

People's Perception towards Wetland Culture: A Case Study of Dhimal Community, Nepal

Presenter:

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Introduction

- ▶ Nepal is a mountainous and multi-cultural country, located in South Asia, between China and India
- ▶ Having diverse caste and ethnicity,
- ▶ Dhimal is an indigenous community, livelihoods largely depend on wetland and its resources, living in the eastern part of the country
- ▶ The community has separate identity in terms of language, dress, festivals, social norms and values
- ▶ One of the oldest wetland dependent community, living in the area since 200 years ago



Trends of Dhimal Population

| S.N. | year | Population of Dhimal | source |
|------|------|----------------------|--|
| 1 | 1921 | 505 | Record of British Sub-continent |
| 2 | 1952 | 5671 | Nepal Government on the basis of Mother Tongue |
| 3 | 1961 | 8188 | census report HMG |
| 4 | 1972 | 1016 | Members of the Folk-Life Study Team 1972/73 |
| 5 | 1981 | 13000 | Key Informants |
| 6 | 1991 | 16781 | CBS 1991 |
| 7 | 2001 | 19537 | CBS 2001 |
| 8 | 2011 | 26298 | CBS 2011 |

► Plate 1: Wetlands Ecosystem



► Plate 2: Toadrush Marshes

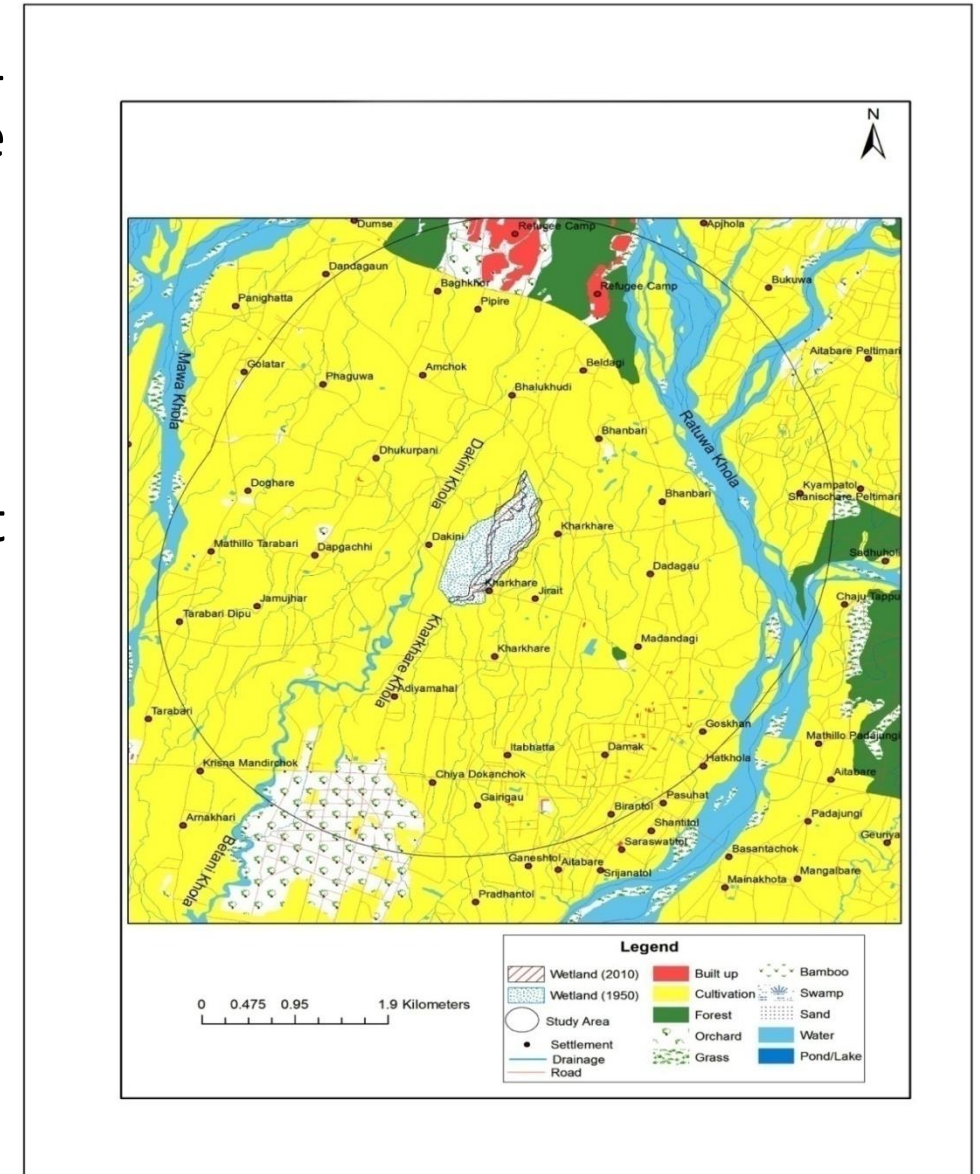


► Plate 3: Dhimal fisherman



Methodology

- The study covered 687 households, and 71 households (10%) of surrounding area were interviewed
- Focus group discussion,
- Key informant interview
- Direct observation
- Secondary information were taken from government reports, population census report (2011),



Wetland Related economic activities of Dhimal Community



Plate 4: Professional Dhimal fisherwoman since 1990



Plate 5: Collecting fish fauna in wetlands



Plate 6: Fishing by hand nets and Groping



Plate 7: Collected Fish and Crabs from wetlands

Holy bathing on Wetlands

- Till 1980 bathing place of Dhimals were near streams, rivers, ponds and lakes.
- Dhimal call it as Chileghate in their Language.
- Women and childrens used to bath and wash clothes on Chileghate

| S.N | Year | Households swimming (Chileghate) | Bathing on wetland | Duration |
|-----|------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | 1970 | 71 | | all year round |
| 2 | 1980 | 62 | | all year round |
| 3 | 1990 | 39 | | all year round |
| 4 | 2000 | 19 | | all year round |
| 5 | 2010 | 11 | | only rainy days |
| 6 | 2010 | 6 | | only rainy days |

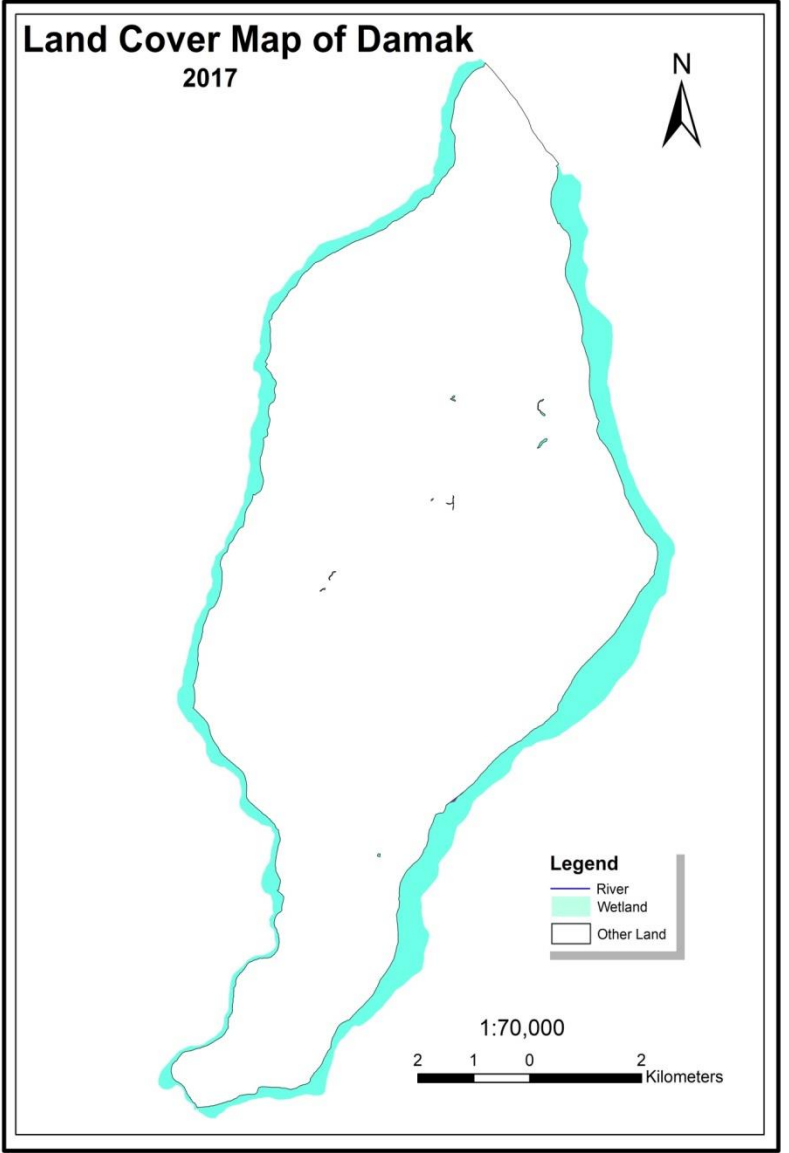
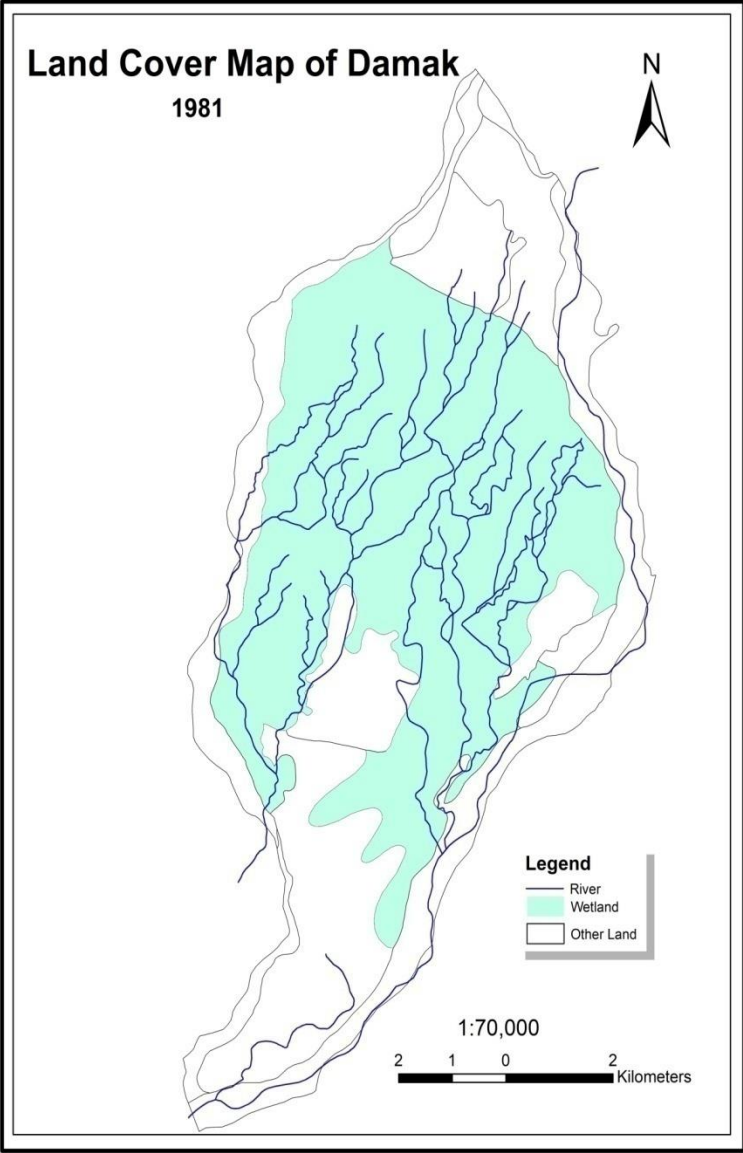
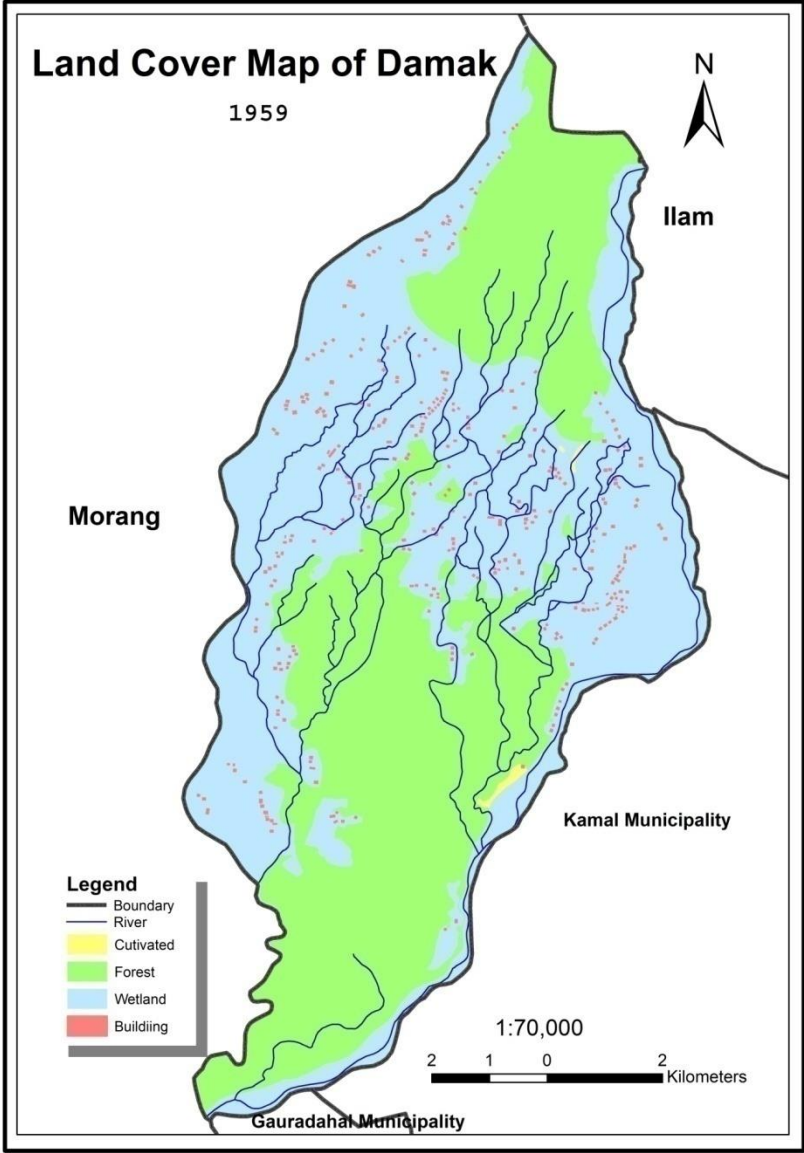
Now a days bathing place of wetlands (Chileghate) is seen only in limited plaes.

Dhimal Community culturally and religiously depended on wetland environment from ancient time. Dhimal community celebrated Marriage ceremony for one week till 1973 (2030 B. S). On the behalf of bridegroom, on last day of marriage ceremony, neighbors goes to wetlands for fishing and returned back with cooked fish as well as they request the guest to take fish with beaten rice , roasted gain and alcohol , after that they were seeing off their respected guest.

Table 3: Decreasing trends of wetland areas in Damak Municipality

| S. N. | year | Wetland covered area (area in square kilometer) | Total area of municipality (area in square kilometer) |
|-------|------|---|---|
| 1 | 1954 | 44.03 (58.67 %) | 75.3 |
| 2 | 1981 | 41.47 (54.51%) | 75.3 |
| 3 | 2016 | 9.05 (12.01 %) | 75.3 |

Source: Topographical Map Sheet No 72 N/10, Survey of India Offices, Land utilization map, 1982 and Google earth 2016



- ❖ Total area of wetland has decreased drastically during the period of 60 years in study area.
- ❖ Between 60 years 486 percent wetland area decreased.
- ❖ Per year 8.1 percent wetland area has decreased.
- ❖ Attributes of wetlands area have changed, which has changed the economic activities, cultures and food habit of Dhimal communities.
- ❖ Till 1981 Dhimal people never used to go to the kitchen for lunch or dinner without variety of fish, now they wait some auspicious occasions or moment to take fish.

Trends of Dhimal Population in study area

| S.N | Year | Households | Total Population |
|-----|------|------------|------------------|
| 1 | 1954 | 305 | 1925 |
| 2 | 1961 | 392 | 2744 |
| 3 | 1971 | 602 | 4214 |
| 4 | 1981 | 678 | 4900 |
| 5 | 1991 | 700 | 4962 |
| 6 | 2001 | 690 | 50015 |
| 7 | 2011 | 687 | 4980 |

1954 to 2011 the population of Dhimal has been increased at a faster rate in the study area.

Since 1980 , wetlands have been filling rapidly and made a personal property, which is the major reason of shrinking and disappearing of wetlands.

Plate 8: School girls are part time fishing



Plate 9: Fishing Dhimal Mother with children



Plate 10: Octogenarians woman is fishing by hand net



Plate 11: Draining water for fishing by family



Plate 12 Carrying cattail from wetland



Plate 13: Women Fishmonger is Selling Fish in the Market



Plate 14: Spouse are selling Fish in the Market



Plate 15: Women are selling) indigenous fish (Punitus panctatus



Plate 16: Boys are swimming in Wetlands in the Middy Sun



Plate 17 Researcher also involving in Fishing with indigenous spouse



Wetlands and culture

- ❖ Dhimal community worshiped Shaliwerang and Kaliwerang.
 - ❖ Shaliwerang goddess blessed to Dhimal for the achievement on getting large quantity of fish during fishing.
 - ❖ Kaliwerang Devi also blessed enough prey during the hunt and furthers no shortage of hunting.
 - ❑ Another unique blessing is preserve the wetlands rather than misusing it further.
 - ❑ epithet of goddess during the ancient period denotes, Eastern Region of Terai was rich in wetlands, wetlands ecosystem, and aquatic biodiversity.
- fully dependent on food, nourishing element, and economic activities on wetlands resources.
 - customs, rituals and cultures of Dhimals is based on wetlands and aquatic resources.

Wetland Culture in Dhimal Community

- ❖ Ashare Puja (Dhangdhange fair) .important festival of Dhimal community.
 - ❖ Celebrated in the local and regional level of Jhapa and Morang in different times and worship wetlands(Plate: 18,19,20 21 have showing the culture).
- ❑ On the occasion of Dhangdhange fair wetlands is worshiped from Tista River to Sapta Koshi River.

Plate 18: Banner of Ashare Puja



Plate 19: Beating Drum in Ashare Puja



Plate 20: Worshiping Major Wetland form Sapta Koshi to Tista River in Ashare Puja



Plate 21: Dhimal youth dancing on the occasion of Ashare Puja



Plate 22: Children are swimming on Dalki covered (*paspalidium punctatum*) wetlands



Perception: Dhimal community has a feeling that the *areas characterized by the presence of cattail and toad rush marshes, Dalki Ghari (paspalidium punctatum) , Holi, frequent inundation, grassy area, shallow water above the the surface for a sufficient period of time (6–9 months) are wetlands.* Dola is a word (Dhimal language), which denotes to the permanent water logged area. For them it is the place where men can drawn up to neck of clay enter, narrow field, even to plough, impossible to plant paddy plough by yoke of oxen oxen (*Bhasland*) and remains water constant. They take such kinds of swampy swampy paddy fields, small ponds, *Holi* as wetland where they find Lesser Adjutant and enough waterfowls. It is that type of muddy land, which is rich in in fish fauna and other edible aquatic life all-round the year where they are surviving and enjoying.

Findings

- ▶ All the available resources and raw materials that the Dhimal ethnic group use in their life cycle rituals and they offer to the deities are obtained from wetlands and the wetland resources. Such culture and rituals have been established as the real culture of Dhimals. In this way the Dhimal, wetlands and Dhimal cultures are integral to each other.

Conclusion

- ▶ The government should give the policy priority to conserve wetlands and support the livelihoods of dhimal community
- ▶ Dhimals custom, culture, rites and rituals and economic activities are also strongly related with wetland and wetland resources.
- ▶ To conserve Dhimal's original fundamental culture, custom, rites, rituals and food habit, we must stop people from encroaching private and public wetlands.
- ▶ Entire conservation of the wetlands, its conserving responsibility must be given to Dhimal Community.

Queries

Thank you !!!