and unstructured nature of *khate* work, there was a detectable ambivalence in their statements about doing something else. I was alerted to the benefits of being a *khate* in Kohiti junkyard and in Durbar Square by the frequent return of boys who had run away from schools. Eleven year old Lhakpa is one such runaway and when I asked him whether he intended to carry on rag-picking, he replied:

> Perhaps I will for a while...Once you get into the habit of *khate* work then you begin to like it, you keep doing it and you grow to like it more. If I am at home with my grandmother, then I remember my friends here and want to come back to the streets. What to do? (*ke garne?*)

There are several points raised in Lhakpa's response. His use of the popular rhetorical question "*ke garne?*" communicates a personal inability to change the position he finds himself in. Judging by the tone of his reply, he is aware that his actions will be judged by others to be morally dubious. By implying the role of fate at the last minute, he is able to evade full responsibility for making these decisions and show me that he believes that one day he ought to give up *khate* life. Why should he feel the need to do this? Although young, Lhakpa has lived in a number of NGO hostels and boarding schools. On the basis of his personal experience he has assessed the pros and cons of these alternatives. In addition, he is fully aware of what others regard as acceptable and achievable. As I explained in the previous chapter, it is within centres providing services to street children that the cultural

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narrative[6] of a street child's life-course is most openly communicated. Bhim's response to a question about his opinion of *khate* work illustrates this point:

> I used to think that rag-picking was good...then when I started coming to the CWIN Common Room, I met the staff and a foreigner who advised me that I should study.

The pervasiveness of notions of what *khate* could and should do to assure a better future accounts for the frequent agreement between boys' ideas about what is 'bad' about street living and therefore needs to be changed, and the opinions and objectives of NGOs. Yet within this broad consensus, there is still scope for individuals to contest the hegemonic view of *khate* work and lifestyle should they perceive it advantageous to do so. As I will illustrate in a later section, boys challenge dominant views verbally but act in ways that will keep their options open. First, however, I describe constructions of the *khate* future that exist within the wider social discourse as evident in the media and NGO publications.

## 6.1.2 EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE FOR *KHATE*

> What the future holds for him is made amply clear by his body which is dotted with countless lesions...
>
> (The Kathmandu Post 25 February 1996 "Hooked on an alternative high" by D Joshi).

These words followed a brief description of "the sordid life" of an eleven year old glue-sniffing rag-picker boy. They reflect the popular belief that the deprivation experienced by *khate* bodes for a bleak future. Alongside this pessimistic forecast, there is widespread public awareness of the existence of NGOs who claim to provide for street children. Although much of the blame for street children's continued presence in Kathmandu is placed on the NGOs, some people pointed out the irresponsibility of children themselves in refusing assistance.

After interviewing two rag-pickers in a back street tea-shop, my research assistant chatted with the proprietor who recounted the following fable and then explained its meaning:

> One day god decided to take pity on a pig who played in the mud and dirt every day. He decided to give the pig a place in heaven. Proposing the idea to the pig, he said that in heaven the pig would not be able to live in dirty places. In response, the pig agreed with one condition; due to his habit of

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[6] In section 5.7 I discussed the role of the media and NGO initiatives in promoting what I refer to as the cultural narrative of a street child's life. I provide further details on external perceptions on the trajectory of a street living in the following section.

eating shit on the earth, it should be available daily in heaven. Upon hearing this, god disappeared.

*Khate* boys are like the pig in this fable. They are never happy when people try to help by giving them money or advice. If you give them fifty rupees today, they will ask for one hundred tomorrow. The outcome of this story illustrates god's plan to teach the *khate* boys good behaviour, love and the route to a better future.

The assumption here is that *khate* are people in need and should, like others in this position, take what is offered in order to improve their situation. Their refusal is interpreted as unwillingness to forego what they enjoy in their current circumstances for an investment in the future. In implying that boys should be taught to respond in the ways expected of them, the effectiveness of these courses of action remain unquestioned.

In media coverage of a very different tone to the report that heads this section, NGOs are presented as successfully transforming street children's lives. Recently, it was claimed that "rag-picking children in the streets of Nepal have plenty to dream about" in a report about a group of ex-street boys who are engaged in advocacy work for street children through photography, acting and writing (Everest Herald 24 March 1996 "Dharan street kids can afford to dream" by R. K. Dikpal). Although a more positive outlook, the article describes boys as having "risen from the pits of life" and thereby reinforces the image of street living as wholly negative. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on the actions of NGOs detracts from any consideration of what *khate* might achieve without input from these institutions. Readers are left wondering what the future holds for boys who do not participate in the projects run by NGOs.

A review of the recent media reports and literature produced by organisations working with street children in Nepal revealed a set of commonly held ideas about the future prospects of a street child. Three broad stages of children's experience on the street can be identified in the NGO literature, media reports and public discourse as shown in table 6[7].

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[7] It should be noted that this model refers to 'homeless' street children rather than those who are closely linked to their families. There is consensus among the NGOs that the former group are the most difficult to work with due to the declining influence of adult authority with time spent on the street (CAR-NG meeting 22 August 1994).

Table 6. Public perceptions of the characteristics,
needs and prospects of *khate*

| Stage | Children's characteristics | Children's needs | Appropriate action | Expected outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 within weeks of arrival | ignorant, vulnerable | protection | family reunion or institution | successful adjustment |
| 2 after a few months | knowledgeable, seeing benefits of street life, bad habits | support, guidance, correction, empowerment? | socialisation by NGO towards school, skilled work or home | problems in adjusting to authority and routine |
| 3 several years on the street | increasing criminality | correction and respect | access to work, ...beyond the NGO remit? | little information |

The first stage of induction to street life is one in which boys are seen to need protection from the perils of the street[8]. Significantly, it is not children's physical safety that is of first concern, but the potential that they will become attracted to the vices of the street. Assertions that experienced street boys engage in "less wholesome activities such as lounging around in video parlours, using drugs, selling sex or thievery", support the assumption that newcomers must be in moral danger (CWIN 1990:10-11). On these grounds, there is said to be an urgent need to remove from the streets those boys whose lives are at risk of "running astray" (ibid.). Staff at CWIN and CWS accompany boys wishing to return to their homes in order to help them explain events in the city and ensure the family's support of the returning boy. Many boys arrive back in the city after a few weeks, however staff report that more 'family reunions' are sustained by relatively new arrivals to the street than by boys who have moved into stage two of the model presented above. By this second stage, boys are thought to have developed a liking for street living and its 'bad habits'. They are thought to need certain supports, for example medical care, but are primarily considered in need of guidance and correction (often termed 'socialisation' by NGOs), to improve their chances of adjusting to a socially acceptable lifestyle.

My forthcoming analysis of NGO provision for these boys shows that the problems experienced by boys are often attributed to their failure to adjust to routines or

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[8] NGO staff are aware of differences between boys' in terms of personality and prior experience, meaning that the time periods for each stage are not rigid.

authority structures. Here we must recall a more general concern of NGOs and the public. In their eyes, "if not controlled or educated, these children are a serious threat to the future well-being of society and for their own lives" (CWIN 1990:11). The final stage is perceived as one of boys' progression into increasing criminality[9]. As outlined in the previous chapter, NGOs promote an uneasy combination of correction and respect in their attitudes towards older, more experienced *khate*, the consequences of which will shortly be discussed. Boys in this third stage find that their age and experience puts them in a borderline position with respect to NGO provision.

While certain NGO projects had an upper age limit (for example, only boys below 16 years are eligible for CWIN's 'kitchen club'), there were no rules excluding them from visiting the centres and one recent NGO initiative has concentrated on acquiring citizenship cards for older boys[10]. Despite rejecting many NGO services as suitable only "for kids", older *khate* complained that staff had 'abandoned' them for no good reason. Contrary to the opinions of NGO staff, older boys do not see their proficiency in meeting daily needs on the street through various and often illegal means as relevant to this decision. The injustice felt by boys was expressed in recollections of their early days as *khate* when they were regular visitors to CWIN and other centres. In their eyes, staff were failing to keep their half of the deal, a notion that is better understood in the light of patron-client relationships established by *khate* with adults in various street settings including NGO centres. As I will shortly demonstrate, these relationships become more critical as boys grow older and become increasingly concerned to find alternative occupations, living arrangements and social identities.

At some point, boys who are termed *khate* will be re-defined as adults. Depending on their occupations and residence, they may be regarded as urban squatters or migrant labourers whose predicaments are shared by vast numbers of the 'urban poor'. While NGOs may desire to address the deep-seated social inequalities within Nepal, they have tended to focus their efforts on improving the lives of young boys

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[9] Theft is most commonly cited but there were rumours that some older boys were selling illegal substances and involved in organised prostitution, however these remain unsupported by empirical data.

[10] During 1995, CWIN social workers were collecting details of boys' family histories which could then be presented to the Home Office. Although the process has taken some time, the government have stood by their agreement to recognise that many boys do not have the contacts with family necessary to acquire citizenship papers through the normal route. It is reported that approximately 30 current or ex-street boys (over the age of 18) have received a citizenship card and are therefore able to apply for waged work (J Shrestha pers. comm.).

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who are seen to be most at risk. This said, NGOs do not totally discontinue their support of older boys who do not fit the target group, as illustrated in forthcoming descriptions of the personal relationships formed between staff and individual *khate*.

To conclude this section, I draw attention to attitudes towards street children's work that affect approaches to their 'rehabilitation'. The origins of the various—and at times contradictory—standpoints taken by NGO staff during the last decade can be traced to movements within the international arena for child-focused development that influenced the campaigns against child labour within Nepal (see chapter 5). The result has been the alternate denigration of rag-picking and other street work on the basis of endangering children's physical health, and the promotion of such work as evidence for and perpetrator of self-reliance. When Suman, a beggar from Durbar Square, was first taken to an NGO drop-in centre by a friend, he was astounded by the instructions of staff to boys living there:

> The sirs were saying to the boys "off you go and look for scrap" and I wondered why they were telling them to do this—thinking perhaps I would have to do the same...I felt ashamed about being there.

Several months later, the same NGO established a residential co-operative for *khate* and decided that members should not be allowed to rag-pick. They were to earn the money for daily food by drawing postcards, the intention being to separate boys from their street networks. Interestingly, in 1996, members of this club had completed a skill-training course and were rag-picking in order to bring in some money while they awaited their work placement. Others had given up the skill-training and returned to full-time rag-picking. In both cases, boys are demonstrating self-reliance. Yet, while the former is condoned by NGOs, boys who take the latter option are considered to have 'failed' to make the changes they desired. Society's judgements are evidently made on the basis of completion of a defined course of action. It should be remembered, however, that although these general criteria are used by NGOs, staff in the centres do not reject boys because they have run away from one of their programmes. The question therefore, is whether a series of attempts to follow the routes prescribed by NGOs equips boys to negotiate a job and living place on their own terms.

## 6.2 FOLLOWING THE PRESCRIBED ROUTES: CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF NGO PROVISION

This section describes the mechanisms of leaving the streets provided by NGOs in Kathmandu and the manner in which boys and staff interact towards achieving

change. I document boys' experiences of non-formal education classes within NGO drop-in centres, enrolment in boarding school and participation in skill-training for employment. My analysis focuses on the relationships between boys and those facilitating the programmes, as well as the impact of these programmes on the process of identity change from *khate* to pupil or working adult.

## 6.2.1  QUESTIONING THE PURPOSE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Appropriate methods of delivering education to street and other working children are frequently the subject of debate within and between NGOs. Although each NGO had built 'non-formal education' into their programme for street children, it was apparent during inter-NGO discussions that none had a clear idea what these were meant to achieve. The lack of specific goals can be partly explained by the largely uncontested value accorded to education in Nepal[11]. My conversations with *khate* revealed that they too viewed education as a means of becoming *thulo* (a person with high status and wealth). The following words, written on the blackboard during a writing class for boys in the CWIN centre, illustrate the pervasiveness of these perceptions:

Important things in life;

to take a bath regularly

to go to the hospital if you are ill

to go to school and study

to be kind to the younger boys

The term 'non-formal education' is used by NGOs to refer to a range of activities including structured literacy and numeracy teaching that tries to emulate the formal school routine, and much looser, shorter sessions designed to cater for the differing abilities of street children arriving in drop-in centres[12].

For all NGOs, children's participation in non-formal education classes is regarded as a necessary precursor to their attending a formal school[13]. However, this

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[11] Parents' and children's perspectives on education are discussed at length in chapter 3.

[12] An example of the former structured approach are the daily classes run by an NGO named EPHC for children who work near Pashupatinath temple to support their families. The 'study' sessions run in the CWIN Common Room and CWS Bal Kendra for street boys are examples of the latter approach.

[13] Boys are placed in local boarding schools by CWIN, CWS and several other NGOs and their costs of tuition and board are met by sponsors, most of whom are foreign.

transition cannot be the sole purpose of non-formal education because the majority of *khate* are unlikely to return to school. Both staff and boys themselves are fully aware of this fact. Some NGOs state that non-formal education can contribute significantly to children's 'socialisation'. They hold that the discipline of sitting in lessons, listening to instructions and completing small tasks can help *khate* become 'good' (sapreko) children. While boys clearly derived satisfaction from learning, they were often inconsistent in their attendance and easily distracted by the wish to sleep or continue drawing postcards (that they then sold to the NGO or on the streets). Conversations with NGO staff showed their frustration with children's lack of dedication to their studies and of the problems they faced in running a satisfactory non-formal education programme.

Observation over several months showed that the teaching routine was often interrupted and the rules adjusted for boys' attendance, thus conveying to children a lack of conviction amongst staff of the value of the education offered. A major factor in teacher and pupil dissatisfaction appeared to be the lack of an agreed achievable goal to the classes. In the Philippines, the focus on life-skills in non-formal education for street children has resulted in activities that make use of children's prior experiences and increase their competence to manage daily life (Baguioro and Caluyo 1992). The general philosophy behind this approach is that by recognising children's capabilities, one can boost their self esteem in the learning environment and enhance the learning experience.

After making arrangements with CWS and CWIN, Lazima Onta (who was also conducting anthropological research) and I taught twice a week in their drop-in centres for a period of six months[14]. We intended to experiment with a range of interactive educational activities in order to include the skills boys have learnt on the streets, for example leadership, communication and entrepreneurship (plate 6.1). We also aimed to involve boys in decisions about the content of lessons and manner of delivery. Our hypothesis was that this approach would significantly increase the relevance of material taught and boys' motivation to learn.

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[14]Onta and I proposed our involvement in order to allow us greater access to the boys who we were studying and also to pilot an alternative approach to non-formal education for street children. Staff from CWS and CWIN were keen that we should do this and then write up the results of our experiences (Onta and Baker 1995).

Ex. 88: *I Hear the Water Dreaming*, letter J, b. 5

in registral extremities.'[271]

Here, obviously, the uses to which the sustaining pedal is put emphasise the underlying implied harmony by prolonging the constituent pitches. The same is even more true of the following extract from *Rain Tree Sketch* (Ex. 91), in which the right pedal remains depressed throughout, so that the pitches of the rapid *ostinati* for the two hands merge into one another in a blur of resonances, audibly projecting the thirteen-note harmonic field shown in Ex. 92 (actually composed of eleven pitch classes with two doubled at the octave.)

This capacity of a field of registrally fixed pitches to generate an implied static

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[271] Koozin (1991), p. 126

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However, we soon learnt that children did not place the same value in participatory learning activities as we did. We tried a number of 'hands-on' techniques such as map-making and a mock election to coincide with the national polling day. It was set up so that three boys acted as candidates who would, if elected, run the NGO centre. These candidates gave speeches, everyone voted and the counting was monitored. Although both exercises were enjoyed by boys, they often asked us why we did not teach "real lessons" and some were clearly reluctant to attend the class.

A critical analysis of our involvement suggests that our efforts to empower boys through an alternative approach to education, had failed. Rather than boosting self-esteem, our activities gave boys the impression that we did not take them seriously as students. Gronow reports a similar experience in a community forestry project in Nepal where the requests of villagers for greater technical input from professionals were denied, on the basis that group 'empowerment' could be best achieved by valuing their own indigenous knowledge above that of outsiders (1995:131). In fact, it had the opposite effect, causing the group to feel excluded from the development process. The form of disempowerment experienced by students attending classes in the drop-in centres was connected to our approach to them as street boys. For, although we aimed to recognise their skills, we did not account for the changes in boys' self-perceptions having settled, if only momentarily, in an NGO centre. We overlooked the fact that in their minds, gaining an education meant learning in the same way as school pupils.

Yet it was also true that when faced with the daunting challenge of learning to read and write, some boys did not believe that they could achieve these aims. One boy explained the futility of attending the classes: "My father is a doorkeeper so what is the point of me studying? I will not be any different". Similar reasons for the futility of attending classes were given by street children in Calcutta (Balagopalan 1997). They asserted that becoming an educated person was not written in their fate. Balagopalan makes the important point that education, even when it is 'non-formal', puts the emphasis on the individual's capacity and continues to judge their worth according to how successful they are at school. In Nepal, the way one makes progress in life has traditionally been through relationships with others rather than demonstrating one's personal qualities[15]. The fact that education places the onus on

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[15] In Calcutta, as in Kathmandu, few high-status jobs are available and can only be achieved by those who excel in education. In Balagopalan's view, the premium put on these serves to devalue the manual occupations that these boys are likely to move into as they grow older.

individual capability makes it a difficult route for *khate*. Given the denigration they have received in the past, it is understandable that the risk of failure deters many boys from attempting serious study for entry into formal school.

In this section I have illustrated the difficulties that arise in attempts to educate street children in a manner appropriate to their needs. The prestige accorded to formal education has meant that efforts to tailor non-formal education towards *khate* expertise and needs, fail to satisfy the expectations of *khate* and NGO staff alike. The myth that education is a straightforward means of improving one's quality of life is further tested by boys who move into boarding schools.

## 5.2.2  BECOMING A SCHOOL PUPIL

I indicated earlier that a small proportion of *khate* have moved into boarding schools through NGO sponsorship schemes. Clearly, the current costs of full time schooling in Nepal prevent education from replacing work as a course of action for the majority of children leaving the streets (Fraser-Jenkins 1996:16). Nevertheless it is a route off the streets recognised and tried by a significant number of *khate* and one which the NGOs continue to promote. Hence this section considers boys' opinions about what being a school pupil entails and the implications of 'running away' (*bhagio*) for those who join school.

Despite the good intentions of foreign visitors who pay for street children to attend a local boarding school, few boys stay longer than a month. Their sponsors rarely anticipate the problems boys face in adjustment, and teachers' inexperience in supporting them. For these reasons, NGOs spend time preparing boys for placements and tend to place them in one of several schools who have taken ex-street boys in the past. Sponsorship is sought for boys only when they have shown that they are 'serious'; showing good manners, discipline as well as commitment to study and institutional living. To build these qualities, boys attached to CWIN live in their Transit Home for three months where the objective is for children "to develop a more secure lifestyle...and a more co-operative attitude among themselves" (CWIN 1994:38). Boys begin to adjust to the rule-bound environment of a school via the routine and general codes of behaviour in the Transit Home. Some then decide that school is not for them and request a place in a skill-training programme.

Ex-*khate* who had been in school for over a year spoke of fulfilling an ambition and moving up in the world. At the same time, they were frank about the problems they faced. These included feeling embarrassed and self-conscious in a class with

children who were much smaller than themselves, having to ask permission to go out, eating the same boring food and not having any spending money. In addition to these everyday restrictions, opportunistic behaviour considered competent by boys living on the streets is not tolerated in school. Furthermore, the price paid for the new and well-respected identity as 'school pupil' is a loss of one's previous position in street or NGO centre hierarchies and of the self-esteem derived from these. It is my view that a combination of these factors can prompt boys to run away and seek the familiarity of the streets. Of course there is the potential for boys to build relationships with other pupils and recreate their identities amongst school friends. However, this process can be hindered by mockery from other pupils, low status of the ex-*khate* in the school class hierarchy and their attempts at integration that involve dominating younger children in ways that would not be contested on the streets. Punishments for such behaviour as well as feelings of incompetence in the school setting have prompted several boys to run away each year.

Despite the many obstacles to continuing in school, there exist some powerful motivating factors. First, the conviction that studying is the best way of assuring a good future is strong among boys. In a discussion with seven ex-*khate* the costs to personal freedom were counteracted with remarks such as:"...by living here we can improve our lives can't we? That is what the CWIN sirs want us to do" and "you see, however hard it is for us to live in the hostel, our lives are improving therefore we do not mind the difficulties". Although they might be teased for it, the move to school is generally respected by their street friends. Having restored honour to their lives, several boys have renewed contact with their families. Yet does this imply that boys are confident about their future prospects? I was aware that in re-iterating what they had been told schooling could do for them, boys were in fact convincing themselves of their good prospects in order to repress the doubts that later emerged.

Most of these boys spoke of the benefits of having friends at school who had arrived there via a similar route. A shared past meant that there was no need to explain one's background to other ex-street boys. Kumar, who was one of the first sponsored boys to attend boarding school, was referred to as *dai* (older brother) by all eight boys who joined the school in the subsequent two years. The way in which they sought his advice and respected his decisions indicated the level of support he gave them. I also observed that in the role of mentor and guide, Kumar himself gained a position in the hierarchy within the group of boys and staff living in the school hostel. Staff frequently relied on him to find boys who had run away and it was apparent that being depended upon had boosted his self-esteem. For Kumar,

being keyed into a social hierarchy is critical to the successful negotiation of moving from street to school and from *khate* to pupil.

The majority of boys begging in Durbar Square had fled from one or more school sponsorship back to the streets. When asked why they had left, boys mentioned difficulties with lessons or in getting along with other boys or staff. Some said that they were beaten for no reason. However, overt challenges to the authority of school teachers were rare and boys tended to describe their actions as incompetent within the context of their new life. I often heard boys refer to flaws in their own behaviour that prevented them fulfilling plans for a better future. When interviewed by his friend in the NGO centre Bal Kendra, one boy in his mid-teens commented:

> Most street children do not like to stay in organisations so they go back to the streets. The children don't go to the organisations because they are living freely. We should learn to control ourselves (CWS 1995:3)

Although runaways who returned to the NGO centres were welcomed, they were closely questioned as to why they had rejected their 'chance' for a better future. Boys who reflected on their flight from school expressed remorse and frustration at their own inability to persevere. The erosion to boys' self-esteem caused by this emphasis on personal failure had significant effect on boys' later decisions. For example, despite talking about further 'chances' brought by new tourists, runaways were reluctant to make serious attempts to return to school via the supportive structure of the NGO sponsorship programmes.

It is also important to recognise that boys who run away are in some sense seen to have broken a moral contract with those who provide their sponsorship. As well as the debt inherent in a sponsorship, boys' obligations to their sponsors arise out of the general expectation that they will enjoy school because it is a more 'secure' environment than the streets. Due to widespread perceptions that school provides the education that boys wish for, regular food, clothes and safe shelter, it is assumed that boys themselves are to blame if they drop out. It is important to note that the contract between each boy and his sponsor is relatively impersonal when compared to the patron-client relationships formed in the junkyard and NGO centres. Although letters are exchanged and some sponsors visit, there is little scope to develop the depth of relationship formed by boys in their previous environments. I was often asked whether I knew boys' sponsors personally and to describe each individual. Their letters were interpreted by boys as affirmation of good relationships that would continue into the future. Boys who did not have these personal connections to their sponsors appeared to be less certain that being in school was a good thing. Evidently for boys who are placed in formal schools, the

contract with their sponsors rests on the demonstration of a special relationship between them. However the practicalities of sponsorship and differences in expectations mean that such relationships cannot be guaranteed.

Concern over the allegiance of their sponsors was expressed by boys who had made the transition from *khate* to school pupil. Knowing that even educated people have difficulty finding jobs, they wanted to know how long their sponsors would support them for. Yet despite their best efforts to cultivate relationships with their sponsors, boys could not be sure that they would be financed through the School Leaving Certificate and assisted in their search for work[16].

## 6.2.3 THE TRANSITION FROM TRAINEE TO WORKER

In 1994 CWIN established a skill-training programme in order to provide a route to a reputable job for boys in their mid to late teens who had settled in the centre. Enthusiasm for this programme stemmed from the success of training in welding offered to older boys in a long-established home run by a French man[17]. Many in the NGO circuit believed that it would meet the needs of older boys, which had previously been neglected. Boys took up training placements in small industries including paper-making, wood-carving and wooden toy making as well as car-washing in the city centre (plate 6.1). These trades were thought to be of interest to boys, within their capabilities and were intended to lead to secure jobs at the end of the three month training period[18]. In line with CWIN's objective to build boys' self-sufficiency, staff assisted pairs of trainees in finding rented rooms where the boys were jointly responsible for budgeting a weekly food and travel allowance.

Reports published by CWIN present these programmes as success stories. By enabling boys to "join the labour market as a better paid skilled labourer and make a more dignified living", they are said to have boosted boys' self confidence (CWIN 1995:110). One of the case studies in CWIN's magazine reported the changed life of fourteen year old Mukesh as a result of his apprenticeship in a paper-making factory. He is apparently "enthusiastic about his new job and feels he has come a

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[16] Although CWIN ask for a 5 year commitment from sponsors, there is no official policy regarding who will continue supporting boys beyond this period.

[17] In 1986, under the direction of Jean-Jacques Haye, the Association for the Children of Chhauni established one of the first residential centres for street children to offer education and vocational training.

[18] Where possible, tne CWIN staff member responsible for the skill training programme obtained assurance from employers that jobs would be available to trainees (Kharel: pers. comm.).

long way from his rag-picking days" (ibid:113). Such words imply that Mukesh has made a definite transition to become an employee in a respected industry, who lives in a rented room and dresses smartly.

However, Mukesh's own account reveals the problems encountered by trainees that are excluded from NGO publications. These include sustaining enthusiasm to learn the new job, co-operating with peers and coping with doubts about their future prospects. Mukesh said that he sometimes could not be bothered to attend the training and described the fights between his room-mates when one of them frittered away the food allowance. Once employed, Mukesh returned periodically to CWIN with requests for clothes and a loan. Shortly after the death of his stepmother, he requested help from CWIN for his younger sister's schooling. He said that if there was no other way of getting this money, he would do *khate* work again. The staff considered boys' persistent demands unreasonable because previously agreed amounts of living allowance were never satisfactory. They despaired as to how to deal with boys' ever increasing expectations and, like the teashop owner's interpretation of the fable of the pig[19], viewed these as negative character traits that needed to be rectified. A very different picture emerges if we consider Mukesh's relationship with CWIN thus far and his current position in the paper factory.

Having been encouraged by NGO staff to cut ties with their street networks and settle in their centres, Mukesh and his fellow trainees are then expected to detach themselves from these replacement supports. While based at CWIN, Mukesh's daily needs were met in the centre as long as he fulfilled his obligations to attend classes, complete his domestic tasks and obey the basic rules. Staff then supported him in his efforts to settle in a secure job and Mukesh demonstrated his allegiance to CWIN by persevering with the training despite knowing that he could return to the junkyard at any time[20]. Now that he is faced with extra responsibilities towards his family, it is clear that he does not regard himself as self-sufficient even if the staff think that he ought to be. Rather, he continues to treat his relationship with CWIN as a client would a patron. This is not surprising given that he was recruited to the paper factory through CWIN and as yet, lacks the personal rapport with his employer that would guarantee protection of his interests.

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[19] See section 6.1.2.

[20] The Common Room and Bal Kendra operate on an 'open-door' policy during the daytime, meaning that children are free to come and go as they wish. Several boys 'ran away' from their traineeships and moved back to one of the junkyards familiar to them.

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Attention to the development of these relationships shows how differences emerge between the expectations of trainees and those of NGO staff. It is also important to note that as a result of inconsistencies within NGO approaches to street children's work, individual boys are able to appeal to certain principles and benefit personally. While staff deemed boys who returned to rag-picking after a training placement to have 'failed', they encouraged boys living in the NGO centre waiting for a work placement to rag-pick in order to pay for their board and lodging. Hence, the message conveyed to boys is not so much about the personal dangers of rag-picking, but of the importance of allegiance to the lifestyle promoted by the NGO. The underlying judgement tries to distinguish the morally dangerous street settings from the restorative potential of the NGO centres. In his conversation with CWIN staff (cited above), Mukesh attempted to use this conception of two distinct moral and social spheres to his own advantage. After appealing to the staff for help in paying for his sister's school fees, he stated that he would have to give up work in the paper factory and rag-pick if they did not help him.

Through such on-going negotiation of responsibilities, a picture emerges of the type of 'self-reliance' NGOs expect of *khate*, and of boys' responses to their efforts. The provision of timetabled training leading to a point in which boys are expected to be safely in school or employed—in other words self-sufficient—does not allow for their continued need of support. Having said this, boys who run back to the streets are never rejected by staff and it is now expected that some will try a number of routes before finding one that suits them. Whether individual boys find the changes in behaviour demanded by institutions too great or just feel more competent in the street setting, the important point is that many move frequently between 'street' and 'non-street' settings. In the former category I include spaces in the city centre, junkyards and NGO drop-in centres, and the latter category comprises school, training programmes and home. The reader will note that this distinction makes plain the fact that NGOs play an active role in both of what they delineate to be two separate social spheres.

A number of potential benefits to boys' lives emerge from the anomalous position of NGOs. For boys who do not currently wish to move back home, to school or other jobs, the NGO centres provide one of a number of street resources that serve their everyday needs. Furthermore, NGO staff are able to accept boys at all times, regardless of whether they have run away from what was supposed to be a good opportunity. In general, boys see staff members as acting in their best interests and trust them above previous employers who cheated them for personal profit. It is this degree of trust that enables boys to return to NGO centres when they are in trouble

or have 'failed' to settle in a job or at school. Although individual staff see the value of this role, it is not widely recognised by the organisation. One explanation is that gradual increases in boys' self-esteem are much more difficult to document than numbers of boys attending education and training projects.

It is impossible to build long-term, trusting relationships between staff and *khate* without engendering some degree of mutual dependence. The power differences between adult providers and child recipients produce a more obvious dependence of boys upon staff than vice versa, and this is something that staff are keen to avoid. Conversations with staff in several NGOs showed a widespread belief that continued reliance on their services would hinder boys' successful transitions into mainstream society. One participant in an inter-NGO discussion spoke of the accusations of miserliness (*bok mari*) levied against him by *khate* because he does not provide food in his drop-in centre. Other NGO representatives responded by praising his decision on the basis that children should learn to earn their food because nothing is free. The centrality of food provision, not only in satisfying a physical need but as a symbol of social inclusion and commitment in interpersonal relationships (as described in chapter 3), conveys the sentiment of detached assistance particularly forcefully. Such a discussion lies in stark contrast to the wishes of boys who consider themselves to have special relationships with an NGO that continue even after they have moved into school, home or a job. When Rajendra, a school pupil sponsored through CWIN, was asked what his expectations were of the organisation, he replied "I wish that CWIN people came to visit us every week and distribute clothes more often and respond to our needs more closely. I wish CWIN treats us well always" (CWIN 1995:101). In the next section of the chapter I show that in practice, staff do allow boys to become dependent to a degree and that they too gain from such relationships.

Of course, NGO staff are acutely aware of the tensions inherent in their position and are continually questioning the value of different approaches to resourcing street children. Implicit in discussions about appropriate services is the question of whether NGO effort should be directed primarily at enabling children to leave the street or whether it should concentrate on improving their lives on the street. This is not an easy question to answer given that the health risks and physical dangers affecting *khate* are faced by large numbers of poor children who have less control over their own lives than do *khate*. As the following interview extract shows, individuals within the NGO sector have expressed ideas about changing society, rather than moulding individuals to meet middle-class society's expectations. The director of CWS was asked whether it is right to portray rag-picking as a degrading

activity. He first explained the stigma in terms of the entrenched "authoritarian traditions" of Nepali society and then said:

> Street children are following a profession. One of the things they do is rag-picking and that is teaching our society that there are things which are recyclable, that even though you may dump them, people can make a living from it. They are not stealing, or into drug-trafficking so perhaps we should concentrate on improving their profession. We could make the way they collect plastics more safe [sic], we haven't done that yet. Yes, society looks down on their work, but we should learn to respect them and that can be started by the social workers (CWS 1995).

At no point in the interview did he address the political implications of fighting to improve boys' social status as *khate*. Here we see a tangible example of the intention to push for children's rights without fully examining what this means in terms of challenging the established power structures. In reality therefore, the 'empowerment' of street children for NGOs is less to do with undoing existing hierarchies than with equipping children to alter their position within the social structure. Regardless of ideological aspirations, it is a more manageable task to provide routes into mainstream society for individual boys than it is to achieve a radical change in social attitudes. Yet when we observe how *khate* boys and NGO staff struggle to achieve boys' greater integration into mainstream society, we cannot help questioning the wisdom of these two approaches. In order to analyse these issues further, it is necessary to examine instances in which *khate* have had the opportunity to be included in decision-making or gain positions of power within the NGO structure. The following section describes reactions amongst boys and NGO staff to such processes.

### 6.2.4 PERSPECTIVES ON CHANGES IN *KHATE* IDENTITY

The mock elections held in two NGO drop-in centres[21] provided access to boys' opinions on issues of control in relationships with those who support them. Boys standing as candidates gave pre-election speeches and in the question sessions that followed, all boys aired their views in front of peers and staff members about the way the centres are run. When asked what they would do for *khate*, candidates said that they would provide shelter and food, then they would open a special school for *khate* and insist that everyone obeyed the rules. In response to staff enquiries about dealing with boys who smoked on the premises or bullied others, candidates suggested that a meeting should be held between staff and boys in order to define the rules, and that punishments should be severe.

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[21] See section 6.2.1

At the same time as demanding involvement in daily decision-making, boys were reinforcing the position of NGOs with regard to standards of behaviour. They even challenged staff about their failure to keep these standards by withholding punishments and breaking rules themselves (for instance in wearing shoes indoors). Boys' responses can be partly understood as re-enactments of the authoritarian teacher-pupil relationships that are common across South Asia[22]. More importantly, the absence of challenge to staff authority effectively preserves hierarchical relationships between boys and NGO 'providers'. I noted that when staff spoke of the problems they encounter in trying to help *khate*, boys did not respond by discussing ways in which together they might tackle these difficulties. There was no indication of a desire to participate in the planning of services targeted at their own needs or to redefine the terms of their relationships with those aiming to support them. Long-standing power differences between children and adults doubtlessly contribute to boys' reticence to express alternative opinions. However, *khate* clearly perceive some immediate advantages in maintaining these traditional status differences.

In elucidating boys' ideas about authority, I am not suggesting that they passively accept a low position in the social hierarchy or, worse, that they *should* do so. Rather, I point out that 'empowerment', as portrayed in international development and Nepali NGO rhetoric, is not regarded as wholly beneficial to individuals within Nepali society. The explanations are found in the value of self-reliance and equality with others in societies oriented around individualism, which are not replicated in societies where social connectedness is emphasised in everyday interactions. In Nepal, to be without social obligations to those junior or senior to oneself is unimaginable. I illustrate this point with some opinions expressed to me about one individual who was 'empowered' through his participation in NGO activities.

Now in his early twenties, Anil was one of the older *khate* who acted a main role in the Aarohan dramas about street living that were described in chapter 5. Anil has since been a leading member of *Bal Chetana Samahu* (Child Awareness Group), an NGO comprised solely of children that aims to promote children's rights. He is well-known by children and NGO staff alike as a result of his speeches about the government's neglect of *khate* and other exploited children which he delivered at various national NGO and state forums. He has also travelled to the Philippines to attend a workshop on education and training for street children.

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[22] See chapter 3

Anil has definitely risen up the social ladder but the appearance of 'success' in his own life and in bringing change to others is questioned by NGO staff and boys on the streets. In a conversation about Anil's achievements, an NGO staff member described Anil as "over-empowered", then posed the question "what is the good of being able to make speeches when you cannot read and write?" The implication here is that Anil could not maintain a position of high status if he was illiterate. In view of the numbers of literate people competing for jobs, his point is a fair one and ostensibly an expression of concern for Anil's future. Yet I was aware of the influence of institutional jealousy and of the desire for recognition from Anil of what the organisation had done for him over the years. NGO staff showed their indignation when Anil criticised the centre's programmes.

By stepping beyond the realms of what are prescribed as prospects for *khate*, Anil has provoked responses that illustrate the interdependence of NGOs and the boys they provide for. Moreover, his transition into the role of adult NGO worker with the added legitimacy of having personal experience on the streets, threatens the clear delineation between 'staff' and 'boys'. As has been made evident, the relationships between these two parties are conducted on the basis of differences in power. If the divide is upheld, the interdependence between boys and NGO staff remains largely unquestioned. Boys, of course, are expected to be dependent at some level on NGOs and this issue is openly discussed within NGO circles. However, fewer questions are asked about the extent to which NGOs depend on maintaining an image of street children as needy of their services. Boys like Anil who become 'empowered' through participation in NGO initiatives are then able to critique their methods and thus threaten the authority of NGOs to define who street children are and what they need.

Amongst boys who had known Anil on the streets he was alternatively heralded as a hero championing their cause and as a *thulo manchhe* (person with status) who was no longer concerned with their daily problems. There were hints of envy at the number of 'chances' Anil had received from NGOs and of the fact that he had successfully left the streets to attain a position not only of respectability, but of renown. It is not surprising that Anil's 'empowerment' did not sit easily for older boys in Kohiti junkyard, given the stark differences in their current lifestyles. However my impression was that these boys, like the NGO workers, were uneasy about the blurring of boundaries between 'recipient street boy' and 'service providing NGO workers' represented by Anil's transition. It is therefore important not to dismiss these attitudes as 'conservative', but to consider the relational context in which people ordinarily move up in status. Anil began by moving up through the

channels laid out by his seniors and mentors in the NGOs, but by recently distancing himself and critiquing their actions from his own position of power, he has broken the rules of normal practice by 'over-taking' those who were his seniors.

On the basis of the above discussion, it would appear that *khate*, quite realistically, do not envisage altering the social structure. They know that security and upward mobility are provided through a properly cultivated dependence on others. As is common in Nepal, these boys see potential to improve their quality of life in good use of their positions within various hierarchical relationships.

## 6.3 THE SCOPE OF STREET NETWORKS: SHEDDING THE *KHATE* IDENTITY?

I now turn to the changes in boys' occupations and identities made possible through social relationships established on the streets. At the outset of this chapter I described the general lack of attention given to the potential of street-based networks to provide boys with means of leaving *khate* work and settling within a community. This section will begin by describing the particular problems that the social dynamics of Durbar Square present to boys who beg there and then move on to trace the efforts of rag-pickers based in Kohiti junkyard to raise their social status. I end by considering boys' strategic use of mechanisms offered by NGOs alongside family connections and relationships cultivated in the junkyard locality.

### 6.3.1 THE PROBLEM OF AGE IN DURBAR SQUARE

The heterogeneous social composition of Durbar Square makes this setting more accepting of boys who beg and sleep rough than other areas of the city. Although they are advised to move off the streets, boys living in the Square do not receive the same intensity of criticism as those who rag-pick in the suburbs. The question then is whether this sense of fitting in with others nearby can evolve into a lifestyle deemed acceptable to boys, their families and other city residents. In this section I outline three factors which seriously hinder boys earning and sleeping in Durbar Square from achieving such a transition.

The first of these factors is the nature of relationships cultivated with tourists. As described earlier, tourists often arrange school sponsorships for street boys in the belief that financial input will assure their future well-being. Most boys in Durbar Square had run away from several schools and returned to the support systems they know in the city. At the opposite extreme lies the total dependence that is

fostered in boys who become involved in sexually exploitative relationships with foreign visitors. If and when these are brought to light, boys are not only left with psychological and emotional scars, but have lost a source of livelihood.

The second factor impeding boys' transitions to a recognised social position is the peculiar fluidity of social relationships in Durbar Square. When I asked boys begging in the area what their older acquaintances from the streets were currently doing, few could give a definite answer. They mentioned several young men who wore leather jackets and hung around the square doing "nothing in particular". Their description was similar to those of *dada* or *gunda* (gang yobs) who exert their power by demanding cash from younger boys and roughing them up if they have little in their pockets. Regardless of the control these individuals might have attempted to exert, boys in Durbar Square consider them to be drop-outs or criminals and do not aspire to live in the same way. In contrast, they look up to the young men who own successful stalls in the square, running errands for them in exchange for assistance when they are without money.

Recognising the potential to build on boys' rapport with older stall-owners in the Square, several individuals have attempted to enable boys to improve their status and quality of life within the locality. In response to boys' enthusiasm to run their own stall, one British visitor purchased the required stock of tourist memorabilia and, with the help of a nearby stall-owner, set up a stand in the central plaza. It was planned that boys would take turns manning the stall and share the profits. However, after a few days this system broke down and quarrels arose because some boys did not put money into the kitty after hawking items by hand. According to the stall-owner who witnessed this experiment, it failed because boys consistently prioritised self-orientated opportunism over responsibilities to others. In his words:

> Their habits are spoiled (*bigreko*), you see they don't abide by any laws. They just wander about, looking for amusement and good food. I tried to talk to them about their responsibilities in running the stall, but they don't seem to care about the future.
> :

Such a conclusion prompts discussion of the behaviour boys have developed in order to make the best use of Durbar Square, which is indeed the third factor I have identified as a hindrance to their attempts to move into an alternative way of life. The general opinion that competence as a beggar is counteractive to a future-oriented lifestyle was shared by individuals who have assisted boys in Durbar Square and by boys themselves. Similar observations in a number of other countries have led to the suggestion that street children adopt a "presentist attitude" in order

to cope with the uncertainties of their future (Visano1990:155). By focusing their attention on activities that bring immediate gratification, they avoid confronting the longer term questions. Although it is reasonable to consider this an adaptive strategy under the circumstances, it cannot be assumed that individuals have undergone permanent psychological change and will never be able to constructively address their future prospects.

According to some NGO staff, boys who beg in Durbar Square have especially acute psycho-social problems and are unable to adjust to life in NGO centres. However, having observed their interactions with peers and staff in the centre, I judged them to be fully aware of NGO codes of conduct and able to adjust their behaviour accordingly. Given that adaptation to different social contexts is indicative of good mental health (Ager 1996:168), I sought a social rather than a psychological explanation for boys' avoidance of NGO centres. Their perceptions of the CWIN Common Room as a place "for boys who do *khate* work" (rag-picking) are part of the explanation, as is the centre's hierarchical structure of control which incorporates staff and boys, and is so unlike what they are used to in Durbar Square. NGOs work on the principle that children need to form long-term stable bonds with a few individuals. This mode of relating to others stands in direct contrast to the series of transitory relationships experienced by boys in Durbar Square. Consequently, these boys may feel especially out of place and constrained within NGO centres and schools.

By avoiding commitment to relationships on the street and in NGO centres, boys who beg in Durbar Square are demonstrating a form of independence. Yet, such independence is not considered to be 'self-reliance' by NGOs and members of the middle-classes, because it challenges ideas about the way children should live and is believed to be incompatible with responsible adulthood. The concerns of boys able to support themselves from the resources of the 'street' are primarily about their future prospects of achieving respectability as an adult. Although they have a clear affinity with Durbar Square, the contact they maintain with NGO centres suggests that they anticipate drawing on NGO support at some stage in the future. Without any precedent of successful business ventures by older friends, boys do not have an obvious avenue into alternative careers within the Durbar Square locality. Only one or two boys in their late teens can be seen begging with the younger boys, and it later emerged that they maintain regular contact with family in the vicinity. Having the physical appearance of youths rather than children, they cannot not rely on the donations of tourists or locals and are often suspected of criminal involvement.

It is clear that age presents significant problems to boys living in Durbar Square. Although boys' lives are not significantly threatened by increasing age (as has been reported in a number of cities in South America (Aptekar 1988, Rizzini 1996:222)), age gradually restricts the number of identities available to boys and thus reduces their ability to make a living in the Square[23]. Ongoing longitudinal research is needed to determine the prospects of boys who spend several months or years based in Durbar Square.

## 6.3.2 STEPS TOWARDS ADULTHOOD IN THE JUNKYARD

The scenario in Kohiti junkyard is rather different. Here, boys in their late teens and early twenties continue to live and work in the vicinity of the junkyard. I soon learnt that several of the older rag-pickers in Kohiti were married and renting rooms close by. Struck by this contradiction to younger boys' assertions that marriage and living as a *khate* are incompatible, I was curious to know how these apparent changes in identity affected their relationships in the junkyard.

Older boys frequently stated their wish to move into alternative work and living contexts, blaming their failure thus far on the prejudices of the general public and the disregard of NGOs for their plight. I took these expressions of exclusion seriously but, given the signs of commitment to the junkyard, suspected that they did not tell the full story. In this section I review the benefits available to boys who consolidate their relationships within the junkyard locality.

Bisnu, a rag-picker aged 22, lives with his wife of two years Ram Maya and his younger brother in two small rooms closeby Kohiti junkyard. He rents the rooms from the junkyard owner for 750 rupees (£10) per month. The marriage was arranged by Bisnu's maternal aunt who, since both his parents were dead, considered it her duty to find a wife for her nephew. Apparently there was little consultation, but little protest either, on the part of bride or groom. The fact that Bisnu is Chetri and therefore of higher caste than Ram Maya, who is Tamang, did not appear to be a problem. My impression is that the important issue for Bisnu's aunt and Ram Maya's grandfather (her only living relative), was to secure a workable marriage for a family member. Bisnu and Ram Maya do not express any regrets about the marriage but, as will become evident, their status as a married

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[23] Writing about the street children of Cali, Colombia, Aptekar described age as their "worst enemy" because a mature appearance automatically limits the degree of public sympathy and number of identities available to children, meaning that they have fewer earning possibilities (Aptekar 1988).

couple influences their interaction with those in the vicinity of the junkyard, the NGO staff and relatives in Bisnu's home village.

Similar steps into adulthood have been taken by Rajan, now aged twenty, who in 1995 was rag-picking in Kohiti junkyard and started to rent a room from the owner after he married Iswori. Unlike Bisnu, he initiated his own marriage through a good friend and fellow rag-picker who is Iswori's older brother. When I first began spending time in Kohiti junkyard Bisnu and Rajan were two of the senior rag-pickers who played a pivotal role in the junkyard. Their age and experience profited the owner and increased his beneficence towards them. As I explained in chapter 4, the owner's income was further enhanced by the brotherly relationships cultivated by older boys with younger members of the workforce. For Bisnu and Rajan, marriage did not appear to have hampered their consolidation of relationships within the junkyard.

Reports from boys who had worked in a number of Kathmandu's junkyards revealed that the allegiance of senior boys is often rewarded with lodgings either with an owner's family or as a paying tenant, a rise in status to owner's assistant, extended loans and in some cases, access to the owner's wider social networks (plate 6.1). Bisnu was introduced to a local team of butchers through the Kohiti owner, who is himself Kasai (low-caste Newari butcher). As one of the early morning butchery team, Bisnu earned between 50 and 100 rupees each day plus some cheap cuts of buffalo meat. He spoke of the advantages of having another source of income that did not depend on his daily attendance. Moreover, despite rag-picking less frequently, he was able to maintain a rapport with the junkyard owner through his room tenancy, debt and the regularity with which his younger brother and two room-mates sold their scrap in Kohiti junkyard. The important point here is that Bisnu can more easily decide where and when he works than younger boys, and has achieved this position of control in his own life through seniority to his brother and friends who sleep in the rented room.

The value Bisnu placed in his relationship with the owner is evident in the steps he took to preserve it. Again, it is clear that debt relationships are not simply one-way exploitations, but are the means of establishing a network of supports. If money was tight at the end of the month, Bisnu's history as a trusted rag-picker allowed him to run up debts even on his rent. The same facility was available to Rajan, whose value to the owner was raised by his wife's nightly trips to the hospital rubbish dump to collect scrap to be sold in Kohiti junkyard. Thus, it was through their continued investment in relationships based in the junkyard, that these boys were able to establish the material elements of a home.

Nevertheless, relationships centred in the junkyard are limited in what they can provide in terms of upward mobility. Their inadequacies are especially significant to Bisnu and Rajan for whom marriage has brought new responsibilities. Neither of the wives frequented the junkyard and Rajan did not want to be seen with his wife by anyone, even when he was outside the junkyard locality and dressed in 'good' clothes. Such evident discomfort indicated that marriage had taken these young men into new social roles that they were not quite able to fulfil. With time, and by different means, both individuals loosened their connections with the junkyard and established themselves elsewhere in the city. Rajan joined a training scheme designed to address the failures of prior attempts to enable older *khate* to leave the streets, the details of which I describe in the next two sections. In contrast, Bisnu did not commit himself to a scheme provided by outsiders, but drew on a range of social networks to support himself and his young family. His achievements in resolving the disjunctions between a *khate* identity and lifestyle, and that of a reputable adult family member are debated the final section of this chapter.

### 6.3.3  Opportunities and problems in NGO training projects

Criticisms are often levied against the NGOs by older *khate* for their preferential treatment of younger boys. In Kohiti junkyard, I was regaled with evidence to support this conclusion. It was clear that older boys considered themselves to have been denied the assistance they required to make the appropriate changes in their lives. Yet I was aware that they knew of training courses that had been run by NGOs. This made the picture more complex and I decided to find out how participants and the NGO operators perceived their implementation and outcomes.

The cycle repair training course run by CWIN for 3 months during 1993, was the organisation's first attempt to offer older *khate* a more reliable and socially acceptable means of generating an income. Although the majority of the 11 participants completed the course, Tarik (age 21) is the only one who is now working as a cycle mechanic and the project is widely regarded to have failed. His comments offer an insider's perspective of the problems in this project, many of which resonate strongly with the difficulties encountered by boys in school placements and training schemes described earlier in the chapter.

According to Tarik, participants appreciated having a place to stay and regular food, but CWIN's weekly allowance of 10 rupees was insufficient to buy cigarettes and tasty snacks. This meant that contrary to the wishes of those running the training, boys went to the streets to get money from friends which they spent on

'unnecessary' items. Clearly the expectation that participants should change their consumption practices and break relationships with street friends as part of their entry into a reputable way of life, was one that could have jeopardised the whole process. A second source of antagonism was the conflict that arose between boys over domestic matters and the fact that punishments were dealt out to all by CWIN staff. Tarik spoke of the injustice of collective blame in ways reminiscent of the indignation expressed when *khate* are labelled thieves. Like other NGO training programmes, this one treated all participants as equals and did not permit the fostering of specific relationships with staff. It was therefore impossible for participants to meet their particular needs through favours or loans from those in charge of their training.

Tarik emphasised that some participants did not have the personal commitment to learning required to complete the training. CWIN staff and older *khate* who knew the trainees also gave this explanation for the project's failure and recounted incidents when trainees had succumbed to the temptations of the streets. Diagnosing the problem in terms of individual shortcomings makes it possible to believe that other, 'better' boys could complete the training and find work. Although unspoken, there is a clear message to NGOs or others (like myself) to continue implementing training programmes for *khate*. In doing so, NGOs require boys to enter a contract with a provider figure who operates on very different terms to those who offer support on the street. However, to my knowledge, these considerations do not enter discussions within and between providers planning their activities to assist *khate*.

In the light of the array of problems raised by Tarik, I asked how he had managed to persevere in the job. Over and above the personal efforts required, Tarik pinpointed his close relationships with his employer as critical to his success in the job:

> "We have become like older and younger brothers (*daju-bhai jasto bhayesakio*),
> he teaches me skills and gives me confidence".

His employer had also invited him to rent a cheap room in his house and lent him money when he needed it. There are clear parallels with boys' relationships with junkyard owners that reinforce the importance of mentors in the process of achieving a higher social status and moving off the streets. Thus, without an established client base or personal relationship with a profitable mechanic, cycle repair work offered little security to newly trained boys. In contrast, street networks cultivated while rag-picking had proven their reliability.

The relative solidity of relationships in the junkyard were demonstrated by the actions of Bisnu and his younger brother. In the space of three months they had

embarked upon, then abandoned, two income-generating projects initiated by CWIN. The first was street vending of shoe polishes and the second car-washing near a busy shopping centre. The brothers were attracted by the special uniform supplied for the vending job which, like the pump-action hose needed to wash the cars, conveyed the potential for high earnings and social credibility. However, they were soon put off by having to work to a regular schedule without the profits they expected. Had their absence from the junkyard been noted, the owner may have retracted certain favours. For these reasons, the attractive job opportunities offered by CWIN could not replace the security provided by the junkyard owner to Bisnu and his brother.

### 6.3.4   THE POTENTIALS OF APPRENTICESHIP

As the boys in Kohiti junkyard understood more about my interests in their lives and my connections to local NGOs, they spoke more frequently about finding a good job and moving out of the area. Various plans were debated and I was asked to help find a means of making these work. Several boys were keen to learn motorcycle mechanics because they thought it an interesting and prestigious occupation. They reasoned that growing numbers of motorcycles in the city assured them of a job in the future. My initial enquiries among NGO staff and directors of motorcycle repair workshops were received with an enthusiasm that was tempered by doubts in boys' abilities to sustain interest and meet the requirements of a regular job. On this basis, my research assistant, Jayem Shrestha, and I decided to set up an apprenticeship project whereby pairs of boys took up training placements in three of Kathmandu's largest motorcycle workshops. We took a number of measures in an attempt to avoid some of the pitfalls of earlier training projects.

First of all, the planning process had to account for the nature of boys' recent learning experiences, their high income as rag-pickers and the freedom they had to spend it. We agreed that apprenticeship would best emulate the manner in which they learnt to rag-pick because boys would immediately participate in workshop activities. Although motorcycle mechanics appeared to have good long term financial prospects, we had to find a compromise between ensuring adequate funds for participants to maintain the standard of living they were accustomed to, and paving a way towards eventual employment without reliance on NGO funds.

Mindful of the problems associated with dependence, we aimed to increase the involvement of participants in arranging the logistics of the apprenticeship. Through lengthy discussions towards a common consensus, we aimed to maximise their

ownership of the project in the expectation that this would better enable them to complete the training. Our final measure was to recognise the support provided by relationships centred in the junkyard. Acting against the advice of some NGO staff, we decided not to hinder participants' continued involvement in the junkyard. In our view, the best way of counteracting participants' dependence on ourselves, was to encourage boys to cultivate friendships in the workshop and to maintain links with those who supported them in the junkyard.

As a result of these decisions, the planning stage involved reaching a consensus amongst participants about an adequate living allowance and then applying for funding[24]. The terms of training were decided through discussions between prospective participants, directors of the motorcycle workshops and ourselves. During the early stages of discussion in the junkyard, several boys readily expressed their views about how the project should be run. I invited prospective participants to meetings with staff of CWIN and SKILL (an NGO who co-ordinate skill training in plumbing etc.), in order to discuss our plans. Their reticence to speak and defensive responses conveyed their discomfort in these settings. I sensed that they resented the lack of conviction amongst NGO staff in their abilities to complete the proposed apprenticeships. When meeting the director of the workshop for the first time, the participants were very nervous and submissive in their behaviour. Yet upon hearing him speak positively of the training and assure his support, they visibly relaxed and stated with conviction that they could complete the project.

On several occasions it appeared that boys were avoiding responsibility for making the project work. For example, despite enthusiastic planning, they were reluctant to begin looking for suitable rooms to rent and waited for us to act. It was soon clear that our expectation of participants' control in this process was not shared by the boys themselves. Were they doubting that any of the plans would actually materialise, or lacking in confidence in their own abilities to proceed? Both these factors may well have contributed to boys' reluctance to take ownership of the project. Yet they do not account for boys views of their own social position with respect to ours. Is it not plausible that denigration as *khate* has contributed to boys' notions that they are in a weak position when it comes to negotiating with a landlord, and therefore sensibly rely on others with more power? A middle-class adult male and western female affiliated to an NGO would fit this specification exactly.

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[24] We submitted a proposal to CAR-NG (The Children at Risk Network Group) who funded the six-month apprenticeship of five boys. The project was conducted under the auspices of CWS (Child Welfare Society).

After a few weeks, Sunil started to miss days at the workshop. He enjoyed playing karom board with his friends in the junkyard and having joined a round of games in the mornings, would not be ready in time to leave for work. He then chose to stay away for the whole day, believing that he would be shouted at by the boss for being late. Sunil's actions could be said to prove the predictions of NGO staff regarding the negative influence of the junkyard environment on boys who are trying to make a transition to a new lifestyle. It was, of course, the easier option for Sunil to stay in the junkyard playing games, than to prepare a meal and walk to the workshop. But to reduce his actions to laziness and peer influence neglects the social dynamics of the workshop environment and Sunil's position therein. As a newcomer without qualifications, he was on the lowest rung of the workshop hierarchy, a position very different to the high status he held in the junkyard. Sunil complained that others in the workshop belittled him through the form of address commonly used to express endearment towards young children or to insult another adult. He was further angered by comments that he perceived as mockery of his *khate* identity. Given that Sanjay, Sunil's co-trainee, reported nothing of the kind and that the director had agreed not to tell his employees about participants' histories, Sunil appears to have read additional meanings into the remarks of his workmates. Such extreme sensitivity indicates how alienated and vulnerable he felt in the workshop environment. As Goffman (1968:109) points out, a lack of self-confidence and anxiety are common in those who are moving from an environment where they have grown accustomed to managing a social stigma, into one in which they appear to have lost that particular stigma. The reason that Sanjay was able to cope with self-doubts in the workshop setting, was through his friendship with a more experienced mechanic, who explained work tasks and took him to nearby teashops during breaks.

The difference in these two participants' experiences illustrates the importance of connectedness to those higher up in the social hierarchy. I concluded that *khate* aiming to 'make good' could tolerate being a subordinate, as long as their seniors were consistently supportive and were themselves connected to those with greater power. Problems arose for participants who were unable to establish personal relationships within their new environment and felt drawn to those who previously offered support. Sunil made a second attempt to settle in a different workshop, and was clearly wrestling with a desire to keep training for his own future benefit and to honour a commitment to us. After a month he was drawn back to the junkyard where he felt confident in his abilities and his status. I take up discussion on the future prospects of boys who return to *khate* life in the concluding chapter.

In this section I focus on decisions taken by Bisnu, the married twenty year old from Kohiti junkyard, towards enhancing the status and quality of life of his family group. I do so because Bisnu's case is at first sight unusual, in that he has not pursued one route offered by an NGO or anyone else, but has kept his options firmly open. The multiple contacts maintained by *khate* (as shown in brief but regular home visits) and evidence that older boys are marrying (either at home or in the city), would suggest that Bisnu's strategy is not as rare as it first appears. It is therefore important to ask how *khate* are able to use their relationships in the city and in distant homes to achieve upward social mobility.

During 1995, Bisnu, his wife, younger brother and two friends were renting a room near Kohiti junkyard. Although they earned sufficient between them to cover their basic needs, they bought food on a daily basis and there were no financial reserves to fall back on when Bisnu lost a bet in a game of cards. It was apparent from their wishes to move out of Kohiti into a larger room with water nearby, that Bisnu and his wife sought a better standard of living in both material and social terms. I will now describe how they moved much closer to this goal over a two year period.

Shortly before I left Kathmandu, Bisnu proposed that I should accompany him, his wife, brother and two *khate* friends to his natal village. We were to leave the next day in our best clothes, catch a bus to Barabrise, a town just south of the Tibetan border, and walk up a hill to the village. Bisnu and his brother were excited about the trip and the prospect of seeing their cousins again. They described how much they had enjoyed their last visit, despite some sad memories of their parents who died ten years previously. Their anticipation of a good reception from the wider family was not unfounded, although their maternal uncle was surprised to learn of Bisnu's marriage. Knowing that it was this uncle's own sister who arranged the marriage, I was perplexed by his reaction. This was only the start of a remarkable series of concealments that were the key to Bisnu's strategy in his relationships with his relatives.

Having been welcomed by this uncle, we were relaxing and chatting on his veranda when he asked Bisnu what job he was doing in Kathmandu. With a straight face, and a sideways glance at me, Bisnu replied that he was working as a motorcycle mechanic. Nobody challenged his response although all those coming from Kathmandu, including the aunt who arranged Bisnu's wedding, knew it to be false. A few hours later, while walking further up the hill to their paternal uncle's house, Bisnu's aunt reminded us that we should not mention her means of earning a living

in Kathmandu. Bisnu and his brother laughed, saying that their uncle would be as shocked to learn that she sells half-rotten vegetables on Kohiti bridge, as to hear about their rag-picking work. Both parties agreed to continue keeping the other's secret.

The successful concealment of this information from his maternal uncle enabled Bisnu to respond positively to his later offers of a newly-built room in another suburb of Kathmandu and of help to register for a citizenship card. Bisnu did not take up the former offer, that would inevitably have meant giving up rag-picking or revealing his activities to his uncle. However he made several trips to the village over the next few months in order to process his citizenship. He spoke of possible plans to go to North India to join another paternal uncle, but these were not pursued.

At the same time as cultivating relationships with his extended family, Bisnu took steps to move his family into a larger room and loosen his ties with the junkyard. He paid back the bulk of his debt to the junkyard owner through his daily earnings and a large loan from his new employer, the owner of the butchers' shop. Such a direct transfer of debts and allegiances indicates that Bisnu is recreating a similar relationship. While the nature of the relationship has not changed, the important difference is that it is outside the junkyard realm and on a par with the patron-client relationships cultivated between employer and employee across Nepali society. Bisnu, his wife and new baby now live in a modern and spacious room in a recently developed part of the city. It is by no means luxurious, but they consider the move to be more than a change of location. Unsurprisingly, as the family's standard of living has increased, so have their debts. Although earning a regular salary from his butchery work, Bisnu was recently rekindling contacts with the CWIN staff. He enlisted the help of Bel Bahadur, an old friend with whom he used to rag-pick who now works as a caretaker for CWIN, to help him secure a part-time job with CWIN.

The pattern that can be identified in Bisnu's actions is one of maintaining connections with a number of different social networks and shifting his dependence to different parties as circumstances change. The fact that he is not reliant on any one social network allows him to conceal information from other involved parties, which in turn enables him to perpetuate his contact with all these potential resources. It is apparent that the more serendipitous path taken by Bisnu was not a conscious decision to reject the single route offered by NGOs, but the adoption of a way of managing social relationships that is widespread in Nepal (see section 5.7). The effectiveness of this strategy is proved by the improvements Bisnu notes in his

quality of life, and his participation in social networks in the city and his home village. Given that participants of NGO training programmes often do not achieve such changes, is there a critical ingredient missing in their approach?

The school placements and vocational training projects described in earlier sections are currently underway and it is therefore too early to evaluate their success in integrating ex-*khate* into the wider community. During discussion in the concluding chapter I comment on the scope for NGOs to emulate the key ingredients in Bisnu's strategy. However prior to this, it is important to recognise two characteristics of Bisnu's approach. The first is that the changes Bisnu made to his lifestyle occurred gradually over a number of years. Thus we must question whether NGOs are working with unreal expectations regarding the changes in boys' lives aimed for within short, pre-defined time periods. The second is that Bisnu was assisted by various different people throughout the process and, unlike most participants in NGO programmes, did not rely on one source of financial and emotional support. Much of the ethnographic material presented in this chapter suggests that boys who are encouraged to break their links with 'street' networks, with some exceptions, feel under-supported once they have joined an NGO.

Although Bisnu did not follow one of the routes offered by NGOs, he has achieved what they regard as self-sufficiency through his current employment as a butcher and his establishment of a family home. Nevertheless, when Bisnu requested work in the CWIN office, he was not dismissed and staff promised to do what they could to find him a job in the centre. Although they said that he was too old and well-resourced to deserve priority over other boys, the fact that they found him part time job shows the value of their eight year acquaintance. On many other occasions I observed a similar stretching of the rules for boys who have known NGO staff for several years or who lived in their centre for a long period of time. Not only are these boys' misdeeds tolerated more readily, but particular efforts are made to trace them if they have not been seen by staff for a month or so. Reciprocal allegiances were evident in boys' character evaluations of staff members and in their habitual visits to certain centres. These factors suggest that there are elements of traditional patron-client relationships operating within the NGO context, despite presenting their approach to provision for *khate* as one without long-term obligations.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

A central theme throughout this chapter has been the nature of social relationships in which *khate* participate. It is evident that the routes offered by NGOs for boys to

move off the streets require a different manner of relating to other people than boys have otherwise experienced. The important consideration here is that these NGO programmes have been formulated in the context of international attention to street children's needs and Nepali middle class ideas about appropriate childhoods. Although critical of NGO competence to improve children's lives, the media rarely challenge the rationale behind the provision to individual boys of opportunities to learn skills that promise good prospects for the future. As I have amply demonstrated, this approach does not recognise the importance of dyadic social relationships in supporting boys through changes in occupation and lifestyle.

When education and training programmes are put into practice, boys experience inconsistencies between offers of support up to certain time periods and levels of material input, and the potential they have to build relationships with NGO staff which are, in their eyes, the basis for long-term support. For several reasons, it is not in an NGO's interest to acknowledge the value of dyadic support relationships to boys' efforts to reintegrate into mainstream society. Staff are reluctant to appear partial and the result is that many boys who start a 'rehabilitation' programme do not seriously commit themselves to it.

Those who run away from school or who give up their traineeships blame themselves for what wider society regards as 'failure' to take a good opportunity. Their frustration speaks of very low self-regard, which is only reinforced by public perceptions of *khate* as individuals who are unable to make positive changes in their lives.

This is not to say that *khate* passively accept public opinion or NGO actions. Many boys have challenged the behaviour of NGOs for failing to fulfil their half of a moral contract. Several boys in Kohiti junkyard asked how NGOs could claim to work 'for *khate*' when little had improved in their lives since the NGOs had been running their programmes. Was it right, I was asked, that NGOs should withhold clothes and money that was explicitly donated for them? I interpreted such statements of ownership as political gestures by boys to gain my support of their point of view.

Do we therefore conclude that NGOs are not fulfilling the role they set out to play? It is clear that projects offering *khate* the means of leaving the street do not make them self-reliant in the ways NGO staff envisage. Rather, their provision contributes to a process of integration into mainstream society that is gradual and cannot be easily documented for each individual. For example, boys value NGO drop-in-centres because they can return when they need to for whatever reason. The consistency of such staff support is important in boosting children's self-confidence,

which is itself vital to the process of integration into communities other than those that are considered part of 'the street'.

In the final chapter I bring together the issues that have emerged as important to the lives of *khate* during the course of this thesis. I then consider the implications of these findings to research and policy-making that aims to benefit children whose vulnerabilities stem from social stigma and pervasive socio-economic inequalities.

# CHAPTER 7
## CONCLUSIONS

## 7.0 INTRODUCTION

To conclude this thesis, I wish to synthesise what has been learnt about being a boy living on the streets in Kathmandu and relate my findings to the efforts of those who strive to help them. This chapter will address each of my original research objectives as outlined in the introduction to the thesis. In brief, the first objective was to determine the meaning of 'home' and 'street' to *khate* through ethnographic comparison. The second was to identify the effects of a period of street living on boys' future prospects by examining constructions of the *khate* identity in relation to Goffman's theories on social stigma and career. The third objective was to critique the research process and its wider implications for the study of childhood.

In the early stages of writing I returned to Kathmandu and sought feedback from research participants on my findings. Boys who were still moving between NGOs, and those who had moved into rented rooms or boarding school wanted to contribute written or verbal accounts of their lives as *khate*. In this conclusion, I draw on their words in order to maintain a firm grounding in the experiences and interpretations of those who are, or have been, *khate*.

## 7.1 THE MEANING OF 'HOME' AND 'STREET' TO *KHATE*

The results of the 1993 comparative study indicated a number of parallels in the environments and daily activities of poor Nepali children living within and outside the home. These prompted me to question the distinctions between 'home' and 'street'[1] as physical and social spheres. Visitors to Nepal and indeed members of the Nepali middle classes, whose childhoods were not dissimilar to those of Northern children, share the concept that children should grow up within the home. Amongst poor Nepalis whose daily lives are to a large extent conducted in public places, the value placed on the family and home makes the 'street' inappropriate an environment for children. As I have demonstrated, *khate* judge their presence on the

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1 In this thesis, the term 'street' refers to urban thoroughfares, junkyards and NGO centres.

street to be abnormal, and even deviant. Yet, in turning to morality to explain what being a *khate* is all about, boys expose the fact that street living is comparable and even preferable to alternative lifestyles in the village or urban workplace. Similarly, parental and public attention to the behaviours associated with *khate* suggests a tacit recognition that boys' quality of life—in physical, economic and perhaps social terms—is not adversely affected by street life.

Throughout Nepal migration from village to town to look for work is a long-standing practice in which boys from the age of about twelve are permitted, and sometimes encouraged, to participate. Given that a large proportion of the rural population is very poor, boys' decisions to leave home were primarily based on lack of income sources in the village. As is clear in Kumar's account of his journey from home to seek work in the city, the stories of returnee migrants attract boys who imagine an easier life in the city.

> Before I came to the city I had heard that in Kathmandu you can see all sorts of surprising things, earn lots of money, eat day and night, enjoy yourself and never go hungry—that is what I heard! We heard that we wouldn't have all those hardships we had before.

Boys' recollections of being beaten or shut out of the house by a drunken parent that accompanied accounts of the family's loss of land and struggles to obtain food showed clearly the links between extreme poverty and violence against children. A remarkable finding that emerged from boys' accounts analysed in chapter 3, is that deprivation and suffering at home often prompt them to leave home to earn for their families, rather than to assert their independence. Hecht (1998:80) reports similar attempts by poor Brazilian children to gain acceptance within the family, and particularly their mother's affection, through their material contributions. *Khate* who earn and spend large sums on their own survival and entertainment, still cherish hopes of renting a room in Kathmandu for their families, saving for their parents or paying for their younger siblings' schooling.

The important point here is that the prevalence of migration makes it possible for boys to reject home at that particular moment, but leaves open the possibility of returning in due course like any other temporary migrant. Therefore, a boy who runs away from an abusive step-mother could return home after several months or years as someone who has been working in the town, meaning that his departure is not interpreted by family members as permanent rejection of the home.

Studies by Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997) and Russell (1997) of relationships maintained by Nepali migrants working in far-off towns or in India show that distance does not weaken allegiances to 'home' and an individual's sense of family and community

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identity. In the case of *khate*, the physical separation of rural home and urban workplace enables them to maintain positive relationships with their family members. Evidence of boys' on-going connections with the home was found in their descriptions of visits at *Dasain* or other festivals and in their plans to return home in the future. As was made clear to me on the trip to Bisnu's home village, these positive relationships depend on boys' ability to conceal their occupations on the street. According to *khate*, visits home at Dasain were possible only if one had a decent set of clothes and gifts or a sum of money for the family. Moreover, their avoidance of village neighbours or relatives while working on the streets showed that an individual's ability to maintain an image of the urban migrant could be jeopardised if news of his status as *khate* reached home.

The potential for Nepali street boys to mask their activities and identities from their families differentiates them from street children in a number of other countries. In north-east Brazil, for example, children who leave their homes in the urban slums (*favelas*) to sleep in the streets are seen by their families to be turning what was previously a working environment into their 'home' (Hecht 1998). Because it is feasible to work in the city centre and live at home, children's decisions to leave cannot be interpreted as anything but a rejection of the moral economy of the home. For different reasons, the child runaways in Toronto studied by Visano (1990) are also unable to portray their move from home to the streets in a positive light. In countries in the industrialised North, where children are expected to be in school and teenagers are supervised during job training, there is no legitimate place for street work. Widespread perceptions that welfare provision should prevent anyone from having to live on the streets have led to notions that 'the homeless', whether young or old, have chosen to opt out of conventional society. There is little scope for young teenagers who leave home and school to redefine their actions in a positive light and claim an alternative identity to that of deviant.

Surendra is now in his late teens and living with his family in a squatter settlement. He rag-picked with his friend for several months and offered the following explanation of how boys become *khate* and the significance of the proximity of home:

> These *khate* boys who live by rag-picking have come to the streets due to hardship at home. They have run away from their village, perhaps because their parents beat them or something else bad happened to them. When they arrive here they don't know anyone so their only solution is to join other boys, get a sack and start searching for scrap. It is an easy job; if they sell the stuff today, they have money for tomorrow. It is OK for them to do this work because they come from outside the city. For us, it is difficult because our parents and brothers are here and they feel insulted and ashamed if we do this work.

Like Surendra, the general public understand that poverty in the rural areas brings boys to the city and to the streets. However, members of the public often interpreted boys' decisions to work on the street as the lazy option which, in freeing them of obligations to others, would lead them towards deviance. As demonstrated in chapters 5 and 6, such connections are the rationale behind state and NGO efforts to improve boys' lives through corrective 'socialisation' programmes.

The fact that radio broadcasts and word of mouth have brought an understanding of the term *khate* to remote areas of Nepal indicates the extent to which the circumstances and activities of this particular group of children have dominated media debate. My task was firstly to determine how boys' own perceptions of their physical and social environment differed from external notions, and secondly to understand the effects of social stigma on their daily lives. According to *khate*, the city represents a viable alternative to drudgery and conflict at home. It is also a place where caste rules are relaxed and one can move easily between jobs. The fact that squatter teenagers encounter caste barriers in their home communities and in the workplace suggests that being a *khate* offers increased social mobility. There is consensus amongst boys who have rag-picked and those who beg successfully, that *khate* work is more lucrative than other jobs available in the city. When I put this conclusion to boys who were visiting the CWIN centre (in 1996), they agreed and evaluated alternative occupations as follows:

> *Khate* work is easier [in terms of working conditions and financial rewards for the physical effort required] than carpet weaving and washing up in teashops, but about the same as working as a *tempo* conductor, as long as the driver keeps his word and pays you properly.

Their final point is a reminder that most boys have suffered deception or even abuse from previous employers. Thus, personal control over their income makes *khate* work a sensible and attractive option.

Learning to survive and succeed on the streets is not without pain, fear and loneliness. My analysis revealed the vulnerability experienced by newcomers to the streets and those who have low status within the *khate* hierarchy even after several months or years on the streets. Boys suffer through lack of knowledge of the resources available, as demonstrated in Bikas' recollections of being cheated by an experienced *khate* when he first tried to rag-pick (recounted in section 4.2). Yet the striking factor in boys' accounts of their first few days as *khate* is the speed and ease with which they are integrated into working partnerships and are shown how to use the city centre and junkyards to earn a living. The readiness with which experienced *khate* adopt newcomers as apprentices speaks of the way in which

social relations are conducted in Nepal. The value that boys place on dyadic friendships is evident in the benefits associated with being like 'older and younger brother' (*dai bhai jastai*). On the one hand, such inclusiveness protects children as there is no need to undergo initiation or pay one's way into a group. On the other hand, those who demonstrate the techniques of success as *khate* also exploit newcomers.

My observations of interactions within specific 'street' settings revealed the power relations operating between boys that are made explicit in the words of Lhakpa, an eleven year old rag-picker in Kohiti junkyard: "Older *khate* boys insult us, take our scrap and sometimes when we hire bicycles they say "hey brother, give me a quick ride", then they cycle off and sell the bike leaving us in trouble." While power wielded within these settings undoubtedly causes boys distress, it is important to remember that most use a range of 'street' settings and move to an NGO centre, a different junkyard or a group of friends when hard-pressed.

This thesis has shown that, although less tangible, the vulnerability of boys resulting from their status within wider society is more critical to their quality of life than inequalities between *khate*. Boys' consistent assertions that they were spoiled (*bigreko*) and in need of improvement before becoming acceptable members of society, indicated their vulnerability to social exclusion both currently and in the future. Such statements could be interpreted as a device to gain the sympathy and support of NGO workers or tourists. However, the fact that boys' reflections on their current status and future prospects pivoted around the moral acceptability of different jobs and places to live, confirmed that they believe *khate* living to be deviant.

The research showed the negative impacts on *khate* quality of life of a match between the social identities ascribed by outsiders and an individual's perceptions of his activities and character. Confirmation of this link was found in boys' assertions that their biggest problems were the derogatory remarks of other people (*hepnu*) and their own inability to give up the habits of street living. The fact that the relationship between ascribed and felt identities can work to benefit children whose activities are highly valued by society and who believe themselves to be doing what is 'right', for example village children attending school or participating in agricultural work alongside their families (Skinner and Holland 1993, Sagant 1996), emphasises the erosion of self-regard that characterises the poverty experienced by *khate*.

## 7.2  THE EFFECTS OF STREET LIVING
##       ON BOYS' FUTURE PROSPECTS

> After I became a *khate* I could not become anything worthwhile. You know
> the saying; "even when the frog jumps he always lands back on the ground"
> (*bhyaguto jati ufre pani kaandh la muni muni*). Only if someone picks up the
> frog will he reach a high place, well that's the same for *khate*. (Rajan, age 19)

The intrapersonal aspects of poverty direct the way in which *khate* think about their
futures and the actions they take to improve their social status. Rajan's statement[2]
expresses the humiliation and sense of powerlessness experienced by *khate*. In
framing 'the *khate* problem' in these terms, boys justify their demands on others
more powerful than themselves. However, they also emphasise the importance of
their own personal commitment to a change in behaviour; a reaction produced by
the moral connotations of street living and one accounted for in Goffman's (1968)
theories of the moral career.

This study usefully indicates the limits of Goffman's concept of 'career' for research
in a culture where individuals are not thought of as having the degree of autonomy
that is attributed to them in the Northern cultural context. In analysing *khate*
perceptions of their future prospects I needed to account for the interdependence
that characterises hierarchical relations in Nepal. The study showed that the forms
of patronage practised by *khate* are akin to those generally used in Nepal to access
resources and secure protection. Where such relationships are regarded as a
hindrance to social development, the importance of a 'street' network to *khate* is
often underestimated. I have shown that *khate* use relationships established in the
city centre, junkyards and NGO centres to obtain reputable jobs, membership of the
local community and the signs of 'doing well' in the city that enable them to return
home. The research also demonstrated the advantages of one-to-one relationships
with a mentor to boys moving into a new workplace and social environment. The
following paragraphs outline the implications of these findings for those aiming to
assist *khate* in improving their quality of life.

At this point it is appropriate to reiterate the vital support role provided to *khate*
by NGO drop-in centres such as the CWIN Common Room and CWS Bal Kendra.
Although many boys choose not to visit regularly, they use the centres in times of

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[2] These words are drawn from Rajan's oral life-history, recorded in 1996 after he had
successfully completed his apprenticeship as a motorcycle mechanic.

crisis and like to keep in touch with the staff[3]. The consensus amongst NGOs was that children's continuing dependence on their resources is a problem that should be addressed. My interpretation is that dependence of this sort is inevitable in the Nepali social context and that it indicates the appropriateness of the services offered to *khate*. There are signs of greater recognition of this inevitability in recent NGO plans to train staff in relationship and counselling skills, and to account for the amount of staff time this form of support takes. Yet in order for this approach to be valued, the public's criteria for judging an NGO must include qualitative change in individual children's lives as well as the numbers benefiting from their services.

Although dedicated and skilled, NGO staff cannot possibly support large numbers of boys at the level they expect. There is therefore a need for people who can act as 'big brothers' to boys. As demonstrated in the motorcycle apprenticeship scheme, such mentors can act as role-models, sources of advice and routes to status within a new social arena. As yet, there is no evidence that NGOs have attempted to build mentoring into existing training and work placement programmes.

A clear result of this study of direct relevance to NGOs is the access *khate* have to a range of routes off the 'streets'. This suggests that NGO staff could better assist *khate* if they worked alongside those who act as patrons to boys in the 'street' setting. While there is logic in this approach, staff participation in 'street' networks would contradict their long-standing principle that boys should leave these social settings. It is worth drawing attention to Hecht's (1998:206) observation that the organisations best at enabling children to leave the streets in north-east Brazil are those that promote themselves as 'saving' street children. He attributes their success to the congruence between their ideology and the opposition in children's minds between a street life of vice and the good life at home; elements of which were evident amongst the *khate* in Kathmandu..

The findings of this study suggest that street children are competent workers whose lives could be improved if their social stigma was removed. There is evidence that NGO staff are also thinking along these lines, as shown in the suggestion by the CWS director that NGOs could help empower *khate* by legitimising rag-picking as an occupation (quoted in section 6.2.3). Validation of *khate* occupations by NGO staff is clearly an important step towards a respected position in wider society.

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3 It is worth noting that if the proposed 'reform centre' is built (see section 5.4.3), police and NGO collaboration in assigning boys to the centre could seriously damage the existing rapport between *khate* and NGO staff.

However, the question remains as to how far outsiders are able to 'empower' *khate.* Current consensus from many parts of the world that the empowerment of marginalised groups must come from within the group itself (Rowlands 1997). Boys' desire for change of this nature was expressed in conversations about how to set up a co-operative junkyard, banking scheme or social club for *khate.* Yet discussion of the practicalities dampened their enthusiasm. They predicted that group organisation would quickly break down and that self-interest would jeopardise the whole scheme. Their lack of conviction in collective efforts is unsurprising in the light of their experience of effective personal relationships with patron figures. However, it also speaks of a continuing expectation of assistance from NGOs.

Upon close examination, it is clear that *khate* and NGOs stand to lose from the collective empowerment of the former. As deserving beneficiaries, *khate* are able to tap resources provided by NGOs that are unavailable to the majority of poor children. NGOs derive their legitimacy from the needs of *khate* and other vulnerable groups of children. To remove 'street children' from the category 'problematic' childhoods not only threatens the existence of organisations working for street children, but also challenges two fundamental principles of an 'ideal' childhood. The first of these is that home is protective of children's physical and emotional well-being, and the second is that working with or for their families places children at lower risk than work amongst non-kin. I would argue that the repositioning of street children in the social hierarchy is unlikely precisely because politicians and social activists best able to motivate this change have a vested interest in the status quo. By this I mean that they are bringing their children up in the belief that education and family membership will guarantee their future security. Thus, validation of the work and lifestyles of poor children represents a threat to the dominant position of the middle classes who are promoting formal education and 'protection' within the home as part and parcel of Nepal's social development. Stephens (1995:19) states that the 'deviant childhoods' of children in the South are perceived by the North as evidence of the social backwardness of developing countries and the reason why modern Northern childhoods should be exported. Although at a national rather than global level, the same hegemony exists to justify the superior status of all aspects of middle-class childhoods in Nepal.

## 7.3 CRITIQUE OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF CHILDHOOD

The 1993 comparative study played a critical role in determining an appropriate methodology for a study of 'homeless' children. Its results formed the rationale for

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my study of *khate* as social actors in their everyday environments. The decision to focus on three specific 'street' settings allowed close scrutiny of the social, economic and political dynamics within these, as well as the movement of boys between the three arenas. The depth of my understanding increased as I took on active roles within each setting. In the process of negotiating my own position and the boundaries to my capabilities, I learnt how *khate* negotiate their identities and began to comprehend the impact of social stigma on their quality of life.

While my goal was to achieve an emic perspective on *khate* experience, the analysis was not 'child-centred' in the narrowest sense of the term firstly because I did not differentiate 'boys' in their late teens or early twenties, and secondly because I included an analysis of the ideas and practices of adults who interact regularly with *khate*. The use of specific participatory methods (for example group diagramming of health issues and the preparation of a video drama) while taking part in projects offering alternatives to street boys, contributed greatly to my understanding of the social context in which *khate* live. These practical roles gave me access to the local discourse in which the identities of *khate* are under negotiation. However, they also created a set of responsibilities to boys and those working on their behalf. The ethical issues raised here include the creation of unrealistic expectations and the wider implications to boys and NGO staff of working in ways that challenge established power relations[4].

This study proved that research and action cannot be separated in environments where social development activities are being pursued[5]. Several of the ex-*khate* who wrote life-histories said that they wished to become 'social workers' once they had completed school. They framed their ambition with statements about moral or religious duty (*dharma*) to help those who face the hardships (*dukha*) they themselves experienced, thus conveying their expectation that anyone with the means to help *khate* should do so (see Appendix IV).

This research project showed that in order to explore the impact of social stigma on children's quality of life, it is necessary to contextualise micro-level analysis of their daily interactions within an analysis of wider social, economic and political factors

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4 Space does not permit elaboration on issues of power and participation in the research process, however they are comprehensively discussed elsewhere (Baker et al. 1996, Baker and Hinton, forthcoming).

5 While chatting with a group of street boys during my most recent visit to Kathmandu, I asked them what they thought I was doing in the year I had spent in Nepal. They responded "social work", showing plainly that they considered me to have had similar interests and duties as NGO staff.

affecting poor children. It highlighted the need for future comparative research on the impact of ascribed identities on children working in towns independently of their families, as well as amongst those living in poor families. Moreover, there is considerable scope to extend the longitudinal research, especially with regard to the future prospects of boys who beg in Durbar Square.

Ethnographic comparison revealed that the difficulties faced by street boys are shared by many poor Nepali children living with and working for their families (see section 3.4). Where *khate* differ is in the multiplicity of childhood norms they encounter. Recalling that their departures from home are embedded in family struggles in the face of chronic poverty and that they too have been exploited in the urban labour market, we might judge a 'street' boy's experiences according to the norms of a poor Nepali childhood. In doing so, the advantages of so-called 'independent' work in the city identified by boys themselves, carry significant analytical weight. However, we must also account for the fact that *khate* come face to face with middle class notions of a 'good' childhood based on Northern value orientations, which both contribute to their stigmatised status and define certain alternative lifestyles as desirable and possible. Unlike other poor children, *khate* experience the extremes in the range of Nepali childhoods and encounter problems when faced with expectations that they will succeed as school pupils or trainees. When they 'fail' in this regard, their self-esteem is further eroded. It is therefore unsurprising that in order to cope with expectations that cannot be met, boys cultivate a series of dependency relationships in the city and keep a strategic distance from relatives.

A crucial aspect of the stigma attached to *khate* is that they are not permitted to define what they believe to be a satisfactory lifestyle. Perceived as destitute or delinquents, these children are guided towards pre-defined 'better' lifestyles. Nonetheless, NGO staff and many *khate* are aware that these paths are strewn with obstacles and cannot guarantee the fulfilment of boys' ambitions.

This scenario raises questions about the way standards are set for different groups of children. As we saw in chapter 5, local NGOs base their approach on international dictates such as the UNCRC. What is not made explicit, is that the labelling of 'street children' as a particular group deserving their 'rights' is a political move that has direct consequences for boys themselves. The issue of legitimacy to represent others concerns NGOs, journalists and researchers. The onus is on all such advocates to reflect on the impact of referring to *khate* as a distinct group. It is not only 'street children', or indeed other groups of vulnerable children, who are affected by being labelled by wider society. In 1996, newspapers in Kathmandu

were focusing on the plights of young returnee prostitutes from Bombay and the violence inflicted against domestic workers. Evidently, the same labelling process was being repeated. As long as groups of vulnerable children are picked out as special cases, there will always be scope to blame particular individuals or circumstances for their plight and to conveniently neglect the need for political change.

For some years now, researchers and practitioners have striven to give children a greater voice and decision-making power. If achieved, these targets will necessarily bring about major political change. Several social theorists have drawn attention to the recent increase in children's opportunities to be heard by influential decision-makers (Cussianovich 1996, Qvortrup 1998), while questioning the extent to which children's words are being listened to and acted upon. Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child state that children have the right to express an opinion and to freedom of expression. However, it remains ambiguous as to whether children therefore have the right to define who they are and for this definition to be validated by others.

The right to define oneself and one's relations with others is said to be "the first necessity of a free people and the first right an oppressor must suspend" (Carmichael and Hamilton 35:1967 in Fisher 1997:457). While the negative impacts of a stigmatising identity on Nepali children support the ideology behind this statement, it loses its force when matched against social realities. Here I refer to the inherent generational difference between children and adults that make assertions that children are "a free people" unsupportable. As Woodhead (1997:42) rightly points out, children's development takes place within a context, meaning that it "is about socialisation as much as freedom, and social adjustment as much as self-determination". All children learn, and although this process does not cease with adulthood, it is one that structures children's relationships with their elders who are assumed to have greater knowledge. Given these parameters, the issue is one of enhancing children's socialisation in families and communities in ways that allow children their rights without threatening the role of adult care-givers.

This thesis has demonstrated that the definition of particular 'vulnerable groups' of children, whether by researchers, social activists or the state, takes the onus away from the underlying social and economic inequalities affecting their lives. The research points to the dangers of a lack of institutionalisation of the principles commonly agreed to give children protection, as well as the legitimacy to select working and living environments that best suit their needs. The process of institutionalisation would involve demanding government accountability to the

UNCRC[6] and promoting debate amongst NGOs as to the implications of all the Convention's clauses to their own advocacy and programme work. Such an approach demands that researchers and practitioners work in partnership to provide the information necessary to formulate workable policies. It also requires recognition of the interdependence between children and adults. Where children are understood to be social actors whose quality of life is intimately connected to that of their family and community, there is scope to recognise their roles as providers and dependents, as well as their vulnerabilities and strengths produced therein.

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6 In addition to pressure groups working within countries, Childwatch International are currently completing an international study to devise a set of indicators that can be used to monitor state achievements with respect to the UNCRC.

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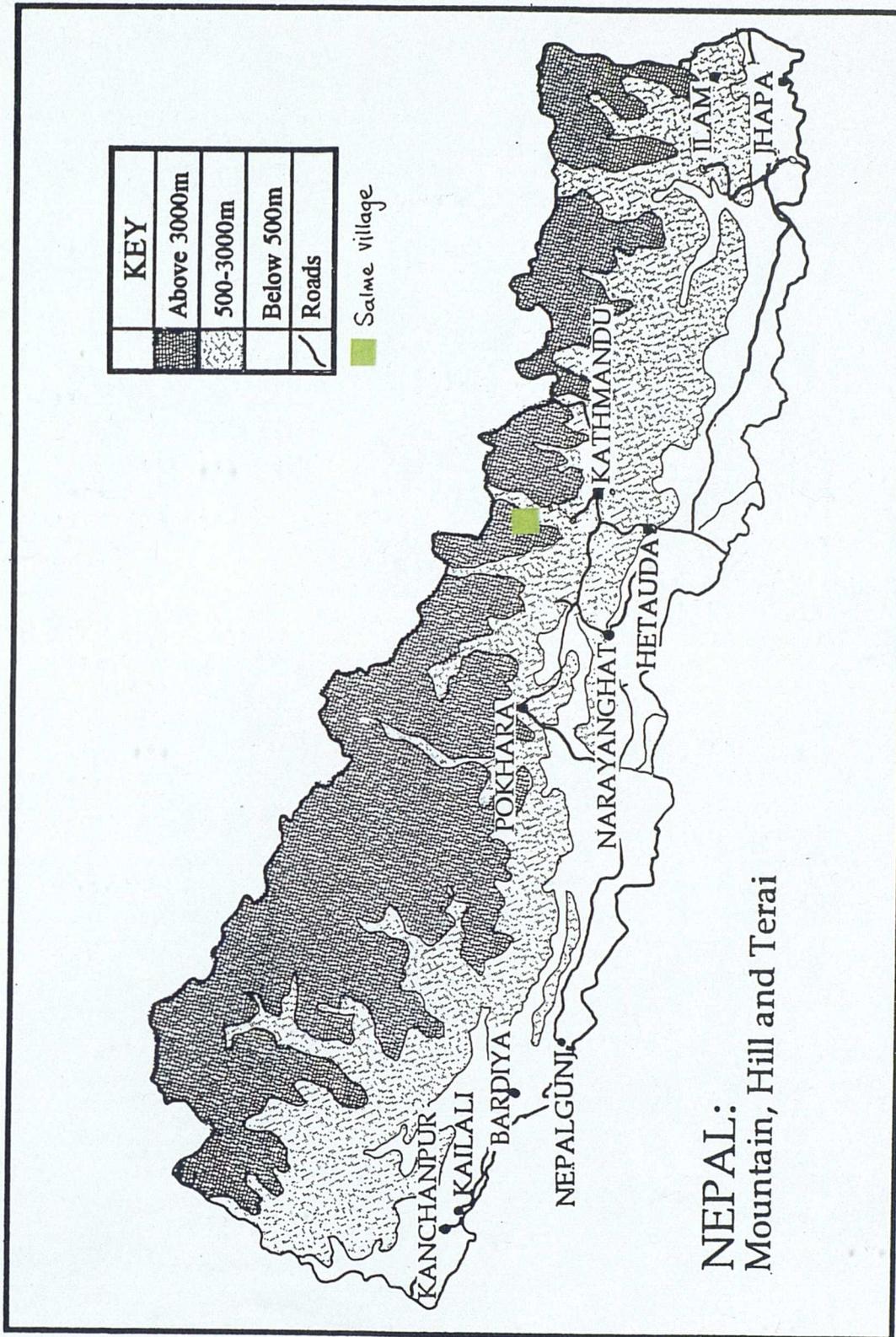
# APPENDIX I

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

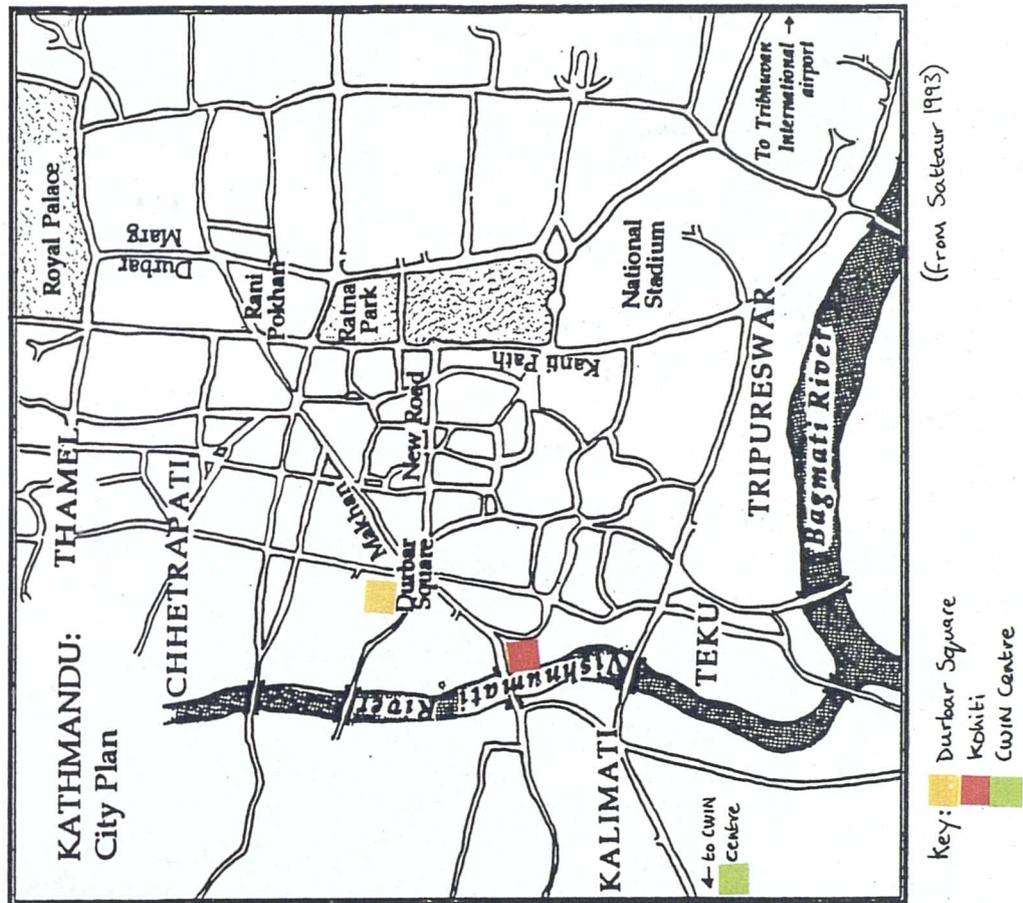| | |
|---|---|
| BCS | Bal Chetana Samuha (Child Awareness Group) |
| CAR-NG | Children At Risk—Network Group |
| CBS | Central Bureau of Statistics, Kathmandu |
| CWIN | Child Workers in Nepal |
| CWS | Child Welfare Society |
| EPHC | Education Programme for Helpless Children |
| HMG | His Majesty's Government, Nepal |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| PIN-Nepal | People in Need—Nepal |
| PRA | Participatory Rural Appraisal |
| UNCRC | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |

## GLOSSARY OF KEY NEPALI TERMS

| | |
|---|---|
| *beijat* | shame |
| *bhagio* | ran away · |
| *bhagnu* | to run away, to elope |
| *bhai* | younger brother or close friend |
| *bigarnu* | to ruin, make bad |
| *bigreko* | spoiled, ruined or 'bad' (in moral sense) |
| *bikas* | development |
| *chinneko manchhe* | friends or social contacts (literally 'known people') |
| *dai* | elder brother or close friend |
| *dharma* | religious and moral duty |
| *dukha* | hardship, trouble |
| *hepnu* | to undermine, insult, denigrate |
| *ijjat* | honour |
| *kawad* | junkyard |
| *karma* | fate |
| *keta* | boy |
| *keti* | girl |
| *khate* | rag-picker (originally) or 'street child' (currently) |
| *ramro kaam* | 'good' work |
| *saparnu* | to improve, make 'good' |
| *sapreko* | improved, made 'good' |
| *sauji* | boss, junkyard owner |
| *sukha* | ease, pleasure |
| *swatantra* | independent |
| *thulo* | big, grown up |
| *thulo manchhe* | an important and influential person |
| *ujjalo jivan* | a bright future |

# APPENDIX II

NEPAL:
Mountain, Hill and Terai

(from Sattaur 1993)

KEY

| | |
|---|---|
| Above 3000m | |
| 500-3000m | |
| Below 500m | |
| Roads | |

■ Salme village

APPENDIX II   Map 2: Kathmandu city and key research sites



KATHMANDU: City Plan

(from Sattaur 1993)

key: Durbar Square, Kohiti, CWIN Centre

ADJUNCT TO CHAPTER 1:
   ISSUES OF SAMPLING AND RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

The choice of six years as the minimum age was based on the youngest age of a homeless child recorded by CWIN. The maximum age in our study was more difficult to define. Legally anyone age 16 years or below is a child in Nepal, however for children over 14 years employment is permitted given certain conditions. Moreover the end of 'childhood' in Nepal depends on various factors other than the law (discussed in chapter 3). UNICEF takes account of earlier notions of maturity in developing countries by making 15 years a cut off for 'childhood'. We chose 14 years as the maximum age for comparative analysis for the following reasons. It reduced the chance of including those who might be considered, and consider themselves to be, adults. For the analysis of growth status, excluding post-pubescent boys removed a potential complicating factor. The comparative analysis relied on similar age distribution in each group. There were too few older children in Salme village and the urban school to recruit samples comparable to the squatter and homeless populations. Finally, CWIN advised us that ensuring the cooperation of homeless boys over 14 years in certain aspects of the research would be difficult.

This suggestion raises questions about participant perceptions of the research process and the issue of consent. While it is true that older boys who rarely visit the Common Room do not have a familiarity with the research context and may therefore be ill-informed or uneasy about participating, their reluctance forces a consideration of the general understanding of our research and thus the type of consent given by all participants. The procedure and purpose of each research activity were briefly explained to children at the outset of the 'health camp' and research sessions in the city. Although some elected not to participate in certain activities thus demonstrating the exercise of a right to refuse consent, it was clear that many children had little understanding of the overall purpose of the study. For example, after a few weeks of saliva collection, boys approached us on the streets and asked if they needed medicine for TB. Although no children were forced to participate, the fact that we represented adult authority, plus that of the 'western researcher', forced us to query the extent to which children were coerced into participating and conforming to authority induced stereotypes. The rewards of food and money offered to compensate for work time spent in research activities and make participation enjoyable for children, were considered vital but raise long term concerns with the nature of informed consent when working with children.

# APPENDIX III

## USE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

During the period of collaborative research (1993), a total of 90 semi-structured interviews with homeless, squatter, village and middle-class school boys were conducted by our local research assistants and occasionally by one of the researchers. The format of questions was designed to allow comparison between the backgrounds and current experiences of children living in the various settings. We also looked at interview schedules used in previous research with street children in Nepal and elsewhere for suggestions of relevant topic areas and techniques (CWIN 1990, Swart 1988). In consultation with our assistants, we prepared a guideline of 32 questions covering the family, home district, arrival in Kathmandu, current lifestyle and the future. Trials indicated that the information gleaned was at a superficial level only and we therefore increased the number of possible questions to 81. Realising the time demands of such a format, we encouraged our assistants to omit questions selectively, depending on the interests of individual children. Efforts were made to enable children to digress or tell stories when they wished. The interview procedure was explained and verbal consent sought from all informants, although the extent to which children understood the purpose of the interview is questionable. Before beginning, interviewees were encouraged to try out the tape-recorder. Transcriptions of the recorded interviews were made by our assistants and translated in collaboration with researchers.

APPENDIX III Diagrams produced using PRA exercises
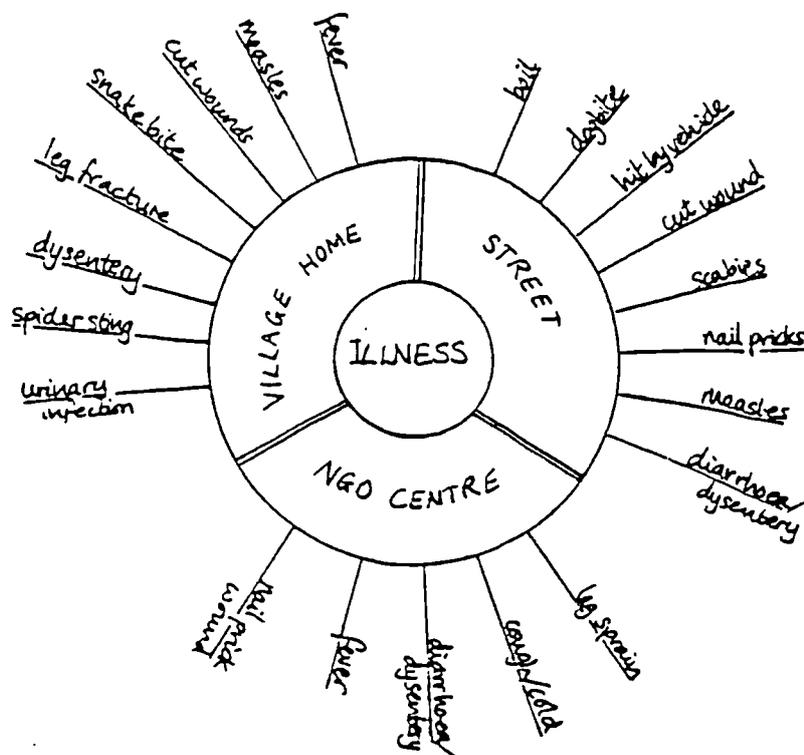
## Figure 1. Spider diagram drawn by street boys



## Figure 2. Table completed by street children showing impact of illnesses and action taken

| Illness | Boil | Dog bite | Wound | Scabies | Diarr- hoea | Hit by vehicle | Cold | Fracture | Hunger | Fever |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frequency | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Degree of pain | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Effect on earning | 5 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 |
| Treatment sought at/with | Free homeo- pathic clinic | NGO clinic/ state hosp. | NGO clinic | None- friends | None- friends | NGO clinic/ junk yard owner | None | NGO clinic/ state hosp. | Friends /junk yard owner | Homeo -pathic clinic |

# QUESTION SCHEDULE FOR THE NETWORK INTERVIEW (DEVELOPED BY EINAR HANNSEN)

A    BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1    What is your name?
2    Are you a boy or girl?
3    How old are you?
4    Which class do/did you study in?
5    Where is your home? where do your family live? Before you lived in the city where did you live?
6    Do you have a mother and father or have they died/eloped?
7    Do your parents live in the same place? Do you have a step-mother or a second father at home? Who lives in your home these days?
8    What work do your mother and father do?
9    What is your caste and religion?
10   When did you leave home and for how long have you lived on the streets?
11   Why did you leave home? Did you choose to go or did your parents send you?
12   Do you sometimes go home or do people from home sometimes come to meet you?
13   Who do you live with now?

B    INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR EACH PERSON IDENTIFIED BY RESPONDENT IN QUESTIONS BELOW

Gender, age, relation (i.e. relative, friend or employer), place of residence, whether known from home or met in the city.


## TO ASK THE CHILDREN

C    CARE RECEIVED

1    When you are hungry who gives you food?
2    When you are ill, who looks after you?
3    When you need something, who helps you?
4    Who tells you stories?
5    When you are worried, who comforts you?

D    CARE PERFORMED

6    When others are hungry do you give them food? to whom?
7    Who do you look after when they are ill?
8    Who do you help when they need something?
9    Who do you tell stories to?
10   Who do you comfort in times of trouble?

E    PITY

11   Who do you worry about the most?
12   Who else do you worry about?

**F  CONTROL**

13  Who tells you "do this, don't do that"?
14  Who tells you what work to do and what not to do?
15  When you make a mistake in your work, who gets cross with you?
16  Who tells you who you should spend time with?
17  Who tells you where you must sleep?
18  Who tells you not to make noise and disturb others?


**G  WISHES OF CARE**

19  Who would you like to care for you if you were ill?
20  If you were ill, who would you like to look after you?
21  Who would you like to tell you stories?
22  When you get worried, who would you like to comfort you?
23  Who would you like to look after your clothes and belongings?


**H  CONTACTS AND FRIENDSHIPS**

24  Who do you normally spend time with?
25  Who do you usually work and eat with?
26  Who is your best friend?
27  Who do you normally play with?
28  When you get some tasty food, who do you share it with?


**I  MODAL**

29  If you had to go far, who would you like to go with?
30  If you had to go somewhere where you felt scared to be alone, who would you like to
    go with you?
31  When someone is angry with you, who would you like to stick up for you?
32  Who do you want to be like?
33  When you do some good work, who would you like to praise you?
34  When you are working, who would you like to help you?
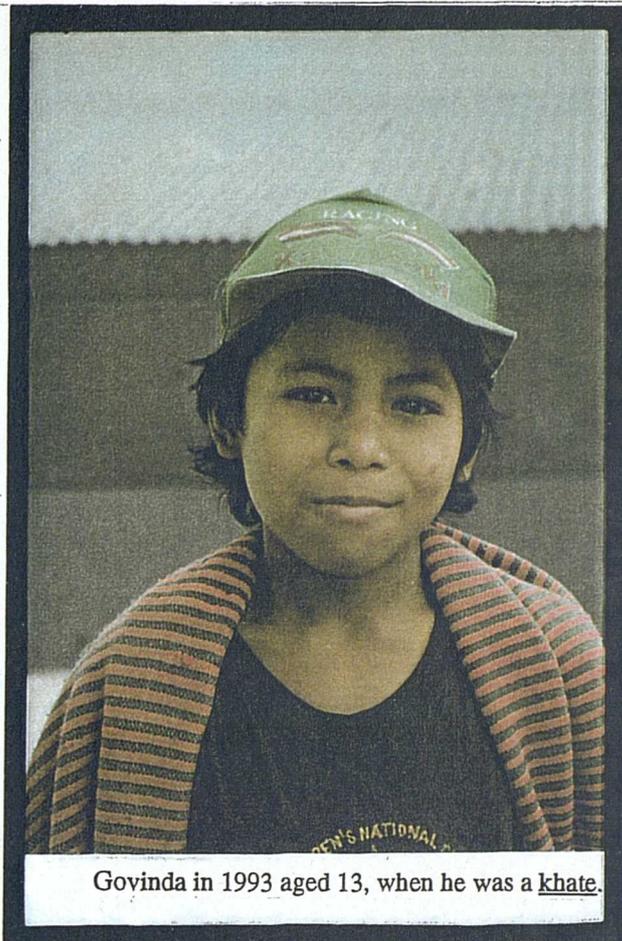35  Who would you like to decide what work you do?


**J  CONFLICT**

36  Recently, who have you been angry with?
37  Who do you not like to spend time with?
38  Who are you most afraid of?
39  Who treats you badly?
40  Who do you fight with the most?

# APPENDIX IV

Plate 7.1 Govinda and Balram move from the street to school to...
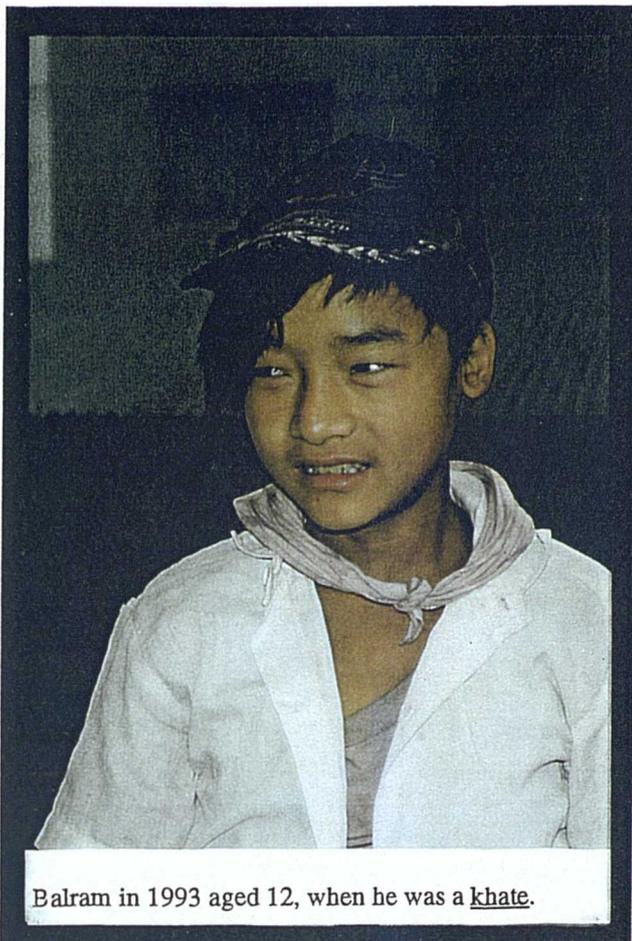


Balram in 1993 aged 12, when he was a khate.



Govinda in 1993 aged 13, when he was a khate.



With fellow ex-khate on a day trip from school in 1994



On a picnic with the researcher in 1995 (Govinda and Balram left of picture)

# TRANSCRIPT OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH GOVINDA (AGE 12)

The interview was conducted in 1993 when Govinda was living on the streets. He then went to live in the CWIN centre where he was assigned a school sponsorship (see plate 7.1). Govinda wrote his version of his life-story in 1996 and the transcript follows this interview.

Govinda was interviewed by JB (male research assistant) on a quiet corner of the pavement in Kalimati. He responded to questions promptly and with assurance.

[JB's questions are preceded by a *]

*Govinda, where is your home?
My home? Dhading
*How long does it take to get ther from here?
 Two days
*walking?
yes
*can you go by bus?
yes you can
 *When was the last time that you visited your home?
One year ago...when I first came here I worked in two different hotels. Then I worked in a shop with an old man in Chetrapati for about a year. He promised to pay me 300 rupees monthly at first but gave me only 400 rupees in total. So I called the police from Sorkhutte and after I had got all the money from him I went back to my home.
*and since then you haven't been back?
no
*So who lives in your home now?
At home...my father and step-mother; she has one son and one daughter, and my three brothers.
*Your mother eloped so you have a step-mother now?
Yes
*What job do they do?
My father works in the office and step-mother in the fields and the house.
*Can they read and write?
Yes they can.
*Your mother too?
No
*Just your father for his job is that right?
Yes
*What is his job exactly?
He works in The Water Corporation.
*Altogether how many brothers and sisters do you have?
Three of my own older brothers ...two of them are married and my step-mother's children are one younger brother and one younger sister.
*What about other family living at home; grandparents, uncles...?
My uncle lives in Dhobichor in Kathmandu in his own house but he doesn't like me so I don't go and visit him.
*At home who took care of you?
At home one of my friends only...the others did not care.
*At home did you work?
I went to school
*Which class were you in?

Class 4
*Did you enjoy studying?
Yes I enjoyed it.
*So why did you leave?
Once I failed the English exam. My father scolded me and said "you are fit only for
cattle grazing" (gotala janna matre thik cha). My father drinks rakshi (mero bua rakshi
kancha) Then I took 500 rupees from him and ran away to Kathmandu.
*Did you have friends in the village?
Yes
*and here in Kathmandu do you have good friends?
yes
*Do you have many or just a few?
Oh lots and lots! (tupre chha!)
*are some of they living here in Kathmandu?
Yes
*Do your parents know that you are here in Kathmandu?
Yes they know... but they don't care
*Has anyone come to look for you here?
No.
*Nobody that you know from the village?
I have seen some people from my village here but they didn't come to talk to me and
I didn't go up to them either.
*Were you happy when you lived at home?
No I wasn't ...before my mother eloped then I was happy but that happened when I
was two years old. Then my step-mother came....she dislikes me, she gives food to
her son but she didn't give it to me.
*What was the best thing about living at home?
The best thing about living at home was being with my friend. He was also alone
and had no parents because they had already died. We were close friends. Then his
brother who had migrated to India returned and took my friend to India.
*So you were alone?
Yes
*What were the other good things?
Going to school and playing with my friends there.
*What were the worst things about living at home...shouting?
Yes ...scolding me ....and she never said anything to her own son.
*So she always blamed you?
yes
*Where would you like to live in the future, in the village or here in Kathmandu?
Here in Kathmandu ... The CWIN sir is teaching me and promised to find a place in
school for me. When I have finished my studies I will get a job and when I am older I
will go back to my home to take a share of the family property. Then I will come
back to Kathmandu and live here for the rest of my life.
*When you left home for the first time were you on your own or with friends?
With my friend.
*Where did you go at first?
Where?...I can't remember the exact place but it was Kathmandu.
*When you first arrived where did you get food?
We couldn't get food so one friend called Syam, he was begging in Thamel and he
taught me to beg. Then I met a tourist and everyday he bought me rice, chowmein,
meat or something and gave me 20 rupees, sometimes clothes too. Then he showed
me CWIN ..after that Bal Krishna taught me khate work.
*Why did you come to Kathmandu the first time?
Well...
*You weren't liked at home?
Yes, no-one liked me at home
*and there were no jobs there?
Yes..no work available there and I wanted to earn some money

*So how long did you stay the second time?
The second time I came I worked in a *momo* shop which was very dirty and I couldn't sleep there. Then I worked in a studio called Gandaki Koshi Studio where they gave me good clothes and food too. But then they kicked me out and employed an older boy (*malai nikalyo, arko thulo manche rackyo*). After that I went to work in the shop in Chhetrapati.
*Do you know the name of the friend that you came for the first time with?
Yes Permeshwor.
*How did you find Kathmandu when you first arrived here?
I thought it was a good place and I was excited but after 2-3 days I got very hungry and felt that it was a bad place (*naramailo*). I got angry and went to find work in the *hotel* (tea*shop) but soon left and started begging.
*What are the differences between Kathmandu and your home village?
Well...there is the jungle there...and fresh air and I often went into the jungle to graze the cattle. There I had enough time to play but here I must search for plastics.
*These days how do you earn money?
In the mornings... but at night I sleep and from 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning I go picking plastics then I go and sell them.
*Your income...is it enough money or does it go quickly?
It goes quickly... one minute it comes and the next its gone (*ekek chin ma aunchha ani ekek chin ma janchha*)
[NB JB writes that G earns 50-60 rupees per day]
*Can you get what you need from it (*meynahat*)?
If I put it all together I eat something and...(mumble)
*Is it enough for you?
...(presumably nods)
*It is..and do you take money home?
No..one day I went home and then my friend he....(mumble)
*Do you send letters home?
No I don't.
*What do you think is the quickest way to earn money?
Well picking plastics takes 3-4 hours so....the easiest way to get money is by begging and singing at Biswojyoti cinema.
*If one day you don't have enough money what do you do?
I try to borrow from friends or the junkyard owner (*kawadi*). If they won't lend me any then I have to take the plastics (*mal*) collected by others and sell it.
*So sometimes you steal or...?
No I don't.... its my friend's scrap (*mal*)
*Oh I see so you take the scrap that your friends have searched for and then go.
Yes I take it and go (*liera janne*)
*What would you do if one day you had a lot of money?
One day near Thamel, Sorkhute area I found 360 rupees on the road and there was lots of *guliya* too so I earnt 140 rupees by selling some goods which made Rs 400 altogether. There were three of us..the others took 100 each so I had 200 left so I bought things and ate....it was finished quickly.
*So what did you buy?
I wanted to buy clothes but even when I put all the money left together there wasn't enough so I couldn't.
*So you earn with friends or alone?
I work with friends and alone also.
*In a normal day what do you eat?
Rice with meat.
*How much does it cost?
10 rupees for a plate.
*Who do you usually play with?
Oh with all my friends...Bal Krishna, Deepok...Assan and the others.
*What sort of games do you play?
Marbles and cards..that was before now its only marbles.

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*Do you play for money?
No we win marbles
*Which friend do you like the most?
The most?... they are all the same (*sabai estau ho*)
*But who is your best friend?
Oh yes...here '*bahini*' is one...*bahini* and Anil [an older *khate*)
*Bahini?* what's her name?
Mukesh....Mukesh
*Mukesh?...so why do you say *bahini* [meaning 'younger sister']?
What?...well his name is *bahini* thats what they call him.
*Oh He's like a girl is he...so *bahini*...(laughs)
Yes, before he looked like a girl so we called him *bahini* and it stuck.
*So what do you do together with your friends?
We play...sometimes they help me when we are working.
*Do you have any friends who are not doing *khate* work?
No
*and girl friends?
Yes I do.
*What work are they doing?
They live in the CWIN hostel.
*In your group there are lots of people aren't there? is there a leader (*naike*)?
yes
*Is there a leader in other groups too?
 *So what do leaders do?
Well...other groups come and snatch *(khosnu)* our money and watches. Once while
we were sleeping some *punk* boys came and took our money, watch etc. When this
happens Buddhe protects us.
*Did he fight with them?
Yes
*Do you know these people in the gangs?
No they are *nachhineko manchhe.*
*What happens in gangs?
Sometimes there are fights between the gangs.
*Have you ever been ill or in trouble since you have been in Kathmandu?
Yes I was ill once...when I went to see a film I got hungry and ate some biscuits that
had been thrown in a skip *(dhwang).* I got ill with stomach ache. Asok saw me in
Bagh Bazaar and he had 80 rupees on him so he bought some medicine for me.
*So he helped you?
yes
*Do you sometimes fight with others in your group?
We do and we don't...I fight..like when other boys teased me and tried to pull the
book that I was reading away from me. They tore the pages and I became angry so I
fought. Fighting with other groups is serious *(sanchai).*
*Do you smoke cigarettes, ganja or drink rakshi?
No I don't
*What are the good things about living on the streets?
Some people play in the street, some beg, some eat and sometimes we run after and
try to jump onto moving vehicles which is great fun.
*What are the bad things?
Being bitten by dogs and being chased and caught by police when we don't give
them money.
*And what do you think of the police..do they help you?
Its us who help the police...like showing them thieves...No they don't help but
instead they catch us and only release us after big festivals like Dasain and Tihaar.
*Have you ever been to the police station?
Me? no I've never been taken in to the police station..not once.
*Do you find that the *khate* job is good...are you happy?

Yes it's good and I'm happy [affirmative] ...but I will be happier if I get the chance to study.

*Will you do *khate* work for a long time?

No when I've finished with it then the CWIN sir has promised to find a place in school for me when the new school year begins.

*What job would you most like when you grow up?

When I'm older...I would like to work in the police force as policeman, a sargeant or officer if I get the chance.

*Will you get married?

Yes I will marry

*And what about kids?

I'll only have two.

*What is the first thing that you will teach your children?

The first thing...I will teach my children to control their mouths, not to smoke, live happily, be good people and to take care of us too when we are older.

*Do you know what is good and what is bad behaviour?

No I don't know.

*I mean like doing such and such is good and something else is bad...

Oh yes I know.

*Who taught you these things did you learn about it at home?

No but I learnt later myself (by heart and through experience) *(afai le jangai)* also I have some very good friends who taught me.

*So what do they do?

They never smoke and are good and gentle people, they never say bad words.

*Do you know someone from home or here in Kathmandu who is a very good person?

Yes

*Who is that?

Sachin-sir [staff member from the Aarohan NGO and drama group].

*What is the reason that he is good?

He looks after us and behaves gently towards us, he asks us about what we have been doing...

*And have you seen any bad people at home or here in the streets?

I have met some bad people on the streets who use smack drugs *(smack kanne haru)*, go drinking in *bhatti* (where *rakshi* and *jaad* are sold) and attack others with knifes.

*Do you yourself think that you are a good or bad person?

In some ways I am a good person but in others I feel that I am bad. *(Ek moyne ramro chu arko moyne naramro chu).*

*Why?

Sometimes friends are bad to me...and then we fight a lot..it's not good
*khoi sathi naramro ek...jagada ekdum koi naramro..*

*How do people in Kathmandu treat you?

Some people say "here are some things.." and they give me plastic rubbish but others say "hup! don't you take this or that..."

*So some treat you well and others treat you badly.

yes

*Who is the kindest to you?

Here at CWIN they are kind to me...and at the *hotel* [roadside restaurant where he regularly eats] they are kind too.

*Do some people treat you badly?

oh lots of them do!

*How are they bad to you?

Such as when someone else has done something wrong they start to scold me without finding out if I was even there.

*If you were sad or in trouble who would you ask to help you?

I would go to Anil or the junkyard owner for help.

*If you could choose someone to take care of you when you were sick or lonely who would it be?

Here at CWIN and there is Anil, Bir Bahadur.
*Have you ever helped anyone?
yes
*who?
People when they were ill...Purna, Mahendra....
*What happened then?
When they are hungry and I give Anil food... when he is out of money.. he is just like
our own brother so I have to help him...he is like our brother.
*How do you feel when you see well-dressed children going to school?
I feel unhappy [immediate answer]...if CWIN helped me then I could go to school in
the same way and become a great person (thulo manchhe).
*Do you ever leave the city nowadays?
no
*Do you go to video places?
Yes every day.
*What are they like?
They are good places to go.
*What sort of film do you prefer..fights or..?
Yes I like fights and also films with a good story.
*and do you watch sex films (nango-film)?
No I don't
*They don't show them?
They do but we don't watch them.
*These sex films...how much are they?
22 Rs per film...sometimes 25.
*You've never seen one of these films?
no
*So who watches them?
Some dhoti (Indian khate) and my friends too...Chimse, Bahun...and other boys who
use ganja and watch this type of movies.
*Do they sometimes press you to go and watch too?
Yes some say "you must come" and they take me there but then I say "I'm just going
for a pee" and I go to another video place.
*Do girls watch these films too?
No they don't.
*Are there local Kathmandu people there too?
yes
*What time do they show the films?
12 o'clock..until 2 or 3
*You mean in the afternoon?
yes
*And in the evenings?
At night until 3 or 4 o'clock.
*How many video places have you seen in Kathmandu?
In some areas 12, some 5, some..
*Ok how many are there in Kalimati?
7
*and in Lagan Tol?
12 and 5 near here (the CWIN Common Room)- you can see if you want.
*in Teku?
none there
*What about prices of Hindi films?
5 rupees for one then you pay 12 for more..it varies
*OK so thank-you GOVINDA-dai, we've done a lot..
Oh not really, that's fine!

# EXAMPLES OF LIFE STORIES WRITTEN IN 1996
## BY EX-*KHATE* WHO NOW ATTEND BOARDING SCHOOL

## GOVINDA'S LIFE STORY

I am going to tell you my life story. My name is Govinda. I am from Dhading Besi and my house is the last one in the bazaar. My father's name is Birnath and my mother's is Rekha Kumari. When I was 2 years old my mother left and went off with another man. After about a month, my father married another woman. This woman became my step-mother and had come to make my life a misery. Before she had any children of her own she gave me a lot of love. But as soon as her children were born, everyone started to hate me and I was treated very badly. I was 3 years old at the time and I suffered like a dog. My step-mother used to give good food and new clothes to her own children, and only old food and torn clothes to me. I suffered like this up to the time I was studying in class 4. Even my father and sister hated me. I was just waiting for the day when I could get away from their behaviour. That day came when I was in class 4 and my brother set fire to a bundle of hay when he was playing with matches. I was blamed for it and beaten badly. God did not help me and it felt like I was in hell.

The only thing keeping me at home was thinking about my education. I used to try to escape from home but luck was not with me. Then I decided to run away with 100 rupees from my father's pocket. My step-mother was feeding her son his morning rice and it was making me drool. She could see this but didn't even give me any water. So I ran away from home and travelled on the roof of a bus to Kathmandu. But I was still in great pain, my whole body was covered in wounds which made me cry. The problems I faced in that place cannot even be understood by god, let alone other people. So, I left forever. I pray to the gods that no-one else has to tolerate such a step-mother.

When I reached Kathmandu I felt happy. I was only 7 years old at the time and I faced the problem of finding food and a place to live. I slept a night on the street without food and it was terrible. A lot of bad things happened that night. The next day I found a job in a *momo* restaurant but the conditions were very bad. The place I had to sleep was filthy so I left the following day and moved to Thamel [area of Kathmandu popular with tourists]. There I made some friends. While I was living on the streets I listened to a lot of foul language and was beaten by older boys and policemen. I was even bitten by dogs. In Thamel, foreigners used to care for me, taking me in their laps and hugging me. They used to give me food and clothes. Many Nepalis advised me to get a job and earn my own living so I left this place. I started to work in a hotel. There the conditions were good but the pay very low. I used to wash dishes that were bigger than me! I didn't like it there so I left and got work in a shop. There I was given a lot of love and treated just like a son. The shopkeeper had a daugther who I used to call 'sister' and she used to call me 'brother'. They gave me the love that my parents never did so I used to call them 'father and mother' which made them happy. I had everything there except education and this made me unhappy. So I left that home and started to work as a *khate*. I started to sleep on the streets and it was very cold. After some time I went to an organisation called CWIN and started living there. I built up good relations with the CWIN staff and learnt a lot. I drew lots of pictures and won prizes for them. It was like a release from the difficulties I had faced. One day a foreigner gave me the opportunity of a lifetime. By his help I was able to come to Valley School. If he had not helped me I would still be a *khate*. He is like a god to me, and like parents too. Now I am only young, but when I am grown up I will let everyone know the name of this school and the people who have helped me. I request to god that they will never leave me. I need the love of the headteacher too, for if they leave me

alone, I will again fall into the mire they took me from. The help I received from the foreigner brought me from a dark place to a bright place, and I will make sure this is recognised by the world when I am grown up. Now I feel happy about life ahead, although I sometimes feel sad when I remember the things that happened in the past. I receive love from the teachers, friends and sisters here. Our headteacher loves everyone equally and he even teaches us Japanese!. If there are drawing competitions going on he makes sure that I get a chance to enter. So I feel as if I have escaped from a cage.

My message: Never treat your children badly, for if you do they will suffer like I did. So always love your children, encourage them and help them to be good citizens of Nepal. Do not treat one child better than another—they are all your flesh and blood. If you can, always give help to orphans. You have to make sure your children are bright like stars. If you don't , you will suffer in the future. I want to be a famous artist and help to make the name of my school, CWIN and my sponsor immortal forever. Drawing and paintings are my hobbies and my aim is to help poor people. This is the end of my story.

## KUMAR'S LIFE STORY

I was born in a poor home into an illiterate family. My name is Kumar! My home is in Baglung—so it is said—but I have never been to my own home. Soon I am going to be 16 years old. Now I'll tell you what has happened in my life!

When I was very small I lived with my own family. My father was working in a town somewhere and it was a long time before he came home. At home it was just my mother, older sister and I—my sister and I were small children. Out of the blue, when I was 4 or 5 months old, my mother ran off with another man. At that time, our maternal uncle wrote to my father about it and he came back from the town. My sister was taken to live with my paternal uncle and I was taken to the town to study. I lived in the town until I was about 5 or 6 years old. At that time my father told me all about the things that had happened previously. We spent some more time there and when I was 6 or 7 years old my father enrolled me in a school. But his income as a manual worker was too small to afford food for us, so I had to give up going to school. Around this time my father left his job. He was thinking of our futures so he enrolled me in a different school. But I couldn't study at that school because I fell into bad ways (*bigreko thiye*) in the company of friends. My father wanted to take his "ruined" (*bigreko*) son back home to our village but we didn't have enought money to go.

A long time later my father and I went to Narayanghat [large town in the Terai plains]. There, when I was 9 or 10 years old, my father suddenly died. Since that day I've been an orphan without my own father, mother or family. So from a young age, I had to do *khate* work (rag-picking) in order to fill my stomach,. When I was doing this work I made friends and I told my friends all that had happened in my life. I did this type of work for 2 or 3 years and one day a *khate* boy from Narayanghat took me to CWIN [NGO centre for street children in Kathmandu]. There friends asked me about my life and I told them everything. The CWIN "sirs" [staff] explained to me what their centre is for and I stayed there. While I was staying at CWIN, I lived by the rules and fulfilled my responsibilities there. That meant that I was trusted by everyone at CWIN and they believed me to be honest. Perhaps that is why the "sirs" were kind to me and showed me a lot of love. I then began studying in CWIN and once the "sirs" had found a foreign sponsor for me, I came to live in the school hostel. Now I will tell you about the time I spent in this hostel:

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I am now living in Valley[1] school boarding house. I like all the teachers here and hope that they like me too. I actually study in another school but live in this hostel. I find the school rules good and easy to keep, so I live here without any problems. I hope that if I do well in my studies then I will be successful in my life to come. I hope that my dreams will be realised.

In the future I want to be a social worker because when our lives were ruined social workers helped us and that is how I came to be here. So, I too want to help others in various ways—and, I also think, it is our *dharma* [religious/moral duty] to do so. In life, those people with money waste it on entertainment and end up being spoilt by money. People like this, I think, are boastful—but look at how many people there are that have no money but a good heart! Yet it is not enough to have a good heart. A person needs money and a good heart. For if he has no money, he cannot be successful in life. In the same way, I had no money but I have a good heart—but I am hoping that all of you will help me.

In life, people are born and people die. Some are born rich and some are born poor. Rich men and poor men—what is the difference? The only difference is that some have to endure a lot of hardship (*dukha*) and others have it easy—that is all. Both the rich and the poor have nothing when they are born. That is why, whether we are rich or poor, we should serve others for the sake of our own peaceful hearts.

You were asking us about the differences between the village and the city. They are very different because in the village only a few of our wishes can be realised. In the city we learn new things and we can satisfy our desires. You see there are no opportunities in the village to do the work we are able to and earn money from it. In the town the work that I can do is available. We think that the city is better than the village because in the city you can earn money, eat tasty food, get nice clothes, watch films, there are lots of motor vehicles and nice places to visit.

## KAHILA'S LIFE STORY

My name is Kahila. I am now living in a school in Kathmandu and working hard at my studies. My home is in Dharan in Koshi zone and Sunhari District. The name of my village is Danabhari. My family are living there. Since my father married a second wife, my mother has preferred to live in another place and I used to live there with her. But since that time my mother has been drinking *rakshi* [a spirit made from rice] every day. She started to behave badly, sometimes beating me too.

Later my mother took me to a Brahmin family's house in Dharan where I worked and earned just 20 rupees a month. I had to wash their dirty plates and cut wood from a far-off forest. I didn't even have any shoes and had to tolerate this terrible treatment. I felt very sad all the time and thought to myself 'I'm working here just in order to survive. There are no other options and I have to do it because it is in my *karma* and determined by God'. As I was thinking I began to cry. In a house nearby there was a boy and we made friends. He was also working and felt the same way about it. The two of us decided to run away together.

In the middle of the night we ran away and began to work collecting dirty plastic. We earnt only 2-4 rupees each day and spent it all on food. Sometimes we had to sleep the night hungry. During the nights, strangers came and beat us until we could only just breathe. They demanded money and if we didn't give it to them, they snatched it from us. The problems weren't only at night. During the day, while we were walking along wearing dirty torn clothes and carrying a sack people in their

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1 As for the authors' names, a pseudonym is used for the school they now attend.

houses and on the roads insulted us. Even the dogs went for us. But we were still people weren't we? There were several hardships that we had to endure with as we spent our lives on the streets like dogs. In this way I earnt a little money and came to Kathmandu with friends.

Before I came I had heard that in Kathmandu you can see all sorts of surprising things, you can earn lots of money and night and day you can eat, enjoying yourself and never be hungry—that is what I heard!. We heard that we wouldn't have all those hardships we had before. Later my friend and I separated but still did the same job. The places were all new to me and I thought that I would lose my way. I had no education even when I was small and I did not realise that the dirt was bad for my health. How could I have known? I had to survive so even though it was very dirty it was the best that I could do. Due to the dirty environment my body became diseased and my foot got very swollen. It grew very big and painful—it was unbearable! I began to think that perhaps I would die there, in that place. When I lived with my family I had a lot of bad treatment, but I realised then that I could have coped with it and stayed there for longer—that is what I was thinking at the time.

One of my friends carried me to Baphal in Kathmandu and took me to an organisation called CWIN. I was fortunate that the 'sirs' there started to help me and my wound was treated. I was very sad to see that there were even more people with worse problems than me. The staff there were good people and in seeing how they looked after those who were poor and suffering, I reaslised I had 'found a god and not a stone'. Gauri Pradhan is head of the organisation and he is also caring and wise. In establishing this organisation, he has done service for the poor people that cannot be repaid. Recently I have been helped by this organisation towards a bright future. I hope that I will spend my life, like Gauri-sir, working for the poor and helpless. You see, I came from a place where it was difficult to get food and going to school was beyond all possibility. I have been through a lot of difficulties and now have a comfortable life.