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**THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXTS
OF FERTILITY DECLINE
IN THE RURAL EASTERN TERAI REGION OF NEPAL**

**A thesis presented in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Health Management and Policy
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ABSTRACT

There has been a steady decline in fertility in the eastern Terai region of Nepal in the years 1981-1995. The decline in fertility is desirable from the point of view of government, because of the population pressure on the region. Population pressure has been caused, however, not primarily by the high fertility of inhabitants of the region, but more by massive in-migration to the region, indirectly caused by the government policy itself.

The government has responded to population pressure in the Terai by seeking to reduce fertility by means of family planning programmes. However, the recent decline in fertility rates in the eastern Terai has little to do with family planning programmes, which were introduced to the region only quite recently. Rather the decline in fertility is primarily the result of a steady rise in the marriage age of women. The rise in age at marriage is the result of economic and social pressures- in particular the difficulty of sustaining a joint family based agrarian livelihood, because of growing population (due to in-migration) and limitation upon further clearing of the forest. A related factor contributing to the rise of marriage age is the quest for urban employment and for the kind of education that would facilitate that employment. Girls are allowed to stay in school longer and boys and girls may travel some distance away from the village for the sake of higher education and job opportunities. While the giving of dowry with a very young daughter in marriage is the prestige model set by the established landed high caste families, the middle caste tribal people and the lower castes practice bride-price payment.

Using the micro-demographic research methodology, this dissertation provides a detailed case history of fertility change in a village of a developing country. Fertility rates are shown to be subject to numerous interacting social and economic forces, and changes in fertility can be better understood with the small-scale and precise analytic tools provided by micro-demography.

The village of Chisang is composed entirely of recently arrived families. The first immigrants- high caste Hindus from the Hill region- acquired good land and established flourishing farms, but later immigrants were less fortunate. In-migration, through-migration, and out-migration are the defining features of the village history and village demography, and thereby of social structure, family structure, economy, and fertility rates.

For all Hindu people in the Terai, the good marriage of each boy and girl, the unquestioned virginity of the girl upon marriage, and the production of offspring within each marriage remain imperative. As the marriage age of women rises, the gap between age at marriage and age of consummation of marriage closes. Though fertility is declining because of the rising age at marriage, villagers say that they have not intentionally planned this chain of cause and effect: for them, it just happened. However, the village is at a stage in its history when the introduction of family planning measures is likely to be, and it appears to have been in the last two years, highly successful.

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GLOSSARY

Nepali words and terms translated into English appear in order of first use in the text. All Nepali words and terms are italicised. The conventions of spelling anglicised Nepali words follow that of R. L. Turner's *A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language* (1931). Any other words that do not appear in Turner's Book have been spelt according to Narendra Mani Acharya Dixit's *English Nepali Sajha Samchipta Sabdakosh, Second Edition* (Bikram Samaat 2044).

Chapter 1

bikash: Development.

Chapter 2

Terai: Low-lying land, (esp.) the low-lying land at the foot of the Himalayas.

Madesh: The middle country, i.e. the land lying between the Himalayas and the Vindhya, Vinsana in Rajputana and Prayag or Allahbad.

madesi: An inhabitant of the Plains, an Indian.

pahari: Belonging to the Hills, A hillman.

adhivasi: Indigenous peoples

anchal: The governmental development region commonly translated as “zone.”

gaon: The lowest level of governmental development region commonly translated as “village.”

varna: Class; the four major divisions in the classical caste system of Hinduism.

jat: Caste; also ethnic group; race; tribe; clan; species.

<i>matwali:</i>	“Those who drink liquor:” the middle ranking castes in Nepal. These castes are considered clean or <i>chokho</i> and water and certain types of food can be accepted from them.
<i>sano jat:</i>	“Small caste:” low caste; untouchable caste; <i>pani nachalne jat</i> .
<i>pani nachalne:</i>	Those from whom water is not accepted, i.e., untouchables.

Chapter 5

<i>maita:</i>	Women’s natal home.
<i>budhi:</i>	Old woman.
<i>ama:</i>	Mother.
<i>jetha:</i>	First born son.
<i>jethi:</i>	First born daughter.
<i>pahari gaon:</i>	Hill village.

Chapter 6

<i>khola:</i>	River; stream.
<i>hatiya:</i>	An open market set up on a fixed day and location especially in eastern Nepal.
<i>karma:</i>	Fate; a moral system in which a person’s deeds affects the physio-moral state in future rebirth.
<i>neuro:</i>	A wild fern that is prepared into curry.
<i>birta:</i>	Royal tax-free land grant.
<i>Bikram Sambaat:</i>	The era beginning B. C. 57.
<i>purba:</i>	East.
<i>majh:</i>	Middle, centre.

<i>paschim:</i>	West.
<i>tol:</i>	Neighbourhood.
<i>sukumbashi:</i>	Landless peasant.
<i>Durga:</i>	The bloodthirsty virgin warrior goddess, a destructive form of the Devi.
<i>Saraswati:</i>	Goddess of education.
<i>Mandir:</i>	Temple.
<i>janai:</i>	Sacred thread worn by members of the twice born <i>jat</i> (Brahmins and Chettris).
<i>tagadari:</i>	People who wear the sacred thread, specifically Brahmin and Chettri <i>jat</i> .
<i>jharra:</i>	Pure <i>jat</i> group.
<i>chokho:</i>	Clean or pure.
<i>ghiu:</i>	Clarified butter.
<i>doko:</i>	Large basket carried on the back for transporting goods.
<i>angaan:</i>	Courtyard.
<i>Dashain:</i>	A major festival held in September-October in honour of the Goddess Durga and her power to conquer evil.
<i>Deepawali:</i>	A five-day festival falling during the dark half of the month of <i>Kartik</i> (October-November) during which the crow, the dog, the cow, the ox, and finally brothers are worshipped on successive days. The evening of the day on which the cow is worshipped is also <i>diwali</i> or the festival of light in honour of Laksmi the goddess of wealth, who is often symbolised by the cow.
<i>Tihar:</i>	see <i>Deepawali</i> .
<i>dal:</i>	Lentil.

Chapter 8

<i>dharma:</i>	Religion; duties emanating from a person's physio-moral constitution; right action.
<i>paraya dhan:</i>	Property belonging to the husband and his family.
<i>pundit:</i>	A learned Brahmin who is a teacher or scholar especially of Sanskrit.
<i>pahuna:</i>	Guests.
<i>ghar:</i>	Home, house.
<i>kanya daan:</i>	Gift of the virgin; a major rite in marriage in which the bride's father offers his daughter as a sacred gift to the groom.
<i>kanya:</i>	Unmarried girl; virgin.
<i>punya:</i>	Merit or virtue.
<i>daijo:</i>	Dowry.
<i>budhi kanya:</i>	Mature unmarried women; spinster.
<i>karma chaleko:</i> full	"Activated <i>karma</i> :" the state of full adult responsibility-especially with reference to observance of caste restrictions; caste status.
<i>chada:</i>	Loose in character.
<i>bidwee:</i>	Widow.
<i>daju-bhauju:</i>	Brothers and sister-in-law.
<i>didi-bahini:</i>	Elder sister and her husband.
<i>sasu:</i>	Mother-in-law.
<i>illaka:</i>	Area.
<i>kanchi choree:</i>	Youngest daughter.

Chapter 9

<i>Raja:</i>	King.
<i>pariwar niyojan:</i>	Family Planning.
<i>dhami:</i>	Shaman; faith healer.

Chapter 10

<i>Naya Muluki Ain:</i>	Civil Code of 1963.
<i>jajmani:</i>	See <i>kamaune</i> .
<i>kamaune:</i>	“Working for hire:” system whereby artisan-caste families perform a specialised services for patron families in return for set annual grain payments (Equivalent to the Indian <i>jajmani</i>).
<i>jajman:</i>	The client of a priest or the one who offers sacrifice to the gods.
<i>bali:</i>	Annual payment in grain made to a member of a lower caste.
<i>riti:</i>	Patron.
<i>bhagya:</i>	Client.
<i>khalo:</i>	Annual payment in grain made to a member of a lower caste.
<i>hali:</i>	One who ploughs the field.
<i>jamindar:</i>	Landowner; landlord.
<i>kipat:</i>	Form of land tenure associated with Rai and Limbu.
<i>raikar:</i>	Form of land tenure akin to freehold.
<i>pashu:</i>	Animal.
<i>jhankri:</i>	Shaman; faith healer.

Chapter 11

brataman: The initiation ceremony of high caste males during which they are invested with the sacred thread.