

**Transformatory Potentials of the Commune: Narratives on Collectivization
and Its Social Sustainability in Thabang, Rolpa, Nepal**

A Dissertation

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By

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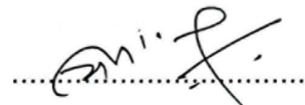
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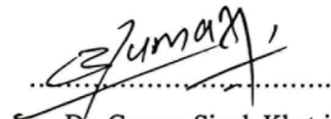
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Letter of Recommendation

We certify that this dissertation entitled "**Transformatory Potentials of the Commune: Narratives on Collectivization and Its Social Sustainability in Thabang, Rolpa, Nepal**" was prepared by **Mr. Keshab Raj Silwal** under our supervision and guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for the final examination to the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Tribhuvan University in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology.



Prof. Dr. Youbaraj Lunitel
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Date: November 21, 2024

Declaration

I hereby declare that this Ph.D. dissertation entitled “**Transformatory Potentials of the Commune: Narratives on Collectivization and Its Social Sustainability in Thabang, Rolpa, Nepal**” is submitted by me to the office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, Nepal is an entirely original work prepared under the supervision and guidance of supervisor Prof. Dr. Youbaraj Lunitel and co-supervisor Dr. Guman Singh Khatri. I have made due acknowledgments to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The result presented in this dissertation has never been presented or submitted anywhere else for the award of any degree or other purposes. No part of the contents of this dissertation has ever been published in the form or a part of any book. I am solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

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APPROVAL LETTER



This dissertation entitled "Transformatory Potentials of the Commune: Narratives on Collectivization and its Social Sustainability in Thabang, Rolpa Nepal" was submitted by Mr. Keshab Raj Silwal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology. I hereby, certify that the Research Committee of the Faculty has found this dissertation satisfactory in scope and quality. Therefore, it has been accepted for the degree.

.....
Prof. Dubi Nanda Dhakal, PhD
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Date: 2081/09/22

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Keshab Raj Silwal

Abstract

This dissertation explores the social sustainability of the Ajambari commune in Thabang, Rolpa, with a notable focus on conscientization and the transformation of society. The primary goals of this study include analyzing the core narratives that underpin the commune system and the distinct local expressions within Thabang's community. The research also seeks to uncover the interconnectedness between communal living, collective farming, and cooperative endeavors. Furthermore, the study explores the ongoing existence of the Ajambari commune in Thabang, Rolpa, and considers the potential for its replication.

The initial inspiration for the commune's collective approach links to Freire's consciousness-raising process. Conscientization, as defined by Freire, aims to liberate individuals from everyday exploitation by raising their awareness and empowering them to take control of their circumstances and embrace the potential for change (Freire, 1972). It is closely tied to social transformation, which encompasses various changes in society's structure, ranging from macro to micro levels and interconnecting dimensions such as politics, economics, technology, and culture (Sztompka, 1993; Castles, 2010). Marx's perspective on social change focuses on the transformation of the mode of production and its connection to class struggle (Marx, 1848). For these changes to be sustainable, social sustainability goes beyond the present generation's needs and emphasizes efforts to meet the basic needs of future generations (Brundtland, 1987). Key attributes of social sustainability include class dynamics, participation and decision-making, social interaction and cohesion, a sense of belongingness, and future perspectives (Sachs, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Dempsey et al., 2009; Cuthill, 2010).

The research utilized a qualitative design to explore and interpret social reality, adopting a constructivist perspective epistemologically and a subjective stance ontologically (Flick, 2009; Lee, 2012; Al-Ababneh, 2020). Focusing on Thabang in the Rolpa district, a region pivotal in the 1996 Maoist insurgency, the predominantly Kham Magar-populated area included a minority of Dalits. Data collection involved household surveys, encompassing all commune households, and employed diverse methodological tools such as semi-structured and key-informant interviews, observations, and document studies, a comprehensive understanding of Thabang's social reality emerged, capturing the perspectives and experiences of its residents.

The Maoists decided to establish the commune as a unit of socialism, an alternative to private ownership in their base area where they had a strong hold and the established government was absent. This was the social transformation envisioned by the Maoists as discussed by Marx, which called for a classless society with a socialist economy (Marx & Engels, 1848) and a fundamental change in society (Sztompka, 1992; Portes, 2010; Haas et al., 2020), rather than gradual change. However, local people did not perceive it as only an ideology, but rather as a means to solve their daily problems. The Ajamabri commune practiced communal living, collective farming, and co-operatives which reinforced the commune. Initially, the Maoist leaders, supporters, and families of martyrs and common people were willing to become part of the commune. The majority of members belonged to the higher and middle class with more land holdings, higher education levels, higher political engagement, and a leading role in the commune. Those who were uneducated and owned less land were particularly hesitant to join. The fact that Dalits were not invited to join the commune indicates that there was still discrimination between higher and lower castes in Thabang during the Maoist insurgency.

The commune struggled with economic challenges while modernizing and commercializing its agriculture. The Ajambari commune couldn't sustain itself due to lacking some attributes of social sustainability including conflicts during its formation, economic difficulties, the impact of a peace agreement, the Maoist party's decision to dissolve the "People's government" and the commune, changes in social classes, reduced a sense of belongingness, and a decline in prospects. In Thabang, replicating the commune was seen as complex, and members were liberated and pursued individual activities after leaving. Despite being a unique socialist experiment, the Ajambari commune couldn't maintain itself in the long run.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBS	= Central Bureau of Statistics
CPNM	= Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPN	= Communist Party of Nepal
ND	= New Democracy
NLSS	= National Living Standard Survey
NSO	= National Statistical Office.
PG	= People's Government
Ph.D.	= Doctor of Philosophy
PLA	= People's Liberation Army
PW	= People's War
RIRDP	= Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project
UCPNM	= United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
UN	= United Nations
UNDESA	= United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNMIN	= United Nation's Mission to Nepal
WCED	= World Commission on Environment and Development

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This PhD dissertation delves into a comprehensive examination of the collectivization process in the specific context of Thabang in Rolpa, a village popularly known as the center of the decade-long armed struggle in Nepal, named the People's War¹ by the Maoists. The primary objective of this study is to shed light on the intricate dynamics of collaborative efforts of commune practices, particularly focusing on social transformation and their social sustainability. Thabang is the focal point of the dissertation, which aims to uncover the underlying principles, assess the formative stages, and critically evaluate the long-term societal implications of these collaborative and commune endeavors. Through this exploration, the study contributes to our understanding of social sustainability within the unique setting of Thabang in Rolpa, shedding light on potential lessons for broader socio-economic transformations. I first learnt about the Maoist commune from newspaper articles and journalists. My interest in Thabang grew as I read Nepali poems, books, and research works in this area (Sapkota, 2010; Rokka Magar, 2011; Zharkevich, 2019). These sources deepened my curiosity about both the commune and Thabang to a remarkable extent.

In addition to their military activities, the Maoists initiated social transformations, including the removal of untouchability, the eradication of superstitious beliefs, the promotion of equal participation for women, the elimination of alcohol consumption, the organization of collective activities during their People's War, and the encouragement of collective economic endeavors over private ownership (Thapa & Sijapati, 2012; Zharkevich, 2019). This initiative aimed at tackling challenges stemming from private farming systems and ensuring the sustainability of the war effort. In the mid-western region of Nepal, four communes were established during the so-called People's War in areas where the Maoists had a strong presence and the absence of established government forces. From its Second National Convention in 2001, the Maoists envisioned a social transformation aimed at shifting the existing social order from private values and norms to a collective initiative (CPNM, 2001, p. 496). The commune possessed transformative potentials, which included envisioned social

¹ The Maoist party initiated an armed struggle called the People's War in 1996 with the aim of overthrowing the monarchy and the existing democratic system, establishing a New Socialist Democracy. This conflict persisted for a decade until 2006 when the Comprehensive Peace accord was reached among Seven Political Parties and the Maoist Party, following the Second People's Movement.

transformation such as modifying modes of production, diminishing class inequality, replacing private arrangements with collective norms and values, and advancing collectivization. The Maoist party established four communes: Juni in Jajarkot in 2000, Jaljala in Jelbang Rolpa in 2001, Ajambari Commune in Thabang in 2003, and Balidan in Rukum in 2004. The Ajambari commune stood out as the largest, accommodating 141 members from 33 families, and it lasted the longest, functioning for 14 years. Other communes existed for approximately ten years before being dissolved due to the departure of their members. Nevertheless, the consequences of the members' departures continue to influence both their activities and those of their original communities.

All the communes were established in isolated midwestern areas of Nepal; however, I chose the Ajambari Commune for my study because it was established in Thabang, nationally and internationally famous as the heartland of Maoist activities. Thabang is the oldest and most significant base area among the various Maoist Party's strongholds in mid-western Nepal. Thabang gained prominence as a center of Maoist activities and is renowned as a historical place for Nepalese communists, opposing the state since 1957. Two-thirds of Thabang's population are Kham Magars, known for their strong sense of cooperation and joy in assisting others. They live in close-knit communities with a robust form.

collective spirit, actively participating in communal activities like production, distribution, consumption, social control, and mutual assistance. The people of Thabang relied on traditional and seasonal agriculture for their livelihood, producing limited quantities of potatoes and maize and herding cattle in the surrounding hills. Due to these constraints, many were compelled to seek employment in India. The village lacked education and health facilities and was a two-day walk from the nearest road access. Just as the social location of the Paris Commune was the urban workers, and the collectivization in Soviet Russia involved peasants, and the Chinese People's Commune included rural people (Volgyes, 1980; Unger, 1985; Sokolovsky, 2019), the Ajambari Commune in Nepal was comprised of rural peasants engaged in traditional fragmented farming and wage labor in remote areas. Therefore, this dissertation undertakes a thorough examination of the social, political, and economic aspects related to the communes and collectivization in Thabang, Rolpa, Nepal. The investigation spans both the periods preceding and following the year 2006.

The commune is conceptualized as an exemplary community where members endeavor to establish a social structure founded on an envisioned perfect society. This concept can denote

a collection of individuals sharing their lives and work, or alternatively, a territorial administrative unit (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 104). Moreover, the commune is one form of collectivization which is the procedure or method of organizing a group of people, a sector of the economy, an enterprise, etc., in line with a collectivist economic system, in which power is collectively distributed or concentrated over certain aspects of production (Davies, 1980). Under primitive communism, the means of production are collectively controlled and held in community by producers (Marx & Engels, 1884; Cornforth, 1961, p. 39). The medieval European communes, noticed in the late 11th and early 12th centuries, were formed for defence, increasing production, and business among the citizens of town or city-states. Later, the commune was practiced by the working class in France after the Revolution of 1871 and was known as the Paris Commune. The commune system was created in Russia after 1917 and in China in 1958 as a collectivized institution that introduced socialist values and collectivization in agriculture across the country to create a self-sufficient, self-governing, enhanced agricultural modernization and industrialization (Eisenman, 2014, p. 75). These collectivization efforts and communes aimed to revolutionize agricultural production and contribute to the modernization of their respective countries. Despite the occurrence of decollectivization in Russia in 1980 and China in 1979, these initiatives led to significant achievements and transformations in both nations (Han, 2008).

As a sociologist, my research focuses on analyzing the collectivization process of Ajambari Commune members in Thabang, initiated by the Maoists in 2003. I break down the commune's collectivization practices into three main components: collective living, collective farming, and cooperatives. I am particularly interested in unfolding their newly formed social interactions and production activities, which they practiced through the process of conscientization and social transformation, aiming at achieving social sustainability. Conscientization, as elucidated by Freire (1992, p. 51), involves individuals becoming more cognizant of the social, economic, and political realities that shape their lives, empowering them to act as conscious agents of change rather than passive recipients. This process of conscientization is integral to social transformation, altering the trajectory of individuals' lives. Social transformation, as described by Sztompka (1992), manifests in one temporal space and dissipates in another, bringing about significant structural changes in society and reconfiguring established social patterns. This affords me insight into the social changes that the commune seeks to achieve. The characteristics, progression, and lasting effectiveness of these social phenomena are the primary focal points for sociologists. The assessment of social

sustainability aids in understanding the qualities that have supported the commune's enduring presence. Social sustainability, according to McKenzie (2004, p. 1), involves fostering growth or development that allows culturally and socially diverse groups to coexist. Simultaneously, it fosters social integration and enhances prospects for all members of society. My research adopts a social sustainability framework to scrutinize collective activities, particularly those within a commune, during and after the Maoist armed struggle. Employing empirical data collected through fieldwork, I analyze the context of social sustainability to gain insights into the developments in Thabang, Rolpa, and to draw implications for the collectivization process in rural Nepal.

1.2 Research Problem

The Maoists initiated the armed struggle in Nepal in 1996 with their ideological goal of overthrowing the existing state structure, abolishing the monarchy, and establishing a New Democracy (ND) in the country. The armed struggle initiated from a few districts of the country subsequently extended throughout the country and succeeded in pushing the state armed forces and administration back to the district headquarters (Sapkota, 2010; Thapa & Sijapati, 2012). Amidst the armed struggle, the Maoists developed a strategy to establish base areas where they founded their state structures, including the People's Government, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Court, and the commune. The communes, such as Ajambari in Rolpa, represent a distinctive endeavor in collectivization, featuring communal living and collective farming within Nepal's socio-political framework. They garnered acknowledgement for offering alternative solutions to everyday challenges, drawing the interest of a portion of the population toward their model. Maoists believed it was crucial to transform society by changing the existing social order from being private and hierarchical to one characterized by equal sharing of resources and a collective standard of living (CPNM, 2003). This type of social transformation, occurring amidst political and economic turmoil and armed struggle, serves as a key area of research.

The type of social transformation envisioned by the Maoists and the establishment of communes raised various questions from its inception to its continuation after the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006. The people's understanding of communes, social transformation, and practices might differ from the Maoist party's political aims. This alternative structure, established in Maoist strongholds during the People's War, deviated from existing norms and values. A comprehensive examination is necessary to assess whether

there has been a shift in collective norms, values, and outcomes due to this social transformation. The context, periods, historical legacies, and political dynamics surrounding this transformation varied significantly, potentially resulting in the inadequate representation of marginalized voices and perspectives. It remains uncertain whether these social transformation efforts effectively resolved local communities' problems and incorporated features of social sustainability. Therefore, the question of social sustainability hinges on the extent of local support and involvement in the transformation process. Investigating the initiation of communes and their vision for social transformation is critical, requiring scrutiny of their establishment, organization efforts, and the people's perspectives by examining the ground reality.

The establishment of communes in other contexts, such as in Soviet Russia, China, and Eastern Europe by the state itself, served as crucial links between rural communities and the government, facilitating political control, providing labor distribution, and economic motives (Volgyes, 1980; Sokolovsky, 2019). However, despite these efforts, they failed to significantly boost production, failed to raise peasants' living standards, did not meet the anticipated success, and depended on state subsidies (Unger, 1985). Ultimately, the communist system weakened, leading to the closure of these communes. In contrast, voluntary kibbutz communes in countries like Israel have been established with community participation (Krausz, 1983; Russell et al., 2018). While some continue to operate, they face challenges in attracting the younger generation. The pertinent question arises: why were these communes shut down, and for those still functioning, how do they sustain themselves? In Nepal, communes were established in areas of Maoist influence but later disbanded following the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006. Following the establishment of the commune, a series of political changes ensued, including the Second People's Movement of 2006², the Comprehensive Peace Accord that marked the conclusion of the Maoist party's people's war, the formation of a republic, the establishment of a secular and inclusive state, and the promulgation of the New Constitution of Nepal in 2015. These communes endured until 2017 but ceased functioning as members gradually departed. Drawing from the aforementioned examples of commune sustainability or dissolution, it is critical to explore the establishment, participation, and acceptance of the new social structure and eventual closure of communes in Nepal for further research.

² In political literature in Nepal, the movement launched in 1990 that led to the end of Panchayat rule is mentioned as the First Janandolan. The Second People's Movement was organized in 2006 by the alliance of seven political parties and CPNM to reinstate the dissolved parliament.

The idea of collectivization and the establishment of communes in countries such as Soviet Russia, China, and various other communist nations have attracted the interest of scholars across diverse disciplines, including social, economic, and political realms (Volgyes, 1978; Unger, 1985; Kokaisl, 2013; Sokolovsky, 2019). However, Nepalese scholars had overlooked the collectivization and commune established in the Nepalese context. Very few studies have been undertaken concerning the collectivization and commune endeavours led by the Maoists in Nepal (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2010; Zharkevich, 2019). These investigations provided only a concise summary of the daily activities, member profiles, and mapping levels. Similarly, another significant shortcoming in the examination of the Maoist armed struggle is its exclusive focus on the broader structural and international context of the war, neglecting the economic activities at the individual micro level within the affected regions (Mishra, 2004; Hachhethu, 2008; Lawoti, 2010; Einsiedel, Malone & Pradhan, 2012; Thapa & Sijapati 2012; Baral, 2017). These studies have linked the origins of the Maoist armed struggle to broader structural elements within Nepalese society. Additionally, they have investigated the evolution of the Maoists, specifically examining the transition in their political pursuits from armed confrontations to engagement in a parliamentary system. Previous research has not explored the social transformation and sustainability of the commune. Recognizing this gap, it is essential to investigate how the commune was established, uncover the narrative behind its formation, and comprehend the perspectives of local residents.

Numerous theories, ranging from functionalist, voluntarist, and actor-based perspectives to modernization and Marxist theories, seek to explore the establishment, operation, and dissolution of communes (Volgyes, 1978; Katz & Golomb, 1983; Pryor, 1992; Bauerkamper, 2014). These theories could not encompass the entire process of the commune, including its social transformation and sustainability. Thus, I have opted for conscientization and critical theory because they offer comprehensive insights into how individuals are conscientized to establish and join communes at the grassroots level. Moreover, the aforementioned theories often fail to elucidate the social changes envisaged by communes. Therefore, I have chosen to focus on the alteration in social structure catalyzed by communes, leading to social transformation through alternative practices. Furthermore, the dissolution of communes may not solely be a political issue; it may also result from a lack of attributes of social sustainability such as social cohesion, a sense of belongingness, future prospects, and changes in class structure. Hence, it is imperative to investigate the formation, operation, and dissolution of communes and collectivization through the lens of conscientization, social

transformation, and social sustainability. Understanding why individuals initially joined communes and the factors influencing their subsequent departure are essential for comprehending the aspirations of the local population on an empirical level. Investigating people's narratives of the commune's establishment, social transformation and social sustainability are significant in the realm of social science, providing insights into activities at the local level. Examining collectivization in the commune from a sociological perspective is a novel endeavor in Nepal, aimed at establishing a comprehensive understanding of the social underpinnings inherent in the commune structure. This dissertation embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the social, political, and economic dimensions surrounding the communes and collectivization in Thabang, Rolpa, Nepal, spanning both the periods before and after the year 2006. To address the research gaps identified, I have formulated the following research questions, which I explored in this dissertation.

- 1) What were the foundational narratives and local vernaculars of the Commune that emerged and evolved in response to the local political, economic, and social context of Thabang?
- 2) How was the commune system initiated in Thabang, Rolpa during its formative stage?
- 3) How do collective living, collective farming, and co-operatives revolve around the idea of the commune? How do these practices reinforce each other?
- 4) How has the practice of commune (dis)continued in Thabang, Rolpa? What are the key attributes that have enabled its social sustainability in the specific setting of Thabang?

1.3 Objectives

The general objective of the dissertation is to examine the social sustainability of the Ajabanri commune, established in Thabang, Rolpa. The specific objectives of the dissertation are:

1. To explore the foundational narratives and local vernaculars of the commune in Thabang, Rolpa, examining how they emerged and evolved in response to the local political, economic, and social context.
2. To investigate the initiation of the commune system during its formative stage in Thabang, Rolpa.
3. To examine the interconnectedness of collective living, collective farming, and cooperatives within the framework of the commune, analyzing how these practices

reinforce each other and contribute to the functioning of the commune as a collective entity.

4. To assess the continuity and discontinuity of the commune practice in Thabang, Rolpa, investigating factors influencing its persistence or cessation, and to identify key attributes that have contributed to its social sustainability within the specific social setting of Thabang.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study aimed at investigating and understanding the impact of Maoists' armed struggle on rural communities in Nepal, particularly their efforts to introduce alternative practices like the establishment of communes. It aimed at exploring the local activities and expectations related to the Maoist armed struggle, the influence of these alternative practices on traditional agriculture, the role of the Maoists in addressing rural development issues, and the potential for conscientization, social transformation, and social sustainability through these initiatives.

The first rationale seeks to identify and examine the local activities and expectations related to the Maoists' armed struggle. The armed struggle had different implications for different regions and communities within Nepal. By understanding these variations, the study can shed light on the nuanced impact of the Maoist People's War on different localities, their needs, and aspirations, as well as their response to the introduction of alternative practices like the communes. Despite the country's modernization efforts, the traditional agricultural system remains prevalent in many parts of Nepal. The Maoist party attempted to provide an alternative to this traditional agricultural system through collective efforts, such as the establishment of the communes. Analyzing the conditions of these communes in the aftermath of the peaceful settlement of the Maoist conflict can offer insights into the success, challenges, and sustainability of these alternative practices in transforming the rural economy.

The second rationale focuses on providing knowledge about the alternative practices introduced by the Maoists in rural Nepal. It highlights that rural communities have historically been marginalized from government programs and planning, which has led to persistent problems and challenges in their traditional economic activities, mainly agriculture. The study aims to explore how the introduction of alternative practices, like communes,

affected rural communities and whether they were able to address some of these social sustainability issues.

The third rationale of the study emphasizes the significance of conscientization, which refers to the process of raising awareness and critical consciousness among individuals and communities. The dissertation seeks to explore how the Maoist people's war, through its alternative initiatives like the communes, contributed to social transformation by empowering and mobilizing rural communities. The study recognizes that the relationships between conscientization, social transformation, and social sustainability are essential factors for the success and replicability of such initiatives. By examining these connections, the dissertation aims at offering potential lessons and insights for other social activities that seek to address challenges in existing systems.

The fourth rationale of the study is to contribute to the existing literature on Maoist armed struggle and its impact on rural communities in Nepal. While there have been previous studies on the Maoist armed struggle and its political implications, there are limited research on the specific effects of the Maoist's alternative practices, such as the establishment of communes, on the rural communities' socio-economic conditions, social dynamics, and sustainability. The study seeks to fill gaps in the existing research and provide valuable insights into the complexities of post-conflict rural development, the role of alternative practices in socio-economic transformation, and the potential lessons for sustainable social change beyond the context of the Maoist armed struggle. Additionally, the study might explore the factors that have contributed to the success or failure of these alternative practices and how they have influenced the communities' perception of the Maoist People's War. It could also investigate the potential implications of these alternative practices for future social and economic development in rural Nepal and whether there are any transferable lessons for other contexts facing similar challenges.

Overall, the dissertation seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of alternative practices established by Maoists and their impact on rural communities in Nepal. By addressing these rationales, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of post-conflict rural development, the potential for transformative social initiatives, and the implications for sustainable development in Nepal and beyond.

1.5 Organization of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation originates with the introductory section, encompassing the title and subject matter, accompanied by the presentation of issues and research questions in the initial chapter. It explores certain contemplations regarding the Maoist armed struggle and the formation of the Ajambari commune in Thabang, Rolpa, interwoven with historical context. Additionally, it encompasses the research accomplishments thus far, outlining preceding studies and providing concise explanations of the theories employed within the dissertation.

The second chapter encompasses literature review that initiates the conceptual exploration of collectivization and communes. It also emphasizes the historical applications of the communes in various contexts, along with pertinent theories. Additionally, it delves into the subjects of conscientization, social transformation, and social sustainability, establishing connections between collectivization and communes on a theoretical plane.

The third chapter is concerned with the methodology employed in this study, commencing with an introduction to the field. It explores the utilization of a qualitative research design within the dissertation, detailing the methods of sampling and various data collection tools such as semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews, and observations. Furthermore, it outlines the steps undertaken for data analysis.

The fourth chapter encompasses the initial phase of the commune's development, encompassing its foundational narrative and local vernaculars. It delves into the socio-economic context of the Ajambari commune's members, examining their backgrounds. Additionally, it examines the investments made and the prerequisites required for becoming a member of the commune while also identifying the pioneers who joined initially. The chapter further encompasses an exploration of the reasons behind the decisions of other individuals who chose not to join the commune.

Chapter five examines the communal activities taking place within the commune. This encompasses communal residence, shared culinary facilities, collective agricultural endeavors such as the truffle project and Bhango farming, and the establishment of cooperatives. The section on cooperatives delineates their variations, incorporating elements like the commune's hotel and shops. Moreover, the chapter delves into the strengthening of communal lifestyles, collective farming, and cooperative ventures within the commune's framework.

Chapter six delves into the social sustainability of the Ajambari commune, encompassing internal conflicts, economic challenges, and shifts in the dynamics among its members. It also examines the state of the commune subsequent to the Comprehensive Peace Accord, considering the initial members who departed. This section explores the ramifications, including the loss of possessions and future opportunities. Moreover, it investigates the current circumstances of those who exited the commune and the transformations within Thabang. The chapter additionally explores the potential for emulating the commune's model elsewhere.

Chapter seven encapsulates the findings of the dissertation and offers a conclusion regarding the attributes contributing to the social sustainability of the Ajambari commune. It establishes connections between theoretical frameworks and empirical observations. This section also concludes that there is a connection between the Ajambari commune and current patterns in collectivization.

Chapter Two

Debates on Collectivization and Social Sustainability

This chapter examines the existing research on collectivization, communes, communal farming, and cooperatives in the context of social sustainability, social transformation, and conscientization. Literature review plays a crucial role in this research by connecting the goals of the dissertation with the findings of previous studies, engaging with the existing body of knowledge, and identifying any gaps in the research (Creswell, 2009, p. 25). By reviewing the concepts of collectivization and commune, valuable insights are gained into the theories and historical significance of communes practiced in Thabang. Similarly, the review of conscientization, social transformation, and social sustainability establishes their connection to the Ajambari commune established in Thabang. This review provides a framework for assessing the importance of the study and a benchmark against which the results can be compared to other outcomes. The first part of this chapter examines various collectivization theories and empirical research, followed by an exploration of different types of communes. Subsequent sections establish connections between communes, collective living, collective agriculture, and cooperatives, focusing on conscientization, social transformation, and social sustainability.

2.1 Conceptualizing Collectivization and the Commune

Differentiating between collectivization and the commune can be challenging, but it is important to understand that collectivization encompasses a broader concept, while the commune represents its practical manifestation. While collectivization primarily concentrates on collective agricultural endeavors, a commune, on the other hand, commences with agricultural activities but encompasses a broader range of activities such as communal living, collective farming, collective child-rearing, and the operation of diverse cooperatives. In this discussion, I have initially addressed collectivization, followed by an exploration of the commune.

Collectivization involves the implementation or approach of carrying out activities collectively, such as economic production, distribution, and organizing people into groups. In this process, power is distributed or concentrated among the collective entity rather than being held individually. This expression means to attribute something to a group, opposed to an individual, and depicts how two or more people behave when they work cooperatively or

collectively. To think about collective conduct in this sense is to create or accept the will of a group (Blumer, 1957, p. 128). For Blumer, collectivization is spontaneous, unregulated, and unstructured. It is, however, structured collective conduct, as opposed to Blumer's definition of collective behavior, which includes the active crowd, expressive crowd, mass, and public. The concept that a group is a distinct entity with its own set of rights that are more important than the rights of individuals is then the basis for it (Griffin, 2003). Collectivization refers to any political or socio-economic theory or practice that encourages communal or state ownership and control of the means of production and distribution (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 100). It applies the strategy of collectivizing people with their lands (Fitzpatrick, 2010, p. 156). Thus, collectivization is the process of group actions being taken in social and economic endeavors like production, distribution, and consumption. It employs the technique of enforcing land collection on people (Fitzpatrick, 2010, p. 156).

The practices of the commune are an integral aspect of collectivization, and numerous investigations and examinations of communes can be found in disciplines such as sociology and related fields (Marx, 1872; Weber, 1947; Diamond, 1971; Rigby, 1974; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Gould, 1991). Marx perceives the commune as an integral element of the class struggle, representing a transformative society in which the proletariat, or the working class, takes control. Key characteristics of the commune include the abolition of private property, the adoption of collective ownership of the means of production, the provision of free education and healthcare, and the implementation of collective decision-making processes (Marx & Engels, 1872). To Weber, a communal relationship is a special kind of social interaction that is focused on the subjective social activity of feeling like you belong together, whether that feeling be conventional or emotive in the particular situation or its purest form (Weber, 1947, p. 136). Weber associated the commune with group social contact and activity, but Diamond saw the commune as an alternative institution for the pre-existing social order. To Diamond, the commune is a setting, an "alternative institution," that makes way for a more significant and indispensable social structure based on unique individuals and their relationships with one another (Diamond, 1971, p. 98).

More broadly, Abrams and McCulloch regard communal living as a timeless idea that dates back to the early days of communism, when mutuality was highly valued in communal life. After observing the commune movements in British society in 1972, they underlined that communes belong to a big family of societal life and are difficult to distinguish from other

members of that family (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p. 25).³ A sense of community, a sense of family, and a sense of institution are all found within the communes. They have many qualities of clubs, rejuvenation movements, therapeutic groups, masses, and cults. Composed of emotionally committed individuals, typically ranging from five to twenty-five members, communes prioritize shared living and engage in collective activities. They reside in a common housing or a network of houses, fostering a sense of togetherness and interaction. Enough resources enable the group to stay together, maintain cohesiveness among members, and resist external forces and internal strain.

2.1.1 Collectivization and People's Commune in France, Russia, and China

Collectivization, in the form of communes, was implemented in various communist countries including France, Russia, China, and several countries in Eastern Europe. I primarily focus on the examples of France, Russia, and China. The commune was at first widely popularized in France, known as the Paris commune, when a revolutionary working class took control in Paris on March 18. Parts of the city were controlled until May 28, 1971. The commune was a municipal administration made up of municipal councillors elected by universal suffrage in several wards of the town, which were accountable and removable for a certain time period. The majority of members were essentially working people or recognized working-class representatives. The commune created socialism, worker's cooperative enterprises across the city, and universal free education, declared the independence of Church and State, and passed resolutions on particular economic issues like the elimination of night labor for bakers (Gould, 1991, p. 718). Upon the closure of factories and the departure of their owners, the commune took steps to operate the factories through worker-owned cooperatives. They equalized the wages of all government employees and laborers. Furthermore, they nationalized church properties and liberated education from the church's influence, ensuring its accessibility to all without charge. The commune aimed to eliminate class property, which essentially turns the work of the many into the assets of very few. Its goal was to expropriate the expropriators (Marx, 1972, p. 59). The commune in Paris intended to change the ownership of the means of production, land, and capital, principally the means of enslavement and exploiting workers, and to free the bonded labor. While carrying out

³ Phillip Abrams (1933-1981) held a position as a sociology professor at the University of Durham starting in 1971. He also served as the editor of Sage journals for the past six years leading up to his death. Andrew McCulloch, on the other hand, worked as a senior research officer at the University of Bath. In their book titled "Communes, Sociology and Society" published in 1976, they delve into the concept of communes as alternative societies. The book explores the sociological theories that underpin the nature of social solidarity and cohesion, analyzing the implications of both successful and failed communal projects.

collective reforms, the Paris Commune collapsed within 72 days after the Communards were attacked and defeated by the previous state power.

The Soviet and Chinese regimes pursued collectivization primarily to organize the peasantry for revenue extraction and fund industrialization (Kochin, 1996, p. 724). Agricultural collectivization began in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution, but it gained momentum in January 1930, with about a quarter of grain-producing areas collected by the end of that year (Kenez, 1999, p. 85). Three types of collective farms were established: Toz, where peasants owned their property but shared machinery and tasks; Sovkhoz, state-owned and operated farms with regular wages; and Kolkhoz, communal land controlled by an elected committee. Kolkhoz farms required pooling land, equipment, and livestock, while families maintained private plots for personal use (Kokaisl, 2013, p. 124). Between 50 and 100 families were gathered to establish a *Kolkhoz*. Initially, the aim was to establish more Sovkhozes, but the Kolkhoz model with private plots became the preferred type during the 1930s collectivization process. The policy of forced mass collectivization was implemented, driven by the belief that collectivization would solve agricultural problems. Stuart (1972) contends that the collective farm was designed to serve as both a means of obtaining agricultural surplus and a means of exercising political control over the countryside at the same time.

Collectivization in Soviet Russia aimed to establish a socialist alternative to agriculture and that it would socialize the peasants to learn labor together and live in communal settings (Davies, 1980, p. 68). The government also thought that mechanization would allow bigger areas of land to be farmed more effectively and that mechanized agriculture would need fewer peasants to work the field, freeing up manpower for new factories. The state would easily obtain the grain it required for the cities and export it resulting in widespread support for collectivization among the urban underclass. Many people regarded land socialization as a critical component of the revolution and a path to alleviate poverty and establish an equitable society. The government stated that half of peasant households had been collectivized by the end of February 1930. However, this occurred against the backdrop of a significant reduction in grain output, partly due to the confusion and turbulence of collectivization (Millar, 1982, p. 65).

In China, the people's commune was founded in 1958 as an agglomeration of collective farms with control of all economic and social activities. It was viewed as a vital option at the time

of its introduction during the Mao period to create a scale of food production that could feed China's huge population. After 1949, the commune, as a core unit of China's communist system, reflected often sudden changes in political and economic policies. Collectivization in China was a ground-breaking concept and a potential solution to poverty (Crook, 1983, p. 66). It was assumed that China would be able to overcome those limitations, scale up agricultural production to feed its people, and even provide a surplus for industrial growth. The communes were to become multifunctional organizations for the direction of local administration and the control of economic and social activities after being solely involved in agricultural activity. In 1958, the commune system was established by uniting many settlements into a single administrative unit. Production teams, production brigades, and the commune itself were all organized into ever bigger groupings. Communes were created to fulfill a variety of functions, including providing rural communities with the opportunity to complete large water conservation projects, establish small manufacturers, and produce stuff that would significantly raise overall income, assist hospitals and schools, and care for services for the disabled and elderly within the community (Lippit, 1981, p. 19). By bringing multiple co-operatives together, the commune aimed to equalize revenue across cooperatives, allowing a cooperative community to gain from the prosperity of a cooperative community with exceptionally fertile land (Lin, 1990, p. 3). Collectivization was compulsory at first, which decreased productivity, and after 1962, production started to increase on a small scale. The establishment of communes and the process of collectivization brought about a transformation in farmland, leading to increased production. This was achieved through investments in irrigation, advancements in seed quality, infrastructure development, and the mobilization of additional labor from rural areas (Han, 2008, p. 39).

2.1.2 Kibbutz and Liberal Communes

In addition to the communes commonly associated with communist countries, various forms of communal living can be found in Europe and other nations. One well-known example is the Kibbutz in Israel. The kibbutz movement emerged in Israel in 1910 and primarily focused on collective farming and industrial endeavors. Its popularity surged during the 1930s and 1940s and has persisted to this day. Presently, there exist over 230 kibbutzim accommodating more than 100,000 members. The core objective of the kibbutzim is to establish an egalitarian society devoid of exploitation. These communal communities revolve around principles of shared living, where resources are pooled and cooperative work is conducted for the betterment of the entire community (Krausz, 1983; Near, 1997). While not strictly adhering

to the Marxist ideology, their way of life does share some similarities with communist practices. They have achieved self-sufficiency in agriculture and have also developed collective industries within the framework of a free market and capitalist system. Kibbutzim are characterized by collective living arrangements, shared kitchens, communal child-rearing, and a shared social life. Jobs are assigned on a rotational basis, and private ownership is nonexistent. Some kibbutzim operate as cooperatives, while others function as partnerships in terms of income and ownership of the means of production (Russell et. al, 2011; Abramitzky, 2018). Additionally, there are urban kibbutzim, which are settlements with a distinct focus on collective ownership and equality. In essence, kibbutzim resemble communes with a particular emphasis on collective ownership and egalitarian principles.

During the Medieval period, Europe had communes that not only participated in economic activities but also engaged in politics and state affairs. These communities formed bonds for mutual protection and assistance and were found in various countries, including Britain, Germany, France, Spain, and the USA (Moberg, 1979; Laffan, 1997; Davis & Anette, 2011). Today, we can observe different types of voluntary collective settlements in these regions. These include collective households, communal living, ecovillages, cooperative housing, and cohousing. These modern communal practices are characterized by their egalitarian nature, concern for human well-being, and lack of bureaucracy (Roberts, 1971). For instance, in Britain, there are communities like the Simon community in London, which focuses on social cooperation and tackling homelessness. In the USA, there were hippie communities in 1967 that aimed for free living and opposed capitalism.

Communes, as observed in Western countries, are categorized in diverse manners (Rigby, 1974; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976). Firstly, six sorts of the commune are identified by Rigby (1974, p.5). These are self-actualizing communes, communes of mutual assistance, activist communes, practical communes, therapeutic communes, and religious communes. Craft communes differ from mystical communes and group-marriage communes, as well as agricultural and social service communes. Members of a comprehensive commune share a common dwelling tightly connected to one another via clusters of residences, as well as the basic utilities and property that come with it. The group works together to make a living and distribute all profits equally; all gains would be available to all members; the group, as a circle of best friends, would serve all of its members, concentrate on the family's functions, and there would be substantial interaction between members. Children are indeed treated as members of the group overall, and everyone, including the children themselves, would have a

role in upbringing from an early age. The group's members have strong support for their lifestyle and mutuality instead of the separate ideology of the group. Within the group, decisions are taken with widespread participation and approval (Rigby, 1974, p. 38).

Abrams and McCulloch, on the other hand, distinguish between four sorts of communes: quasi-communes, utopian communes, purposive communes, and familial communes (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p.33). People gather in quasi-communes by chance, staying when it is convenient and moving in and out without plan or purpose, as the group is defined by a lack of deliberate form and structure over time and space. The utopian commune aspires to establish a social order that exists above and beyond its individual members and is based on their intended subjugation. Between the quasi-commune and the utopian commune lies the family commune. It is a proliferation of groups that share property, close relations, and a livelihood, but that resemble an extended family further than a utopian commune, a family of sisters and brothers without parents who establish friendship instead of groups bonded together by ideology, where the quality of life is perfectly defined (Abrams & McCulloch, 1976, p.36). A purposive commune is a crucial way, if not an essential requirement, for group members to achieve this goal. It is endowed with a concept that encompasses its members and may be used to lead, alter, and discipline in ways that the family commune cannot. Whenever economic, social, or political goals are created to support the group, they are in essence secondary to the collective's existence. In terms of sustainability, collective performance, and group members' well-being, the benefit of making purposes is more essential than persons.

2.2 Collectivization and Diverse Theoretical Perspectives

In this section, my primary focus is to provide a clear understanding of the theoretical aspects of collectivization initially. Subsequently, I will delve into an exploration of the commune in subsequent sections. There are diverse perspectives and ongoing discussions concerning the implementation of collectivization, which significantly affects the social, political, and economic domains of society (Volgyes, 1978; Katz & Golomb, 1983; Pryor, 1992, Bauerkamper, 2014; Sokolovsky, 2019). One important analysis of collectivization is the modernization theory, which takes the development of technologies and surplus production in agriculture (Volgyes, 1978). Using Yugoslavia as an instance, Volgyes demonstrated how the collectivization of agricultural farms was linked to the non-farm sector for technological support that sustained the collectivization as well as management expertise, which was also

crucial (Volgyes, 1978, p. 130). His argument is backed up by modernization theory, which emphasizes the importance of developing managerial expertise and technology to ensure the success and sustainability of collectivization.

In a similar line, Katz and Golomb (1983)⁴ analyze the collectivization through functional perspectives. They discussed three levels of integration: the individual level, the system level, and the supra-system level. The two main components of functional integration are (a) whether the person has a fulfilling job within the system and (b) whether being a part of the system results in a materially rewarding way of life (Katz & Golomb, 1983, p. 54). Socio-emotional integration, which also includes attraction to other group members and favorable conditioning to the social environment, is referred to as affective attachment to the system. Adopting behavioral norms that are compatible with the values of the system and are shared by others is referred to as normative integration. These common standards thus justify the behavior expectations of members. As a result, the individual doesn't feel compelled to comply with what he perceives as acceptable institutional demands. The movement's loftier objectives are referred to as ideological integration, which offers a more comprehensive defense of system standards (p. 55). Because of these linkages, the community is coherent and cohesive.

According to Bauerkamper's actor-based perspective on collectivization, the state's specialized agencies and their worldviews, mentalities, perceptions, interpretations, and appropriations to particular settings and conditions had an impact on individual and collective agency (Bauerkamper, 2014, p. 405)⁵. To Anthony Giddens, this is the appropriation of structures through social action that people and groups pursue in both space and time. Social action reproduces the structures that operate as resources for individual or group actions, giving subjects incentives and choices (Giddens, 1984, p. 16). Even though they failed to maintain their self-respect and individuality, collectivization opponents expressed their hatred and scorn in opposition to the official ideas of the communist overlords.

To assess the comprehensive activities and implications of collectivization, these three theories of collectivization are insufficient. Therefore, the Marxist theory is more appropriate

⁴ In their assessment, David Katz and Naftali Golomb have examined the Kibbutz as a social system. Their analysis is featured in the book "Sociology of the Kibbutz," which was edited by Karusz Earnest, a professor of sociology at Bar-Ilan University, an Israeli public research university.

⁵ Arnd Bauerkämper, a professor of Modern European History at Freie Universität Berlin, and Constantin Iordachi, a professor of History at the Central European University and head of the Department of History, have collaborated as editors on the book "The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements" published in 2014.

to grasp the entire process of collectivization since it commenced as a process of peasant socialization in rural Soviet Russia after 1917. Pryor (1992) argues that Marx and Engels postulated the transition to socialism from the abolition of private property in land and the application of all land to public purposes (p. 33). They did not, however, have a clear working premise for collectivization. Lenin concentrated on turning enormous tracts of land into producer cooperatives and collecting them to construct socialism. By nationalizing the land and allocating it to a group of peasants for collective production, the class conflict and the hegemony of the landlords in rural regions were ended. Pryor contends that Mao was less coercive than Stalin, who imposed collectivization through force (1992, p. 53). By examining the activities as a whole, Marxists discovered that collectivization was not only economic but also political and ideological.

Mentioning collectivization as an economic motive and political control over the peasantry (Mosley, 1958; Volgyes, 1980), Sokolovsky⁶ (2019) looks for fresh theoretical explanations for the collectivization that was performed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during 1929–89. She forwarded three models of collectivization as three types of peasant-state interaction during collectivization. First, collectivization as class conflict entails introducing socialism to the countryside and overthrowing the influence of the rural bourgeoisie. Second, collectivization as the management of economic resources entails getting an economic return on the assets used to change the agrarian system. Third, as a state forms through collectivization, opposing authority structures are dismantled, bringing rural areas under state control and allowing for the institutionalization and consolidation of such regimes.

Both Sokolovsky and Katz and Golomb discuss the perspectives on collectivization and the state's involvement in putting the policy into practice (Katz & Golomb, 1983; Sokolovsky, 2019). These also examine how individuals fit into particular group structures. However, they have fundamental differences. Sokolovsky argues that people were coercively integrated into collectivization in Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe to achieve socialism (Sokolovsky, 2019). However, Katz and Golomb assess that direct democracy, informality, face-to-face interaction, and more voluntarism were used to integrate individuals into the kibbutz (Katz & Golomb, 1983). Sokolovsky identifies structural viewpoints based on class conflict and the

⁶ Joan Sokolovsky is an academic faculty member employed by the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. His research aims to provide a theoretical understanding of the process of collectivization. Specifically, he examines the events that took place in Hungary and Poland between 1948 and 1962 as case studies for his investigation.

state's function in collectivization. Katz and Golomb use a voluntaristic approach to assist people's integration in and becoming part of a larger group.

2.2.1 Collectivization as an Ideology

Many believe collectivization to be an ideological issue, while others hold opposing views (Blumer, 1957; Rigby, 1974; Katz & Golomb, 1983; Economakis, 1991; Griffin, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 2010; Sokolovsky, 2019). In this respect, it is found that some collectivization is practiced as religious and the structural group of the democratic regime, such as the Kibbutz in Israel (Rigby, 1974; Katz & Golomb, 1983). Other forms of collectivization were controversially used under communist rule and considered to be a component of socialism (Sokolovsky, 2019). The first and most controversial collectivization was used in communist governments in the Soviet Union, East Europe, China, and South America between 1928 and 1990, where collectivization policies were employed to boost agricultural output as well as spread socialism to rural areas (Simic, 2018, p. 1024). It adhered to Marxist theory and made the supposition that collectivization brought an end to the class struggle and established a socialist state. It was also an economic policy that increased productivity by applying modern technology and collective effort to modernize the system (Economakis, 1991, p. 280). Economic progress was thought feasible since the means of production had been made collective, private landowners were no longer exploited, and assured that peasants were always satisfied and safeguarded. In the late 1920s, the process of collectivization was initiated in Soviet Russia as a means to merge the land holdings of small peasants into a unified entity under the New Economic Policy. This policy granted a group of individuals the legal ownership over a specific plot of land, enabling them to utilize it collectively and share in the profits derived from its usage (Blecher, 1986, p. 159). Additionally, it was viewed as an alternative approach to drive economic modernization, primarily through the implementation of collectivization, socialist industrialization, and urbanization (Bauerkämper & Iordachi, 2014, p. 20).

In another ideology, collectivization refers to a group of entrepreneurs and socioeconomic statuses that utilize shared resources, compete with capitalism, and conduct economic transactions (Ben-Rafael, 1983, p. 196). A strictly egalitarian environment can be created because of its ideology of shared ownership of the means of production, direct democracy, and collective responsibility for cultural life, education, and consumption. Thus, members participate in both personal and institutional roles where decisions are collectively made but

individual interests are also taken into account. According to Rigby (1974), collectivization is a social movement inside the same social structure that aims to establish a new social order based on an idealistic vision of society and an experimental form after an individual feels alienated and unsatisfied with the existing social order. Collectivization must therefore be initiated by a collective of individuals, much like in Israel's Kibbutz or Britain's religious communes, rather than at the level of the state. The adherents of collectivization avoid conflict with the state apparatus and instead work to improve their situation within the democratic and existing economic systems.

For some scholars, collectivization is not only ideology; it is a practice of searching for an alternative process to sustain the everyday life of people (Blumer, 1957; Griffin, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 2010). Blumer attributes collectivization something to a group as opposed to an individual and depicts how two or more people behave when they work cooperatively or collectively (Blumer, 1957, p.128)⁷. To think about collective conduct in this sense is to create or accept the will of the group. For Blumer, collectivization is spontaneous, unregulated, and unstructured. It is, however, structured collective conduct, as opposed to Blumer's definition of collective behavior, which includes the active crowd, expressive crowd, mass, and public (Griffin, 2003). Griffin thinks that a group, which is a separate entity with its own set of rights and more significant than those of individuals is the foundation for it. Moreover, collectivization is the process of group actions being taken in social and economic endeavors like production, distribution, and consumption. It employs the technique of enforcing land collection on people (Fitzpatrick, 2010, p. 156).

Although several democratic countries have used a modest amount of collectivization, in my opinion, collectivization is an ideological and economic notion in which a group of people interact to find solutions to their problems. The most contentious and widely used in communist regimes had academics from several disciplines interested. Functionalist viewpoints, agency-based theory, structural theory, and Marxist perspectives can all be used to investigate collectivization. Since the Marxist viewpoint emphasizes changing the mode of production to completely reconstruct the economic system and social structure, I like to embrace it as the hope of the members of the collectivization to address their current problems with employment, education, and daily needs. As a new embryo of socialism and

⁷ Herbert George Blumer (1900-1987), a sociologist from the United States, was a proponent of symbolic interactionism, who believes that social reality is constructed through both individual and collective actions.

ideology, collectivization was used by Maoists in Nepal in their communes, and many people joined these communes.

2.2.2 Collectivization, Social Sustainability and De-collectivization:

De-collectivization⁸ is the reverse of collectivization and has some societal consequences connected to the three collectivization types. Collectivization is not sustained when the class struggle is not adequately pursued, isolated poor peasants support the cooperative movement, and benefits just a higher and middle class of people (Sokolovsky, 2019, p. 87). In a similar vein, the interruption of agricultural production and the inferior performance of community farms compared to private holdings were good enough reasons to terminate the collectivization campaign. Thirdly, when there is a low quality of the peasant-state connection, organizational weakness and ideological uncertainty result in the paralysis of the government's hold in rural areas, which results in de-collectivization (Sokolovsky, 2019, p. 92). Hungary had a successful program from 1956 to 1990 as forced collectivization, while Poland's effort at collectivization from 1947 to 1955 failed. The program was brought to an end during the political crisis of 1956 in Poland when over 90 percent of all existing cooperatives dissolved.

From the functionalist perspective, collectivization cannot be sustained when there is a lack of integration within the larger structure (Katz & Golomb, 1983). Traditional and interpersonal interactions are replaced as the foundation of social organization by the expansion of Weberian bureaucracy with complex role structures. The maintenance and advancement of society depend on these universalistic principles and roles. It is not possible to continue substituting the universalistic norms and roles inside the Kibbutz with particularistic relationships. The informal social structure, voluntarism, and direct democracy that the Kibbutz places more emphasis on are insufficient to maintain the universalistic trends of a sizable, developing industrial society. It either witnesses a drop in membership or loses its unique identity as a utopian community.

The study of decollectivization was profound after the 1980s when forceful collectivization failed and decreased productivity leading to famine in 1965 in China. The implementation of collectivization in Soviet Russia resulted in a negative experience, with the outbreak of

⁸ Decollectivization is the dissolution of centrally planned economies and collective endeavors, accompanied by the redistribution of land and agricultural resources to smaller farming units or individual farmers. While minor reforms were introduced by Nikita Khrushchev in the late 1950s and early 1960s, significant de-collectivization took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

famine occurring in parts of Ukraine in the spring of 1932. This was due to the lack of agricultural expertise and effective organization of collectives. Despite a temporary relief following the harvest of 1932, the famine expanded to other regions. A famine struck the Soviet Union from late 1932 until 1934, killing millions of peasants. After 1935, grain output began to steadily improve. Decollectivization in Russia began in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s as a result of the ongoing issue of resource exploitation and state subsidies (Kochin, 1996, p. 732). And, the de-collectivization process began in 1978 in China as a result of the production's ongoing stagnation, insufficient allocation of resources, low labor motivations, and the farmers' growing discontent (Unger, 1985, p. 589). To Unger, de-collectivization was required since collectivization failed to raise peasants' living standards and forced them to labor long hours to produce low-cost grain for the state. He also admits that de-collectivization allowed peasants to diversify into non-agricultural activities and specialize in more expensive crops. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that de-collectivization had political as well as economic goals. Collectivization continued to be dependent on resources that the state redistributed through substantially subsidized credits and direct subsidies, which made it difficult for it to continue. By evaluating de-collectivization, I gain insight into the factors that led to the unsustainable nature of collectivization over an extended period.

2.3 Diverse Perspectives on the Commune

In this section, I thoroughly examine and analyze the diverse perspectives on the commune, which constitutes an integral aspect of the collectivization process. Firstly, Wesson explores the radical and Marxist view of how a commune is organized (Wesson, 1963)⁹. The communes are more radical, anti-property ownership, and in favor of collective living and surpass the concept of individual ownership. Marx and Engels placed greater emphasis on workers rather than peasants, while Lenin implemented the collectivization of rural peasants, granting more autonomy (Wesson, 1963, p. 7). Thus, it took a little more than a year to implement collectivization in Soviet Russia. Commune seeks to improve the agricultural techniques and cooperate with state authorities in the class struggle (Wesson, 1963, p. 105). As a militant proletarian revolutionary organization, the commune excluded all non-proletarians and admitted freely to all the poor and underprivileged. Communes were

⁹ Robert Wesson was a professor of political science emeritus at the University of California, Santa Barbara since 1984, and later served as a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution. His extensive research mainly revolves around the Soviet government and encompasses a broader scope of comparative politics.

political instruments which party members were involved and managed the commune and members were party sympathizers. The Party focused on common production, but the commune placed more emphasis on collective consumption.

Beyond the Marxist perspective, Wesson has provided a guide to the key moments in the creation of the commune, including a political scientist's "Utopian" institution, a sociologist's social organization experiment, and an economist's collective form of agriculture (Wesson, 1963). He introduces several communities in Europe and America, which shows that communes are practiced in the Western world before communist regimes for the satisfaction of personal needs. Moreover, Rigby (1974)¹⁰ has taken commune as social change within the existing social order from those who are alienated and hoped to establish a utopia. It is not a total class struggle, but youths and people of the middle class who are dissatisfied with their life in the conventional society have joined the commune for brotherhood, equalitarian, and a new way of life. This is not agricultural collectivization as Wesson (1963) has discussed. It is argued that the operation of a commune has largely been determined by norms and standards that have been rationalized in so far as they have been determined solely by the functional requirements of the institution as a whole. A member has lost traditional sources of personal identity and self-affirmation that have accompanied the development of large-scale, hierarchically organized, institutions of economic, political, and social life (Rigby, 1974, p.6).

Additionally, Rigby examines the formal commune movement in contemporary Britain, its members, the community activities in which they participate, and the worldview that motivates such activities (Rigby, 1974). He argues that increasing numbers of middle-class youth who are open to joining the commune movement are struggling with identity issues, an inability to successfully define oneself in an environment of insufficient symbolism, and a situation that the people are experiencing as a result of factors like the quickening pace of technologically induced social change and the disappearance of traditional sources of personal identity. Like Peter Berger, he offers a thorough theoretical explanation of the commune that incorporates elements of Schutzian phenomenology and Marxist philosophy (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Communes are the establishment of communities as beneficial alternatives to the existing order that, for the majority of contemporary commune members,

¹⁰ Andrew Rigby, currently serving as Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies at Coventry University in the UK, has an esteemed background as a sociology lecturer at the University of Aberdeen. His research focuses on the examination of the formal commune movement within modern-day Britain.

involves a belief in the viability and desirability of non-violent social change through exemplary action based on the strength of love and personal example, just as it did for previous generations.

2.3.1 Social Sustainability of the Commune

Ensuring social sustainability emerges as the foremost concern for the continued existence and identity of a commune. The concept of social sustainability within a commune bears resemblance to the social sustainability of collectivization. Nonetheless, I have briefly touched upon the topic of commune practices in this context. Following the Paris Commune's defeat, Marx's perspective became pivotal in terms of sustainability, suggesting that the working class could simply take control of the existing state apparatus and utilize it for their purposes, without necessarily dismantling it entirely. Importantly, they did not have a pre-established plan for sustaining the commune, and they approached this task with relative ease. To Marx, the merely repressive character of state authority emerges in stronger and bolder relief after each revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle (Marx & Engels, 1972). Marx suggests that due to the significant advancements in modern industry since 1848 and the improved organization of the working class and the Paris Commune where they held political power for the first time, some aspects of the program have become outdated.

Besides Marxists, other academics have placed varying emphasis on social sustainability for the existence and support of its members (Wesson, 1963; Regby, 1974). Production and economic activity alone are insufficient for the commune to survive; it also has to sustain the state and its ideology (Wesson, 1963). It should minimize the consumption and need to feed the city population. Based on the study of Hungary, coercion is not suitable to continue to the commune. For Regby, if the essential physical and material necessities are met, the commune, which represents an alternative to the current social order, can endure (Regby, 1974, p. 301). Realistic alternatives to the institutions that carry out the role should be offered. To operate as beacon lights for the new age and to promote self-development in constructive harmony with others and one's environment, communes that provide bases, zones of freedom, and happiness are sustained as a constant challenge to the current way of life (p. 302). The characteristics of a commune that can last for a long time include the ideals of cooperation, levels of cooperation and mutual aid, individual autonomy, and participatory democracy. Regby (1974) argues that the social system can persist only as long as its

members continue to take for granted without question the institutions, roles, and identities that continue the system. The social sustainability of the commune as a whole is intricately tied to the social sustainability of communal living, collective farming, and cooperatives.

Communal living is a major feature of a commune where members are provided with housing, food, clothing, and childcare collectively (Wesson, 1962; Lebina, 1999; Attwood, 2012; Zavisca, 2012; Harris, 2013). Communal living loses its sustainability when it fails to cultivate a sense of community, affordability, happiness, and security, while also failing to maintain community unity and achieve common objectives (Gavron, 2000; Hilder et al., 2018). The presence of class divisions plays a crucial role in the decline of communal living, as it hampers the provision of essential freedoms and other basic necessities. Second, the social sustainability of community farming relies on production, organization, and management, with an emphasis on intensive input (Stuart, 1972). The continuation of collective farming relies on a mix of centralized and decentralized decision-making, contributing to the advancement of industrialization within the confines of a socialist economic system. Moreover, Swain (1985) suggests that the sustainability of collective farming relies on the integration of family labor from small agricultural plots with the social wage labor of the collective farming system, establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between these labor forces. Third, cooperatives sustain through fostering the creative and solidarity-based principles that are the foundation of any socialist initiative, as well as democratic skills and attitudes, without ignoring economic factors (Harnecker, 2013). To maintain and accomplish its communal goal, cooperatives must uphold cooperative values, including self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity (Rajasekhar, 2020, p. 32).

2.3.2 Communes during Maoist Armed Struggle in Nepal

Nepal has various traditions of collective activities such as *Kippat* and *Guthi*. The *Kippat* system was a type of communal land ownership practiced by ethnic groups such as Rai, Limbu, Danuwars, and Sunuwars (Caplan, 2013; Regmi, 1999a). It existed during the time of the Sen Kings and persisted even after the Gorkali conquest of eastern Nepal in 1774. These lands were not individually registered and instead were held collectively. The *Kippat* landownership was closely tied to traditional occupations. Members of the *Kippat*-owning community had the right to cultivate and consume crops like rice and grains on this land. The transfer of these lands was limited to other community members or future generations, and

selling the land was strictly prohibited. In 1962, the Nepal government abolished the *Kipat* system through a land reform policy. Besides, the *Guthi* system, which has been prevalent in Nepal since the Lichchabi period, is a form of collective social organization (Regmi, 1999a; Sharma, 2015). It continues to be practiced, particularly among the Newar caste. Within the *Guthi* system, members come together to engage in various collective activities such as celebrating religious festivals, conducting death rituals, maintenance of temples, performing worship ceremonies, playing traditional instruments, and promoting skills in wood and metal arts. Additionally, the *Guthi* system includes a distinct tradition related to land ownership. *Guthi* land is acquired by an individual or a member and is utilized for the functioning and operation of monasteries. The communes established by the Maoists are different from these traditional practices.

The Maoist Party initiated the People's War in 1996 in Nepal intending to establish socialism. As the conflict between the Maoists and the established government escalated, the Maoists asserted their control over approximately two-thirds of the territory by 2004 (CPNM, 1998, p. 421). Furthermore, they established base areas in the western part of Nepal where they exercised significant authority. In these regions, they established some communes as the fundamental socialist units by collectivizing their members and the common people. Maoists practiced collectivization in communes in the western part of Nepal during their armed struggle as a legacy of collectivization practiced in Russia and China. However, few studies concentrate on the micro-level analysis of Maoist activities in the commune and collectivization economic foundations (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2010; Zharkevich, 2019). Lecomte-Tilouine¹¹ visited first at Deurali village, Gulmi district, in the hills of mid-western Nepal, which was thought to be a model hamlet for Maoists through collectivization and the commune in Thabang. In her research, Lecomte-Tilouine (2010, p. 121) discovered that collectivization efforts were undertaken in various areas such as road construction, reservoirs, and other infrastructure projects. Maoist cadres and members collaborated in cultivating crops for families with fewer members, and they also attempted to establish a cattle herd. However, the residents of Deurali declined the proposal due to a lack of sufficient pasture land. The Maoists further sought to establish a commune in Deurali, but this plan was halted due to limitations in available communal arable land. Additionally, they aimed to set up a

¹¹ Marie Lecomte-Tilouine is a French scholar who lived in Deurali village for two years between 1986 and 1989 and even continued her research after starting the Maoist People's War in 2005.

common factory for craftsmen like blacksmiths and tailors, but local artisans opposed the idea out of fear of losing control over their tools and machinery.

Lecomte-Tilouine identifies the Maoist commune as part of the Maoist armed struggle's Cultural Revolution, in which the insurgents strove to build a war economy without profit (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2010, p. 118). Maoists planned to establish communes or community manufacturing units in the base region as the collective production units. Maoists believed that by abolishing the parcelled model of production, reorganizing the fields, and employing scientific agricultural methods, they had revolutionized farming. Lecomte-Tilouine discovered that communes were seen as new and experimental ideas, serving as role models despite their seemingly small size and number. Many of these communes were founded on land taken from the state or the so-called exploiters by the Maoists. Lecomte-Tilouine mentioned briefly the Balidan People's commune in Pvang, Rukum, and the Ajambari People's commune in Thabang, Rolpa. The Balidan People's commune consisted of 10 families, with 18 individuals working full-time for the party, including seven in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and eleven in the political organization. The Ajambari commune in Thabang consisted of 34 individuals, with 22 of them being young people. These individuals belonged to seven Magar families and had connections to the families of martyrs.

Aside from the income from the land ownership, the commune possessed some woodlands and vegetable gardens, as well as a shop (the Self-Sacrifice Fancy store), an inn (the Self-Sacrifice Hotel) with a total turnover of 5,000 rupees per month), and a tailor's shop. In Ghartigaun, Rolpa, co-operatives created during the Maoist armed struggle opened a hotel (i.e., a dining place). The Martyrs' family, the full-time activists' family, and the PLA's family all borrowed money from the cooperative bank and invested it in the hotel. It provided a dinner at a lower cost than other hotels would provide. Marie Lecomte discovered that the commune was in horrible condition in 2004 (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2010, p. 120). The stables were home to all of the inhabitants, lacked enough clothes and blankets, and they only had 10 dishes to eat from, which they shared. The commune was in a difficult condition since it lacked sufficient workers.

Differently, Zharkevich¹² (2019, p. 149) describes the day-to-day activities of a commune in Thabang whose members shared issues, tasks, and emotions. Joining the commune during the war was not solely motivated by ideology; rather, it made it easier to live together, easier to acquire a livelihood, and easier to work in fields. In contrast to the risk of living in a hamlet, people felt comfortable in a commune and found it easier to hide in the jungle in groups in wartime. Following the Maoist People's War, members were found supportive of one another and retained community assets and projects, as they had a sense of unity. After the war, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist saw several splits that damaged communal cohesion because some members ended up in different political factions (Zharkevich, 2019, p. 150). There was increasing economic inequality within the commune as a result of the fact that many people were still required to rely on subsistence farming; some commune members received state funds as compensation for the families of martyrs, while others were admitted into the new Nepalese Army, and one was given a prestigious position in outside employment. Since only selected members received protection from the center, there was considerable discrimination among the members. Members felt that there was no longer anything to share, no shared life trajectories, no shared resources, and certainly no shared aim to seek.

Both Lecomte-endeavor Tilouine's research and analysis of Zharkevich are only at the mapping level since it has some examples of Maoist collectivization during the armed struggle. The ethnographic portraits of a commune without sociological or social sustainability analysis were taken. It still has to be objectively studied for its long-term viability and people's perceptions of it through sociological analysis. The Maoist communes necessitate examination through the lens of conscientization, social transformation, and social sustainability. Since these perspectives have not been adequately explored, I have addressed these concepts in the subsequent sections and connected them to the Ajamabri commune.

2.4 Conscientization: Questioning the Existing Social Order

To comprehend how the residents of Thabang were motivated to participate in the commune and make changes to their way of life, it is essential to grasp the process of conscientization¹³

¹² Dr. Ina Zharkevich, an anthropologist and a lecturer at the University of Oxford, has conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the mid-Western hills of Nepal. This specific area carries great significance as it served as the central territory for the Maoist armed struggle during the civil war spanning from 1996 to 2006.

¹³ The word "conscientization" has no direct translation in the English language. In Portuguese, "conscientização" refers to the process of gaining awareness or becoming conscious of something. The

The notion of conscientization was initially defined by Freire, who linked it to social sciences, participatory forms of practice, and the concept of freedom as an everyday work that could be carried out by anyone (Freire, 1972; Montero, 2009; Armitage, 2013; Liu, 2014). Freire's theory of education¹⁴ aims to empower and support marginalized individuals in capitalist societies (Freire, 1972). It emphasizes elevating consciousness, which involves acknowledging oppression and taking responsibility for overcoming it. Freire critiques oppression and advocates for liberation by merging political and educational philosophy. Conscientization, a key aspect of this theory, enables individuals to engage in transformative assessment practices, develop critical awareness, and take the initiative to create new realities (Freire, 1972, p. 51). It allows people to emancipate themselves and take control of their own situations by understanding their capacity for change.

Conscientization is not only a subjective matter; it is also objective in the sense that it is the process used in praxis, the connection between theory and practice, and also the reflection of social relationships. Overall, conscientization is both a subjective and objective process in the sense that the subject obtains the ability to critically assess social reality and put that knowledge into practice, a dialectical unity that combines subject and object establishes a relationship between theory and practice and encourages reflection of social interaction (Freire, 1972). To Montero, conscientization develops, strengthens, and changes consciousness (Montero, 2009, p. 72). It is constructed through praxis, which alters people's thinking, generates critical knowledge about social realities, and applies that knowledge in their everyday life. As a result, conscientization creates new knowledge and adds meaning to a people's time and space position in society.

Liu reviews the radical, critical, and liberating pedagogical theoretical discourse of Freire (Liu, 2014). He looks into the notion of critical thinking and crucial aspects of conscientization. Additionally, he draws attention to the issues of using conscientization as a pure strategy in actual educational contexts. Oppression arises from the control of the ruling class or those dominating groups in power, just like other kinds of dehumanization including exploitation, alienation, authoritarianism, and corruption. Therefore, it is thought that revolution, or a fundamental alteration of the dominant social institutions, is the only way to

Portuguese word "consciência" can be translated to English as consciousness or awareness. In this context, the process itself is referred to as "conscientization" (Guzzo, 2014, p. 300).

¹⁴ Paulo Freire, a prominent Brazilian Marxist, educator, and philosopher, played a significant role as a key proponent of critical pedagogy. His renowned publication, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is widely regarded as a fundamental text within the critical pedagogy movement. Notably, according to Google Scholar, it ranked as the third most cited book in the social sciences as of 2016, further highlighting its impact and influence.

end oppression. Humanization and dehumanization are dialectically coupled. According to this interpretation, dehumanization stops a person from engaging in praxis by either reducing the range of options available to them or by impeding their capacity for critical thought. It broadly incorporates conscientization with the development of conscience.

2.4.1 Key Elements of Conscientization

The process of conscientization, according to Freire (1972), has three phases. The first is magical consciousness, in which people explain their life's circumstances from the perspective of powers and forces outside their influence and comprehension. The second level is naive consciousness, in which individuals adopt the values, laws, and social order that they find themselves in while having an imperfect comprehension of their lived circumstances. The third phase is critical consciousness, or consciousness, in which people begin to question the values, norms, and beliefs that have been handed down to them by those who subjugate, have power, and dominate them. As a result, conscientization is more than just an individual process; it also takes place in the framework of the collective, in mutually beneficial horizontal interactions. Conscientization brings conceptions of reflexivity to Gajardo (1991, p. 40), who claims that a conscientized person is the focus of a change process, critical, reflective, and competent of comprehending his or her world to modify it.

Conscientization, as defined by Freire, involves a dialogical process and critical reflection, leading to critical pedagogy (1972, p. 47). The dialogue through which individuals engage with current realities and explore fresh insights to change them is the most crucial thing to examine. The silence that accepts unfair events is dispelled through dialogue. Learning is rooted in praxis, a combination of reflective analysis and action that goes beyond intellectual discovery and political engagement. Reflective practice requires individuals to evaluate their personal and professional actions, as well as their impact on society and interactions with others (Bolton, 2001). The conscientizing process encompasses action, comprehension, critical consciousness, empowerment, capacity building, participation, knowledge generation, and independent decision-making.

Barreiro's conscientization process is divided into four parts (Barreiro, 1986). The realization of the human being and the dedication to its ramifications, which leads to the humanization of individuals, is the first stage. The conquering of transitive-critical consciousness as part of a gradual scale of linked discoveries is the second phase. This stage is marked by knowledge of oppression and the ability to effect change, as well as a willingness to engage in dialogue.

The third step is the transformation from oppressed to oppressor awareness. The individual emphasizes the unfair and divisive nature of oppression in this statement. The ultimate stage is the transformation from oppressed existence to oppressed consciousness, which leads to freedom.

Moreover, the process of conscientization commences when individuals actively engage and participate, involving discussions and reflections as integral parts of the action-reflection-action sequence (Montero, 2009, p. 78). Additionally, conscientization is a dynamic process linked to de-habituation¹⁵, de-naturalization¹⁶, and de-ideologization¹⁷ which problematize the established habits and knowledge that have been taken for granted without prior questioning or consideration, simply because they were perceived as the accepted norms or the way things are supposed to be. Conscientization begins with the problematization of what already exists, allowing new perspectives, consciousness, insight, aspiration, and action to create new realities. Problematization, according to Montero (2009, p. 79), causes dispute, doubts, and controversy because it initiates a process of awareness mobilization that leads to conscientization, causing changes in the ways of interpreting particular occurrences. In comparison to regular life processes, people feel compelled to act in different ways, critically examining the notions, beliefs, practices, and their social bases and linkages.

2.4.2 Conscientization: A Catalyst for Social Transformation

The process of conscientization plays a crucial role in driving and facilitating the transformation of society (Freire, 1972; Chan, 2010; Guzzo, 2014). To Freire, conscientization is a strategy for achieving radical social change in areas like economics, human relations, property, the right to employment, land, education, and health, as well as against the reactionary position that seeks to stop history and uphold an unjust socioeconomic and cultural order (Freire, 1998, p. 99). To Chan, social transformation is one of the main aims of conscientization, and via it, oppressed people critically search for solutions to their oppression and, more significantly, inspire one another to deal with it (Chan, 2010, p. 40). It

¹⁵ Dehabituation is the process of restoring a behavioral response to a familiar stimulus that had previously become habituated by introducing an external stimulus that contrasts with the original stimulus (Steiner & Barry, 2014).

¹⁶Denaturalization involves questioning and challenging commonly accepted and normalized ways of comprehending and interpreting everyday life and the events that occur within it. It challenges the notion of normal or logical in daily life which results in difficulties, and unfairness for individuals (Montero, 2009, p. 78).

¹⁷ Deideologization involves questioning and rejecting dominant ideologies that justify and normalize social oppression. By exposing the socially constructed interpretations and meanings of people's daily lives, it aims to challenge and dismantle the hegemonic influence of these ideologies (Montero, 2009, p. 78).

aims to recognize and tackle social, political, and economic inequalities and conflicts by promoting awareness and taking action. It provides a practical solution to the widespread sense of hopelessness and similar cultural issues, empowering marginalized groups to achieve social transformation.

Conscientization, which is regarded as the collective action of people for social reform, refers to the oppressed people and their freedom from oppression and the existing system. The relationship between an individual and a collective, which may be repressive or freeing, is examined by Freire. An individual may question an individual or a collective, turn factional, and support repressive people or groups, or come together with others through deliberate negotiation to work for social change (Freire, 1972). Conscientization is the process through which oppressed people are liberated from oppression and the existing system is critically analyzed and questioned. Comparably, collectivization is the process of organized collective actions against markets and the capitalist mode of production. People so participate in collectivization when they are conscientized. Conscientization, which is the process of critically analyzing the reality of the existing and defining social transformation through alternatives and human emancipation through oppression, is the basis of collectivization.

Guzzo illustrates how conscientious objection may be used to effect political change and social transformation (Guzzo, 2014). Conscientization, for him, has a specific value in terms of the evolution of historical subjects, whereby people who were able to establish their lives without being oppressed and exploited were able to self-organize and fight for their rights. It's a process that includes class consciousness, and it's often tough to recognize the ideology that pervades daily life. Individuals who are driven by inquiry, involvement, and dedication may take ownership of reality through critical consciousness and active participation, which refers to social, cultural, economic, and political activities. Conscious people can take control of their world and change it. To transform reality, it is required to build a conscientization process. It supports the transformation of reality and creates well-being. This task must start with everyone participating in the particular skill and political action being aware of it.

Freire's understanding of consciousness incorporates elements like political analysis, limit conditions, belief systems, and praxis. Consciousness, for Freire, involves recognizing and comprehending the illusions and ideas that perpetuate the dominant system, with a focus on grasping truth and critically understanding oppression (Freire, 1972). Those who become

cognitively aware, face challenges within a dialectical dilemma, with some seeking to maintain existing structures while others aim to modify them. It is essential to critique existing dynamics, uncover reality, and de-ideologize to realize human capacity and liberate oneself from affliction, oppression, and exploitation (Guzzo, 2014). Through the conscientization process, individuals perceive, acknowledge, comprehend, and respond to internalized oppression, leading to their liberation. Active participation in reality is crucial for this ongoing process, bringing about significant changes in people's lives. Conscientization aims to bring social transformation by eliminating oppression and emancipating human beings from exploitation.

2.5 Social Transformation in a Broader Spectrum

The commune possesses characteristics related to social transformation that are essential for connecting conscientization with the concept of social transformation and social sustainability. In this segment, I have evaluated different viewpoints, components, and fundamental aspects of social transformation, providing insights into the social changes pursued by the commune. In sociology, social transformation is a contentious issue, and many academics conflate the phrases social transformation and social change (Sztompka, 1993; Haferkamp & Smelser, 1992), while others characterize social transformation as a fundamental shift in society and social change as gradual or incremental adjustments (Castles, 2001; Khondker & Schuerkens, 2014; Jacobs, 2021). The fact that society changes, grows, develops, and evolves constantly is a basic element of it. Change is persistent in all fields and at all levels, while the pace of change is different. Science, art, education, morality, religion, the economy, politics, family life, and even the interior parts of our existence are all altered (Lenski & Linski, 1974, p. 3). The dynamics of social interaction, group formation, minorities deviating from established standards, conflict initiation and resolution, and collective behavior fluctuations are all discussed in the literature on social transformation.

There are several aspects through which social change may be pinpointed. First and foremost, social change is defined as a change that occurs within or encompasses the social system. The term "system" refers to a complex whole made up of several pieces linked by various interrelations and isolated from the outside world by a boundary (Parson, 1951, p. 17). Systemic thinking may be applied to fundamentally different parts of society, such as the economic, political, and cultural. Accordingly, from the perspective of system analysts such as Parsons, the concept is nevertheless generalized but also proved to be broadly applicable.

Based on structural functionalism, social change serves as the foundation for the difference and modification of a system at distinct temporal points that are not generally reoccurring (Hawley, 1978, p. 787).

Some explanations of social transformation illustrate how society transforms from a micro to a macro level and how individual actor conduct affects social structure (Macionis, 1987; Persell, 1987; Ritzer et al., 1987; Farley, 1990). According to Macionis (1987), social change is the evolution of society's organization, concentrating on patterns of thinking and action across time. At the macro-level, the entire human society can be considered a system; at the mezzo-level, nation-states and provincial political or military alliances can be considered systems; and at the micro-level, local communities, institutions, enterprises, families, or friendship spheres can be considered small systems. When considering social change, Persell (1987) places a strong focus on the transformation or alteration of how society is organized. Similarly, variety in social relationships among people, groups, organizations, cultures, and societies is a manifestation of social change (Ritzer et al., 1987). However, Farley (1990) described social transformation as changes in behavior, patterns, social relationships, institutions, and social structures across time.

Besides the above arguments, Sztompka (1993)¹⁸ argues that the study of social change is central to sociology, tracing back to the transition from traditional to modern society in the nineteenth century. At present, there is a profound transition from modernity to emerging forms of social life known as 'post-modernity'. Structural change is considered the most significant aspect of social change, as it impacts society as a whole. Instead of focusing on fragmented changes, structural reforms demonstrate how society progresses. The term "social processes" is crucial for understanding the integrated sequence of social development and change, encompassing cognitive and behavioral patterns over time (Sztompka, 1993, p. 6).

Moreover, Castles emphasizes the interconnection of various entities, such as national societies, local groups, and individuals, as the driving force behind societal change (Castles, 2001, p. 14). This perspective acknowledges the global interconnectedness and its implications at regional, national, and local levels. On the other hand, Haas et al. (2020) criticize the concept of development and propose a meta-theoretical framework called social

¹⁸ Piotr Sztompka, a sociology professor at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, has held visiting professor positions at both the University of California, Los Angeles, and Columbia University in New York City. His primary sociological areas of focus include trust as a social phenomenon, social change, and more recently, visual sociology.

transformation to study significant changes. They define social transformation as a fundamental reorganization of societies and the distribution of resources, encompassing political, economic, technological, demographic, and cultural dimensions. They explore how the "modern transformation" has shaped societies globally, despite unique manifestations across different societies and periods.

Sztompka (1993) and Haas et al. (2020) embody a comprehensive assessment of social transformation, including modernization and industrialization as the process of social transformation. They concur that structural change, as well as changes in politics, the economy, and technology, are the key elements of social transformation. However, Sztompka (1993) focuses on the process and types of social transformation, while Haas et al. (2020) make an effort to take contemporary changes like modernization and globalization into account. To account for the variation in its concrete expressions through time, variances, and exceptions, the social transformation demands fresh theories and a new framework (Haas et al., 2020, p. 14). Social transformation becomes a virtually unstoppable force once the processes are in motion and deep, fundamental, interlocking changes begin to occur across all dimensions of social change and start to reinforce one another, despite variations and fluctuations, temporary setbacks, and ups and downs.

The level at which social transformation occurs is a highly debated topic in sociology. Garry Jacobs argues that social transformation is a subsequent state in the sequence and an exceptional occurrence that aims to accelerate social progress deliberately, rather than relying on natural evolutionary processes (Jacobs, 2021, p. 155). He illustrates how social transformation can occur at the grassroots level through the actions of local leaders, gaining attention and momentum to be adopted on a larger scale. Jacobs identifies common characteristics of effective social transformation, including a universally recognized purpose, a viable plan or mechanism for accelerating the process, a shift in organizational structures, and a social process that enables rapid transmission and adaptation by society. He highlights India's Green Revolution as an example of societal transformation in agricultural regions, leading to food self-sufficiency and the elimination of external food aid.

2.5.1 Figuration as Social Transformation

Elias has described social transformation differently than other scholars. He associates social transformation with structural changes and the intensification of social inter-dependencies;

yet, it is figurational¹⁹ shift in the role of individual actors who retain their identity (Elias, 1978). The rise of state monopoly powers, civilizing behaviour, and the growth of human interconnection, according to Elias, are the three primary components of social transformation. The struggle and competition for political and physical dominance have altered the world's social and economic environment. Human behavior, bodily functions, and social attitudes change as a result of the civilization process and the monopolization of political and coercive power, transforming the warrior into a civilized person capable of self-control (Elias, 1994). Norms, values, emotions, and behaviors are changed as a result of these structural changes. As ideas and belief systems of higher status were regarded as civilized, such behaviors spread throughout the world. People suppress what they believe to be a pattern of unsophisticated character, consumption patterns, and habits, repressing in a field that manifests over time as humiliation and prudence. People develop new habits that offer them more respect in society, such as regard for noble rulers, and they abandon old values, norms, and habits. The civilizing process is the copying of bodily functions, eating habits, and sexual behavior that is accepted as civilized, and the internalization through self-restraint and impulse management. Civilization is a long-term process of managing habits and increasing interdependence.

For Elias, social transformations are a multilinear process rather than a static and straight event. Individual actors' actions are a constant succession of reactions to and judgements about others, as well as the patterns formed by the interaction and interdependence of individuals; he rejects the system theory and instead refers to social transformation as figurational. Figuration is a social structure that emerges through the process of state social genesis, monopolization of politics and power, and a long-term civilizing process. Individuals and goals remain the same, but roles shift, resulting in a new structure in which the intentions and actions of a large number of actors in society intertwine rather than a collection of independent actors and their choices. Although Elias's perceptions appear to be more reasonable, the people have struggled for millennia to achieve these transformations. As a result, we cannot dismiss these massive societal upheavals as just figurative.

¹⁹ Norbert Elias (1897-1990) was a strong advocate of figurational sociology, which explains several interconnected assumptions, including the idea that humans are reliant on one another and their lives are shaped by the figurative relationships they form with others.

2.5.2 Marxist Theory of Social Transformation

Marx provided a dialectical analysis of social transformation as the corollary of conflict and change (Marx & Engels, 1848)²⁰. Firstly, Marx focuses on the change in the mode of production, which is the material base or economic infrastructure of a society for the social transformation. The social relationship of production and the forces of production together compose the mode of production and these have close interaction and contradiction. To Marx, the social relations of production determine the superstructure of society, such as religion, philosophy, norms, and values, and also the organization of the family, ranks, and classes of society. Society runs from the dialectic's principle, leading to social transformation. The unstabilizing contradictions overwhelm all the societal arrangements, destroy the existing societal system, and produce a new social order (Smelser, 1973, p. xxiv). A major element of social transformation for Marx is class consciousness. Class consciousness has two parts: class in itself and class for itself. First is related to the economic situation of the individual that determines their class, and second is class consciousness that the autonomous political organization can start a class struggle for social transformation (Paulantzas, 1974, p. 16).

Moreover, the conflict between owner and non-owner occurs as a result of the working class's alienation from the means of production that triggers the social transformation. The accumulation of profits and other types of incentives pauperizes the lower section of society. The only thing the working class has to sell is its labor. The condition of labor worsens to starvation as the owner's surplus grows. These lower classes are more numerous than the upper classes, which demands a change in the production process. They fight against the upper classes' control of the means of production to transform the system. As a result, human society gradually changes from a communal to a feudal and capitalist mode of production. One well-known quote by Marx (1848) expresses his viewpoint on societal change: "All human history is the history of class struggle." The conflict perspective, which is based on Marxist theory, views social transformation as an inherent process in a society characterized by antagonism and conflict between distinct groups. According to Coser, social organization can be fully harmonious, and conflict catalyzes social change, whether it is positive or

²⁰ Marx's theories drew from Hegel's perspective on history, which emphasized a dialectical progression. According to Hegel, the development of history involves the emergence of one concept (thesis) that inevitably gives rise to its opposing counterpart (antithesis), and their interaction leads to the formation of a new concept (synthesis). This synthesis then becomes the starting point (thesis) for a new cycle of development (Hegel, 1969).

destructive (Coser, 1956). In contrast to Marx, society is divided into different factions with an unequal distribution of power, and there is a struggle between them (Dahrendorf, 1959).

Marxist theory is inherently a progressive viewpoint, but not a linear one. Not only does the Marxist view of history differ from that of linear growth in that it regards history as the sequences of violent conflicts rather than a smooth progression. Progress toward a classless society is aided by dialectic conflicts in which one lower class usurps the ruling class, such as when the bourgeois overturns the aristocracy, and another emerges to reclaim the governing class. Engels added his view on the Marxist theory of social change and saw early primitive society as a classless commune, generalizing Morgan's anthropological investigations (Engels, 1902). On the other hand, these cycles are neither eternal nor pointless. In the final turn, according to Marx, the proletariat revolution is about to conclude the game. The victory of the proletariat ushers in a society devoid of actual conflict and revolution. The Maoist party, inspired by the Marxist perspective, envisioned a social transformation achieved through the establishment of communes.

2.5.3 Social Transformation as a Fundamental Change

The most notable societal transformation occurs during revolutions, which mark significant historical turning points, fundamentally alter human civilization, and remodel individuals (Sztompka, 1993, p. 301). Revolution affects all levels and aspects of society, including the economy, government, culture, social structure, everyday life, and human personalities, and the changes are profound and fundamental in all of these areas, affecting the very heart of social structure and functioning. A revolution is described as rapid, radical changes in society's political, social, and economic structure (Bullock & Stallybras, 1977, p. 542), or a widespread, sudden shift in the social structure, or some essential characteristic of it (Fairchild, 1966, p. 259). Many academics define revolution as a change in society's constitution and sociopolitical and economic developments brought about by force and violence (Johnson, 1968; Gurr, 1970). Revolution, according to Huntington, is a quick and violent change in a society's prevailing beliefs and myths, as well as its political institutions, social structure, and leadership (Huntington, 1968, p. 264). Revolution, according to Skocpol, is accompanied and in part carried out by class-based revolts from below (Skocpol, 1979, p. 4). Furthermore, Giddens perceives revolution as the violent seizure of power of the state by the mass movement and the subsequent use of that authority to launch substantial social reform and process (Giddens, 1989, p. 605).

The term transformation refers to the significant structural changes that result in a society, which is substantially different from its forerunner (Haas et al., 2020, p. 14). It encompasses fundamental changes in society that differ in intensity from the limited social changes that people encounter daily, as well as the successes and downturns of communities, as well as the ups and downs of aristocracies and regimes that have no bearing on society's entire structure. Previously, the term "transformation" was used to describe significant changes in certain societal areas, such as technologies and economics (Ayres, 1990a; Ayres, 1990b; Castles et al., 2011; Polanyi, 1957). Social transformation indicates a fundamental shift in society, which may be contrasted sharply with social change considered as progressive or gradual changes through time, according to Khondker and Schuerkens (2014, p. 1). As a result, social transformation is identified as a key change in the way societies are structured and the transfer of resources that goes beyond the constant processes of recurring and existing social change, which are all at task but do not affect deeper social structures and expected functions of society (Haas et al., 2020, p. 15).

As a consequence, social transformations indicate substantial structural shifts in society that reorganize all established social arrangements (Portes, 2010). These changes encompass deeper shifts in social value systems, power structures, ideologies, economic activities, social roles, social status hierarchies, and institutions. Social transformation brings about fundamental changes across all aspects of social life, including macro-level structures, underlying societal organization, daily life events, social group dynamics, community dynamics, and political systems. They can result from incremental changes that accumulate until reaching a tipping point, triggering a fundamental transformation. The study of the social domain, including social interactions, everyday processes, and the social aspects of economic, political, cultural, technological, and demographic changes, can help operationalize the concept of social transformation.

2.5.4 Key Ingredients of Social Transformation:

The key ingredients of social transformation are the alteration of social structure, social relationships, and social interaction and the alteration in social norms, values, and social order (Farley, 1990; Sztompka, 1993). Similarly, social transformation entails a shift in organizational structures, such as the political structure for democratic government, the economic structure for production networks or supply chains, and the social structure for personal connections and financial activities (Jacobs, 2021, p. 155). According to Marx, the

change in class structure and a shift in the means and relations of production are the major ingredients of social transformation (Marx, 1848; Berberoglu, 1994).

Various types of change can be identified based on what is seen to be changing- what occurs, fragments, and system dimensions are involved in change. This is because the overall condition is not simple or one-dimensional, but rather arises as the consequence of the combined, aggregated state of multiple components (Sztompka, 1993, p. 7). The system model comprises social change as changes in composition, structure, functions, boundaries, and relationships among subsystems and surroundings of the society. Social change involves transformations in the relationships between elements, including social bonds, interactions, and exchanges, as well as changes in functional elements like occupational tasks. It also encompasses modifications in subsystems and the surrounding environment, such as natural conditions, the context of other societies, and geopolitical location.

Shifts in political power are a crucial element of social transformation. According to Weber (1922), political power is a form of authority held by the state, enabling it to control and influence the behavior of individuals and to shape social structures and policies. This power involves mobilizing resources, swaying public opinion, and altering social and economic policies. In contrast, Foucault (1975) views political power as both productive and repressive. It not only shapes social norms and institutions but also regulates and controls individual behavior through various social practices and institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. Political power is embedded in daily practices and institutions, which facilitate social transformation. It legitimizes different forms of authority, thereby influencing the enactment of new policies, shaping public discourse, restructuring social institutions, and redistributing resources through either coercion or persuasion, leading to significant social changes.

Moreover, the important ingredients to social transformation include mass mobilization, social action, citizen participation, public advocacy, popular education, and the development of local services (Schneider, Gruman & Coutts, 2012). To foster social transformation, large masses of people are gathered to draw attention to specific societal challenges or problems (Schneider et al., 2012, p. 526). Social transformation, which generates strong organizations through structural change at the community level linking the growth and activities of grassroots organizations, requires social action. Social transformation also requires the establishment of local services, public advocacy, popular education, and engagement of the general public. The essential components of social transformation include altered

interdependencies and connections, shared values and norms, the empowerment of individuals to have control over their lives, changes in social, economic, and political systems that create new opportunities, guaranteed participation and inclusion, and shifts in cultural attitudes and behaviors. The social transformation envisioned by the Maoist commune should be examined from the standpoint of social sustainability, which has not yet been adequately explored.

2.6 Divergent Understandings of Social Sustainability

The existing research on the sustainability of collectivization and the commune falls short in addressing the current discourse on social sustainability, which is broader and distinct from earlier discussions. Consequently, I have examined the recent advancements in theories of social sustainability that have emerged after 1987. These theories offer valuable perspectives for evaluating the long-lasting attributes of the commune. Social sustainability, one of the three pillars of sustainability together with economic and environmental sustainability, lacks a common understanding and established definition. The social aspect of sustainability has, however, been the subject of numerous endeavors through a variety of writings and research (WCED, 1987; Brundtland, 1987; Sachs, 1999; Chiu, 2003; McKenzie, 2004; UN, 2007; Bacon, Cochrane & Woodcraft, 2012). In terms of the environment, the word "sustainability" was initially employed to economic expansion (United Nations, 2015). And, the terms 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' are being explored in a variety of fields, ranging from social sciences to science and natural sciences, politics to economics, and urban development to design. Paradoxically, when it comes to the many facets of sustainable development that are linked to the sustainable discourse, environmental, economic, and social sustainability issues have not been given equal weight by policymakers (Dogu & Aras, 2019). The Brundtland Report,²¹ published in 1987, brought attention to the concept of social sustainability. It defines sustainability as the ability to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987). The report emphasizes the involvement of experts from various fields, not limited to environment, development, or politics, to address economic, social, and environmental concerns. It highlights the importance of developing practical solutions and strategies that consider poverty alleviation, gender equity, and wealth redistribution. In addition to

²¹ The Brundtland Report, known as *Our Common Future*, was a publication published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). It introduced the concept of sustainable development and provided a comprehensive explanation of how this concept could be attained.

environmental aspects, social dynamics encompassing political, social, and economic transformations are considered for long-term sustainability.

The main focus of this dissertation is social sustainability, which is one of the major components of sustainability and investigates the social repercussions of change. However, the social aspect of sustainability is the least researched among the three mentioned pillars of sustainability. Social sustainability is achieved when official and informal processes, institutions, structures, and connections actively promote current and future generations' potential to develop healthy and liveable communities (McKenzie, 2004, p. 18). Additionally, Munro contends that all actions that enhance both human and environmental well-being, including the social aspect of sustainability, should be considered to be part of development (Munro, 1995). In a similar pattern, Chiu describes social sustainability as the preservation and enhancement of the well-being of the present and future generations (Chiu, 2003, p. 221). In the assessment of social sustainability, the involvement of the community is important, which is focused by Osso et al. (1996) and Dempsey et al. (2009). According to Osso and friends, sustainability assures the protection of both the artificial and natural environments by attempting to fulfill the long-term needs of people and resources (Osso et al., 1996). And, Dempsey et al. (2009) also point out that social sustainability depends on how a community engages with its surroundings.

Moreover, social sustainability is the capacity of a society to serve as a long-term viable setting for interactivity, communication, and cultural development (Yiftachel & Hedgcock, 1992, p. 139). It is the growth or development that allows for the coexistence of culturally and socially different groups while also fostering social integration and improving the quality of life for all segments of the population. Similarly, Davidson and Wilson, on the other hand, define social sustainability as a system of cultural affinities that includes favorable attitudes toward values and the promotion of varied cultures (Davidson & Wilson, 2009). Like Chiu, Bacon argues that social sustainability is all about improving people's lives both now and in the future (Bacon et al., 2012). Future generations would not be devoid of basic services such as health, education, transportation, housing, and recreation as a result of existing world conditions, and they would have equal accessibility (Mckenzie, 2004, p. 1).

Empirically, Colantonio & Dixon (2011) studied and analyzed social sustainability and urban regeneration in five important cities in Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and the UK. They discuss the current economic downturn as well as the expansion of investor and

developer agendas for corporate responsibility and responsible investing. In addition, it offers a comprehensive study of the measures and instruments now employed by the public, corporate, and NGO sectors to implement, gauge, and keep track of social sustainability. With a focus on public-private partnerships and EU structural subsidies, a variety of urban regeneration models and vehicles are explored, and a new framework for evaluating social sustainability is presented. Thus, social sustainability focuses on the individual well-being of people- their physical and mental well-being, the social well-being of people in their community, and the economic and material well-being of people about conditions and circumstances and their physical surroundings (Colantonio & Dixon, 2011, p. 251). Social sustainability depends on expectations, the standard of the residential properties, access to a wide variety of employment options, and the availability of public services, including high-quality healthcare, welfare, and education. These analyses all provide me insight that I have used to apply social sustainability to my research on the Maoist commune that was founded in Thabang.

2.6.1 Social Sustainability as a Social Transformation

The linkage between social sustainability and social transformation offers valuable insights for examining the changes introduced by the commune implemented by Maoists and its enduring nature. Social sustainability has become a significant public concern and a universal objective for societal change. Both seek to address the issues related to change in production, distribution, and consumption patterns and services in society (Stengel, 2011). The sustainable development goals have focused on sustainability and social transformation through prosperity, increased opportunities, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and sustainable economic growth (United Nations, 2015). Further, the goal of social sustainability is to transform society by balancing resource consumption and conservation, restraining resource exploitation, promoting equal opportunities, and considering the well-being of future generations. Both social transformation and social sustainability are closely interconnected concepts, implying that they can be used interchangeably to describe efforts to change society. The possibilities of transforming social practices, mobility, changing social and economic order, and the notion of justice specifically are associated with social sustainability (Neckel, 2017, p. 47).

Social sustainability can only be achieved by social transformation, which is a change in social structure, values, and norms. All attributes of social sustainability, like equality,

justice, cohesion, and participation, connote the meaning of social transformation. Further, social sustainability aims to achieve its goals through social transformation. To Janicke, social sustainability is a vital precondition for future social transformation (Janicke, 2012). Social sustainability is considered an essential prerequisite for both economic progress and social transformation. Proponents of the green economy, as indicated by Cato (2011), emphasize the interconnection between social sustainability and economic advancement. Subsequently, social transformation plays a crucial role in promoting sustainability, as highlighted by Muraca (2014) and Brand and Wissen (2017).

Moreover, the level of social sustainability varies depending on the type of transformation and the boundaries of the system. Linner and Wibeck link social sustainability with profound and multidimensional structural change involving more cultural, political, technological, economic, and social processes than incremental as well as other kinds of changes (Linner & Wibeck, 2020, p. 222). For them, three drivers of social transformation and then social sustainability are technological change, transformative learning, and shifting narratives. Technological change is an important factor that brings about tangible changes in society, including changes in production and consumption. However, transformative learning goes beyond this by fostering awareness, acquiring new knowledge, exploring new roles, and shifting perceptions. Shifting narratives further contributes to personal growth by transforming worldviews, beliefs, desires, and identities. Narratives serve as a means to articulate desired futures and challenge assumptions about individual and societal change in various contexts (Linner & Wibeck, 2020, p. 225). These three drivers of social transformation are linked to social sustainability. Observing all these, I have linked social transformation and social sustainability at an empirical level in the study of the Ajambari commune in Thabang, Rolpa.

2.6.2 Attributes of Social Sustainability

Various scholars have assessed the attributes of social sustainability in various ways, which are useful in this dissertation (Sachs, 1999; Spangenberg, 2004; Cuthill, 2010; Baffoe & Mustiya, 2015; Davoodi et al., 2014; Dempsey et al., 2009; Putnam, 2000; Forrest & Keams, 2001; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). Firstly, the key components of social sustainability include equitable incomes, social homogeneity, and equal access to goods, services, and employment (Sachs, 1999). Sachs considered the basic values of equity and democracy as fundamental requirements for a valid definition of this concept. He also highly emphasized

the attribution of all human rights by all people, such as social, cultural, civic, economic, and political (Sachs, 1999, p. 27). Spangenberg has put forward some important indicators of social sustainability that comprise in personal levels, such as education, skills, experience, consumption, income, employment, and the right to actively participate in social activities (Spangenberg, 2004). According to Dempsey et al., social sustainability of a community consists of five elements, which are social interaction and networks, residential stability, security, participation in collective services, and pride in and sense of place (Dempsey et al., 2009)²².

Furthermore, Cuthill, based on the action research approach, includes four factors of social sustainability. These are social justice, equity, effective government that supports the methods of participation, and social capital (Cuthill, 2010). Murphy (2012) developed a conceptual framework to provide a clear understanding of social sustainability. This is based on a four-principal division of social sustainability, namely: equity, participation, social cohesion, and public awareness. Ahman (2013) recognized equity as the key concept of social sustainability and categorized different applications for equity namely: education, quality of life, social capital, social cohesion, integration and diversity, and sense of place. The indicators of social sustainability comprise social interaction in place, social security, hierarchy, social participation, and flexibility (Davoodi et al., 2014). Baffoe and Mustisya (2015) have grouped these factors into three categories. These are the representative mechanism, which include participation in the decision-making process and grassroots development initiatives; a collective state, which includes group membership, trust, family ties, and crime-free environment; and individual access, which includes education, health care, jobs, better housing, and food.

Differently, Dogu and Aras present the indicators of social sustainability for conducting research, which are a sense of belonging, social capital, perceived environment, social interaction/security, interaction with space, satisfaction with space, and voice and influence (Dogu & Aras, 2019, p. 7). The sense of belonging can be assessed by community stability, sense of community, well-being/happiness, sense of place, and sense of belonging to the house. Social capital depends on the relationship with neighbors, chatting with neighbors, trusting neighbors, and spending time with neighbors. The perceived environment is related to the satisfaction with the living areas, such as maintenance, transportation, sports centers,

²² Dempsey et al. (2011) focus on the topic of social sustainability, particularly within the context of urban development.

and health centers. Social interactions and security can be measured by the happiness as well as trust and contribution of the present and future generations. Interaction with space/quality of space is the human interaction with the spaces they live in. It is assessed by the satisfaction of people with the spatial organization of the house and their size. Satisfied with space is climatic comfort conditions of houses that can increase or decrease the satisfaction level of people about their homes. The social sustainability can be affected by the community due to participating in democratic matters. Social participation is manifested by the voice and influence of collective groups and networks in the community (Kefayati & Moztarzadesh, 2015). It is measured by the willingness to work with people and have a voice in the decisions.

By reviewing the literature and synthesizing the indicators of social sustainability, I have used the following indicators of social sustainability in this dissertation. These are: (1) changed political power (2) equality, (3) class dynamics, (4) participation and decision-making, (5) social interaction and cohesion, (6) a sense of belonging, and (7) future prospects.

2.7 Research Gap

In essence, I discovered that the prior research studies and articles I examined in this section had several significant research gaps. Firstly, I found that there is a theoretical and empirical gap in the study of communes and collectivization since functionalism and modernization theory do not encompass empirically the collectivization practiced at the micro level (Volgyes, 1978). The actor-based perspective also ignores collectivization in a communist state, as well as the overarching state system, in favor of the micro level. Even the Marxist explanation of collectivization is only applied at the state and policy level, ignoring the empirical field, in the collectivization study (Sokolovsky, 1990). Moreover, there is a lack of research on how the class structure of members in collectivization is changed generally. The research on de-collectivization simply takes into account the state inefficiencies, and economic decreases, which is not enough to conduct a thorough sociological analysis (Unger, 1985; Kochin, 1996). Hence, there is a methodological gap in earlier studies because they only looked at the macro level of relating the state and its policies. To examine collectivization through broad class change, micro-level activities, conscientization, social transformation, and their social sustainability, new research is thus needed.

In addition to theoretical gaps, examining previous research often reveals population and contextual gaps. Many collectivization groups, such as those found in the least developed countries like Nepal, where the communist revolution was unable to gain the state level, are not taken into account in analyses of collectivization. Other forms of collectivization and communes that are still in existence after the fall of Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1990s are frequently overlooked by researchers (Ciccariello-Maher, 2016; Fernandez, 2018). Additionally, to assess whether members' expectations and goals were realized or not, as well as how they connected to the sustainability of society, member levels are not also looked at in the research of communes. Further, it is insufficient to evaluate sustainability solely through the lens of ideology and coercion (Regby, 1974). The sociological underpinnings of collectivization and commune establishments and their sustainability, which are completely absent from the previous studies, should be properly examined.

Empirically, few studies have attempted to understand the collectivization and communes established by the Maoists during their armed struggle. These studies have largely relied on ethnographic studies without any theoretical analysis and have not connected them to the widespread practice in other communist countries (Lacomte-Tilouine, 2010; Zharkevich, 2019). Therefore, a thorough examination and theoretical background connecting empirics from the field are necessary for the study of Maoist communes.

Collectivization, communes, communal farming, and cooperatives were not tied to one another in the previous research. These, however, were put to use in conjunction with one another and are related. The earlier research revealed contradictions, inconsistencies, and a lack of attention to specific collectivization and commune outcomes (Sokolovsky, 1990; Volgyes, 1978; Bauerkamper, 2014). Some of them concentrated on political initiation, conflict, and coercion, while others concentrated on individual initiation and system support, leaving the social dynamics of these activities unaffected. Therefore, it is essential to increase knowledge in this regard to conduct focused research based on commune and collectivization members. It has been noted that they were used in tandem in Nepal, and they were further used to deal with the problems being faced in rural areas.

How the communes and collectivization are related to conscientization, which leads to social transformation, has not yet been studied. What types of social transformation are contained in collectivization and communes, or what elements they contain, are not academically explored. Additionally, the social sustainability of these activities is not researched

sociologically concerning their demise or continuation. Researchers only examined at the emergence and collapse of collectivization and communes in particular types of regimes. Numerous aspects of social sustainability, such as changes in socio-political context, social equality, class dynamics, participation and decision-making, social interaction and cohesion, a sense of belonging, and future prospects, have not been fully examined in previous studies about collectivization and communes.

2.8 Analytical Framework

I have developed an analytical framework for this dissertation research, which intertwines various theories on conscientization, collectivization, social transformation, and social sustainability. Initially, conscientization, originating from

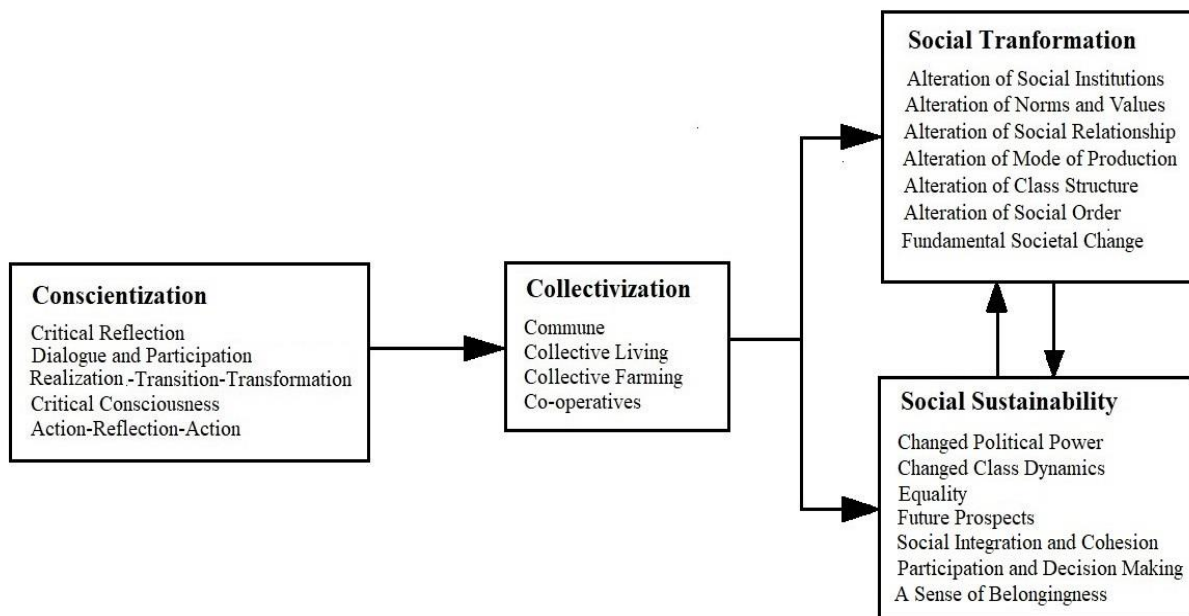
Freire's critical theory, delineates the journey towards cultivating critical consciousness among marginalized individuals, fostering awareness of social, political, and economic injustices (Freire, 1972). The critical theory underscores the imperative of critically reflecting upon oppression and exploitation by dominant factions, engendering conscientization through a dialectical exchange between educators and learners. This process entails a cyclical progression from realization to transition and ultimately transformation, culminating in the emancipation of oppressed communities. Critical consciousness evolves into action through a continuous loop of reflection, wherein individuals recognize their agency in challenging entrenched norms and consequently seize control of their circumstances, as evidenced by the establishment of collectivization through communal endeavors.

Critical consciousness leads to collectivization which encompasses the pooling of resources, labor, and decision-making within a communal entity or community, stressing cooperation, solidarity, and communal ownership of resources and obligations. It encompasses various practices such as communal living arrangements, cooperative farming, and joint enterprises. Through collectivization, individuals amass collective strength to confront shared challenges, pursue communal objectives, and advocate for collective interests. The process of communal engagement in social and economic endeavors, including production, distribution, and consumption, embodies the essence of collectivization. Beyond being merely a philosophical concept, collectivization embodies a lifestyle aimed at exploring more effective ways for individuals operating jointly or in groups to support one another in their daily lives (Blumer, 1957). The commune serves as both a physical space and an "alternative institution," essential for fostering deeper social connections among individuals, without which its transformative

potential would be compromised. In Nepal, Maoists envisioned societal transformation through the practice of collectivization and the establishment of communes.

Collectivization embodies a vision of social transformation, signifying a profound shift in society encompassing alterations to institutions, social interactions, behavioral patterns, and social structures over time (Sztompka, 1993). Social transformation denotes enduring and significant changes in the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric and practices of a society. It challenges prevailing norms, values, and power dynamics while advocating for alternative societal visions akin to those envisioned by communal living. According to Marxist theory, the transformation of the mode of production and the promotion of collective endeavors, such as collectivization, are achieved through class struggle. Furthermore, conflict theory emphasizes that social inequality arises from the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and power among social groups (Cosser, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1959). This unequal distribution perpetuates social conflict, and the struggle between opposing forces in society drives social change and shapes the societal structure.

Figure 2.1: Analytical Framework



Sources: Freire, 1972; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; WCED, 1989; Sztompka, 1993; Sokolovsky, 2019

The interconnection between collectivization and social transformation is inherently tied to social sustainability, whether these practices endure or dissolve. The enduring aspect of collectivization and communes lies in their ability to examine the impact of change on society

and to empower both current and future generations to create societies that are both healthy and conducive to living. Social sustainability encompasses the capacity of a society to function as a sustainable environment for interpersonal interaction, communication, and cultural advancement. The coexistence of socially and culturally diverse groups is facilitated by growth and development, which also fosters social integration and enhances living standards for all segments of the population. At the core of sustainability lies the future and present quality of life for individuals (Brundtland, 1987). In essence, attributes such as shifts in political power, enduring class conflicts, economic crises, social interactions and cohesion, participation in decision-making, a sense of belonging, and prospects for the future contribute to the social sustainability of collectivization and communal living.

Within this theoretical framework, conscientization acts as the driving force behind collective action and societal transformation, while collectivization offers the structural framework for mobilizing communities and pursuing transformative objectives. Social transformation materializes through the collaborative endeavors of conscientized individuals and groups, culminating in shifts within social structures, institutions, and behavioral norms. Social sustainability stands as the guiding ethos, ensuring that these transformations foster justice, equality, a shared sense of belonging, and promising prospects for all members of society, both presently and in the future.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

The research methods used in this dissertation are described in this chapter. The most significant section of the dissertation is the research methodology, which refers to the procedures used to systematically resolve the research problem by collecting data using various methodologies, presenting an interpretation of the data collected, and deriving conclusions from the study findings (Murthy & Bhomjann, 2009, p. 32). In other words, the goal of research methodology is to produce an unbiased data collection and analysis, to comprehend social actions, and, above all, to interpret them and to reach conclusions. Methodology encompasses not just the methods but also the theoretical underpinnings, research concepts and design, operational procedures, and interpretation of how research is conducted, and provides the possible reasons why specific methods are applied in the research (Mills & Birks, 2011, p. 4). The research design, methodologies, data collection and analytic tools, and data interpretation are all thoroughly detailed in the subheadings below.

3.1 Nature of Research

This dissertation employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a narrative approach that integrates both interpretive and analytical elements to explore the interplay among conscientization, social transformation, and the social sustainability of collectivization within the Ajambari commune. A qualitative research design is characterized by its explanatory and descriptive nature, aiming to uncover the underlying reasons and mechanisms behind a particular social phenomenon within a specific context. This approach facilitates a deeper comprehension of social reality by meticulously analyzing the actions involved and their meanings within their unique context (Gentles et al., 2015). It provides a detailed description and analysis of the quality or substance of the human experience. Thus, the research approach I employed in this dissertation is oriented towards explanation and interpretation, aiming to understand and interpret social reality. In qualitative research, the emphasis is on human experiences, providing in-depth descriptions and analyses to explore how reality is socially constructed (Marvasti, 2004, p. 7). This approach involves engaging with people to investigate and understand the world through their experiences and perspectives. It connects behaviors, values, norms, and beliefs to their social context and reality (Bryman, 2008, p. 407). As a result, it concentrates on the more minor elements of social reality, like

interactions and everyday activities. Additionally, it carries elements of critical inquiry, seeking to unveil power dynamics and social inequalities within the research domain. The narrative approach in qualitative research offers a subjective perspective that delves into the multifaceted aspects of human experiences and social phenomena by analyzing narratives collected from fieldwork and interviews. In this approach, narratives serve as a source of data, illuminating the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of lived experiences (Elliot, 2005). Through narratives, individuals make sense of their social milieu and construct their reality.

The narrative research incorporates the philosophical framework that integrates interpretive epistemology and constructivist ontology. Thus, I have adopted a constructivist epistemological approach that recognizes people's contribution to the creation of knowledge (Flick, 2009; Lee, 2012; Al-Ababneh, 2020). Because of this, my research's epistemology is interpretive and subjective, with a particular emphasis on using the experiences and viewpoints of commune members to understand the commune. This entails employing in-depth observations and interviews to extract rich, qualitative insights into the dynamics and practices of the commune, illuminating the method by which knowledge about the commune is obtained. Furthermore, the study delves deeply into the construction and interpretation of knowledge about the commune, drawing on member testimonies, news reports, Maoist party publications, and historical experiences. This method places a strong emphasis on the role that individual experiences and contextual interpretation play in understanding the commune. Ontologically, the research examines the commune's establishment, its nature and structure as a social unit, and its ongoing existence. It investigates social interactions within the commune, members' roles and responsibilities, participation and decision-making processes, practices of social transformation, and social sustainability. The focus is on understanding what truly exists within the commune. The real existence, characteristics, and internal dynamics of the commune are elucidated through the lived experiences of its members, as captured in detailed interviews. Ontologically, I have adopted a subjective stance, emphasizing the importance of people's subjective understanding and experiences in shaping social reality. So, to speak, my ontology is a socially constructed one.

3.2 Research Design

This dissertation applied the explanatory and analytical research design which involves gathering information from real-life environments and natural settings, where human beings

play a crucial role as the primary research instrument (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2008, p. 101). As a result, the data obtained in qualitative research are abundant, intricate, and comprehensive. By employing qualitative research design, I can enhance the understanding of the social environment and explore phenomena that have not been previously examined within their field of expertise. In my study, I have sought to investigate the experiences and interpretations of individuals within the communal system, as well as their interconnectedness, experiences, and comprehension of their social context and circumstances. Moreover, the selection of qualitative research held significant importance as it enabled the exploration of social actions and the attribution of social importance to them (Creswell, 2009, p. 18). Through the utilization of a qualitative research design, I am confident that it strengthens the validity and reliability of my study. To conduct this dissertation, I utilized various research techniques rooted in qualitative research that included conducting field research, making observations, conducting in-depth interviews, engaging in key informant interviews, and studying relevant documents.

3.3 Research Area

The Thabang of Rolpa, located in mid-western Nepal is the field of this dissertation, known as the main center and birthplace of the Maoist armed struggle started in 1996, despite its remote location from the country's center. It is situated at a significant distance from the capital city and is encompassed by towering hills, namely Jaljala, Uwa, and Mirul, with elevations ranging from 3000 to 4000 meters. In 2017, Thabang village municipality was formed by merging the Thabang, Mirul, and Uwa village development committees. The main areas of interest for this dissertation are ward numbers 1 and 2 of Thabang village municipality, commonly referred to as Thulo Gaun or main Thabang. In Thabang, the population of the Kham Magars is 9,061 out of a total of 10,851 residents, with the remaining population of the Dalits (1,509). Other ethnic groups have only a minimal presence in Thabang (NSO, 2021).

In March 2022, I made my first trip to Thabang from the starting point, taking a 24-hour journey involving two rounds of public buses. Despite the lengthy travel time, there are two routes to reach Thabang: one through Liwang, Rolpa's headquarters, and the other through Middle Hill Highway, Rukum. A significant aspect of this dissertation is the exploration of the Ajambari commune, established on June 7, 2003, during the Maoist armed struggle in Thabang, Rolpa. This commune, which consisted of 141 people living in 33 households,

gathered families of Maoist supporters, martyrs, combatants, and full-time Maoist party members from Thabang and the neighboring areas. Additionally, some common people and Maoist party supporters also joined the commune. The media highlighted this commune after Maoists' peaceful politics in 2006, leading to my interest in conducting sociological research on the subject.

For the pilot survey, I got in touch with Mr. Nabin Bivas, a journalist, writer, and native of Rolpa, who had visited the Ajambari Commune in 2007. Mr. Bivas provided contact information for Mr. Mausam Rokka Magar, a Thabang native and former Maoist combatant, whose wife, Ram Kirani Rokka Magar, became the chairperson of Thabang rural municipality in 2017. Both of them were members of the Ajambari commune. I visited Thabang multiple times after that, in March 2022, September 2022, and April 2023, staying at Hotel Sangam in Thabang and visiting Rachiwang to observe the Ajambari Commune.

During these visits, I noted three families still residing in the commune house, each having their own kitchen and engaged in field labor. Particular attention was paid to the shared tap, the kitchen, and a larger house with 19 rooms. Interviews were conducted with commune members to study their surroundings, activities, and the process of collectivization in Thabang. Additionally, I spoke with political cadres from the time to gain insights into the Maoist party's policies on communes and their activities.

I encountered difficulties coordinating with all my participants at once, which necessitated three trips to Thabang. Around Thabang, I walked for one or two hours to meet individual participants in locations like Jurbang, Jakibang, Phultibang, and Duldada. I then hired a motorcycle for a two-hour ride to meet Dalit members and Kitab Jhakri in Uwa. Initially, some participants were not ready, but they opened up after some time. Fortunately, some commune members assisted in connecting me with others. Staying in Thabang was convenient due to the availability of homestay accommodations.

3.3.1 Thabang and Kham Magars

Several studies have been conducted on the collective traditions of the Magar community, particularly in Thabang, by various researchers (Hitchcock, 1966; Molnar, 1981; Dhakal, 1996; de Sales, 2003; Gersony, 2003; Ojha, 2021). In one of these studies, Molnar's research focused on women's economic involvement within households (Molnar, 1981). The Kham Magars engage in mixed agriculture, combining crop cultivation in fertilized fields with

livestock rearing. They have a tradition of marrying the daughters of the mother's brother. The Kham Magar community is divided into several subtribes like Rokka, Buddha, Gharti, Jhakri, and Pun. John Hitchcock extensively examined the Magar caste, kinship structures, living arrangements, family dynamics, marriage rituals, festivals, and economic practices, specifically in Banyan Hill, located in the Syangja district (Hitchcock, 1966). Hitchcock pointed out the existence of patriarchal biases in Magar society, as males receive lineage affiliation and property rights. It is important to note that Hitchcock's study centered on the Magar population of Banyan Hill, rather than Thabang.

Upon reaching Thabang in 2022, I noted its isolation and distinct characteristics, including closely clustered two-storied houses with stone or increasingly common green zinc roofs. Village elders prefer traditional attire; men typically dress in *Kachhad*, *Bhoto*, and *Khado* (see Annex 8), while women wear *Lungi*, and the younger generation adopts modern clothing trends. The traditional practice of pig rearing is diminishing, with efforts to relocate it away from the main village. Thabang aspires to be a model village, evident in street cleaning and stone paving initiatives. The industrious Kham Magar community, known for their work ethic, is predominantly occupied in farming, with women actively engaged in economic activities like hemp spinning for crafting items such as *Khado*, *Kachhad*, and *shawls* (Hitchcock, 1966; Molnar, 1981).

Kham Magars are highly cooperative and find joy in assisting others. Living in close-knit groups, the Kham Magar community exhibits a strong collective spirit, engaging in communal functions such as production, distribution, consumption, social control, and mutual assistance. Despite searching for evidence of the *Bheja*²³ (see Annex 8) practices in Thabang, I found none, contrary to Dhakal's mention in the Palpa district. Jaya Prakash Rokka, a notable figure in the Ajambari Commune, clarified that the *Bheja* group is absent, and they instead celebrate *Bhume Puja* and other festivals collectively. In their community, the collective functions of *Bhai Khalak*, *Beth*, and *Jhara* play significant roles. The Kham Magars uphold unique communal traditions, notably the *Bhai Khalak* system. This system involves 15 to 17 identical brother groups living closely and participating in community activities like attending ceremonies together. They offer 50 or 100 rupees, local wine, and sometimes a cow or a hen to support one another. They collectively engage in day labor for tasks like building houses or harvesting, accompanied by traditional music. The *Bhai*

²³ Dhakal (1996) explored Bheja, a collective tradition of the Magar community found in the eastern part of Palpa district in Nepal, as described in the literature review of this dissertation.

Khalak's intriguing collective tradition, '*Beth*,' involves an annual helpline service, where community members must collectively respond when called for assistance.

Jhara, Beth, and Begari (see Annex 8), mandated unpaid labor enforced by the government, was historically extracted from the population by officials and elites for agricultural work²⁴ (Regmi, 1999b, p. 102). Among the Kham Magars, *Jhara* persists as an organized communal activity, with the entire village participating in tasks like road or school construction. Every family member must contribute until the task is completed. The construction of the Ajambari communal house exemplifies the use of *Jhara*, involving workers from all Thabang households. *Jhara* is viewed as community service, promoting social harmony, while *Beth* is considered a personal calling, collectively fostering unity and warmth within the Kham Magar community.

3.4 Field Research

I conducted field research in Thabang, Rolpa, intending to comprehend the social sustainability of collectivization in rural Nepal. Field research is a qualitative research method that involves examining and evaluating human interactions within the natural settings and surroundings of individuals, communities, and groups (Van Maanen, 1988). The primary data for this study was obtained through field research, which entails gathering information outside of a laboratory environment. Fieldwork involves observing and conducting informal or structured interviews in real-life situations of social interaction and relationships. To Kerlinger (1978, p. 11), the objective of fieldwork is to identify the relationships and interactions among sociological factors within a real-world social structure. It helps in gaining a deeper understanding of the study's context, obtaining precise and high-quality data, and addressing data gaps that can only be filled through intensive basic research.

Additionally, field research involves discovering a field, visiting it, selecting appropriate methodologies, collecting data, and developing interpretations. However, conducting fieldwork requires additional time, resources, and informants to gather the necessary data. While fieldwork establishes an overall research strategy, its successful implementation relies heavily on systematic observations, interpretation of observable characteristics, and interactions within the study area. To ensure the validity and reliability of the information, I employed various approaches and procedures, ranging from sampling schemes to

²⁴ Government officials at higher levels, including royal families, royal priests, Gurus, Chaurasiyas, Bhardars, and Kajis, were granted land by the government in the form of Birta and Jagir. It was a form of compensation or salary for individuals employed in government positions (Regmi, 1999a, p. 16).

verification. The dissertation employed a social survey, reliable sampling methods, observations, in-depth interviews, unstructured interviews, key informant interviews, and document analysis.

3.5 Census Method

For this study, I employed the census method to strategically select 33 participants, primarily selecting the household head from each of the 33 households involved in the Ajambari commune. The census method is used to gather data from every unit within the targeted population. It is different than the sampling method, which chooses the selected units as samples. The census provides a comprehensive and accurate representation of the entire population (Babbie, 2019). By selecting all households, we gained comprehensive insights into the overall characteristics and key features of the Ajambari community. This approach facilitated valuable contributions from Thabangs, allowing them to offer insights into the research questions. The census method is in line with the study's objectives, enabling me to concentrate on all households within the Ajambari commune that are most pertinent to the research questions. This method ensured a holistic reflection of perspectives, experiences, and characteristics, thereby enhancing our understanding of the community as a whole. This comprised 33 participants, each representing a distinct household within the Ajambari commune. Ten additional participants were selected to gather supplementary information about the commune, including spouses and children from various households, although not from every household. Since the unit of analysis for this dissertation is at the household level, these participants were utilized to obtain the necessary information regarding both the commune and households to address the research questions. This intentional selection aimed to capture a cross-section of the community, considering factors such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and other relevant criteria that could influence the research findings. I identified one household at first and then accordingly captured all households in the Ajambari commune in and around Thabang.

3.6 The sampling technique

Furthermore, besides utilizing the census method to encompass all households within the Ajambari commune, I specifically focused on a unique cohort of individuals residing outside the commune who opted not to become part of it. This approach aimed to capture diverse perspectives regarding the commune's establishment. To gather data from this group, I employed the stratified sampling technique. The process of stratified sampling involves

dividing the sampling frame into different groups or strata based on factors such as sex, region, grade, and other similar characteristics (Baker, 1999, p. 157). Each of these strata consists of individuals who share similar social and demographic traits. Samples are then selected from each stratum using a simple random sampling technique. The primary village, Thabang, consists of ward numbers 1 and 2, with a total of 1,158 households as per the 2021 population census (NSO, 2021). From this population, I selected 801 households that were conveniently located within a short walking distance and close to the Ajambari commune. These households were then divided into 10 strata based on their geographical location.

Table 3.1

Strata for sample selection outside the Ajambari commune

Strata	Place	Number of Households Around the Ajambari Commune	Number of Samples
1	Maghekharka and Phuntibang	53	2
2	Therbang and Chalabang	46	2
3	Rachibang and Gobang	63	3
4	Jurbang and Jakibang	47	2
5	Thabang, Main village, left, ward no. 1	134	5
6	Dalit Inhabitants	188	5
7	Thabang, Main village, right Ward no. 2	129	5
8	Palbang and Duldada	48	2
9	Maranthan and Koijabang	56	2
10	Phuli and Chhorlebang	37	2
11	Dalit Quota	-	3
-	Total	801	33

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

Within each stratum, consisting of approximately 50 households, I employed a simple random sampling technique to select samples from each respective stratum. In the first step, I assigned a number to each household and then randomly chose at least two households to ensure that the total number of households joining the Ajambari commune was matched. Additionally, I chose three samples for the stratum consisting of Rachibang and Gobang, as these locations are near the Ajambari commune. In the case of the remaining three strata,

namely two in the main village of Thabang and one representing the entire Dalit population in Thabang, I included five households from each stratum. Considering the heightened level of exclusion experienced by Dalits in Thabang, I additionally selected three households at random for research purposes as quotas for Dalits as they are the lowest in social status. This resulted in a total of 33 households that had not joined the commune. I took a single member from each household to conduct one-on-one interviews with, considering the individual as the unit of analysis. A detailed list of the participants is presented in Annex 5.

3.7 Operational Definition of Key Concepts

Collectivization: Collectivization is operationally defined as the process of shifting from private to collective or communal ownership and collective control of resources, such as real estate, resources for production, or land. According to Scott and Marshall (2009) and Fitzpatrick (2010), this procedure is meant to help the group or community by enabling decision-making among members, guaranteeing equitable distribution, and helping to accomplish shared objectives. The concept of collective ownership and management of economic and social resources is made possible by activities that support it.

Commune: A commune is defined as an organizational framework created for the joint management of a group of people who share resources, live together, and take an equal part in activities and decision-making. As a social and economic entity where resources, obligations, and income are shared collectively, it is freely formed by a group of people (Diamond, 1971; Abrams & McCulloch, 1976; Gould, 1991). To promote a feeling of community, social equality, and sustainability, the operational definition of a commune includes the application of communal ideals, collective governance, democratic participation and decision-making, cooperative labour, and shared benefits.

Conscientization: The operational definition of conscientization is the transformation brought about by critical awareness and empowerment. Through education and reflection, this approach is put into practice, assisting people or communities in realizing the sociopolitical contexts and injustices resulting from hierarchies of power that impede their well-being. Education methods that promote social awareness, cultivate critical thinking, and inspire social change are all part of the operationalization of conscientization (Freire, 1972; Chan, 2010; Guzzo, 2014). By emphasizing critical consciousness, this method empowers people to examine and confront repressive circumstances.

Social Transformation: Operationally, social transformation is characterized as shifts in the allocation of opportunities and resources along with modifications to social structures, such as social institutions, values, norms, and relationships (Haferkamp & Smelser, 1992; Sztompka, 1993). Evident changes in institutional frameworks, power structures, collective behaviours, and cultural norms are what identify it. An extensive and continuous process that radically transforms society is required to operationalize social transformation, and this process frequently yields notable enhancements or modifications to the general structure and functionality of society.

Social Sustainability: Operating definitions of social sustainability include the continuous maintenance and integration of equity, cohesion, and social well-being within a community or society. This is done by implementing strategies meant to meet the needs of various people, enhance community well-being, and build inclusive and equitable social systems (Brundtland, 1987; Sachs, 1999; Chiu, 2003; McKenzie, 2004; Dempsey et al., 2009). It includes attributes such as the impacts of political change, alteration of class dynamics, a contradiction within the commune, economic equality, and the enhancement of overall quality of life. The aim is to secure benefits for both present and future generations.

3.8 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection methods refer to the various techniques and procedures employed to acquire information for research purposes. They play a critical role in ensuring the accuracy, trustworthiness, and reliability of the research. It is essential to minimize bias and facilitate the achievement of research objectives (Kumar, 1999, p. 140). In my study, I gathered primary data through field research, specifically focusing on the Ajambari commune. Additionally, I obtained some data from secondary sources such as newspapers, books, and articles. To determine the population and household numbers of Thabang, I utilized population census data published by the Central Bureau of Statistics. Furthermore, I relied on secondary sources to obtain information about the Maoist party and political events. To collect the primary data, I employed techniques such as semi-structured interviews, observation, and key informant interviews.

3.8.1 Household Survey

A total of 33 households in the Ajambari commune participated in my research study. I utilized the household survey method to include all households of the commune in the study.

The purpose was to gather information about the socio-economic status of the households their land ownership, and their activities in the commune. Conducting interviews, primarily with the household heads, allowed me to gain insight into these aspects related to the objectives of this research. The household survey method provided a comprehensive understanding of the households, which in turn enabled me to investigate the sustainability of collectivization and the commune in Thabang, Rolpa. This method was particularly advantageous in obtaining a local perspective. This is a type of social survey approach, which aims to extract information about the nature, temperament, and behavior of an entire society or community (Babbie, 1990, p. 51). While surveys are predominantly employed in quantitative research, they can also be utilized in qualitative research through the inclusion of open-ended questions or by collecting descriptive information from participants (Jansen, 2010; Farrell, 2016). The qualitative survey explores comprehensively the Thabangs' experiences, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, providing in-depth insights.

I perceive the household survey based on qualitative research as a social survey, which is a scientific and methodological approach utilized to examine and understand the social reality, circumstances, and living conditions of a particular community. This survey method is conducted with well-defined objectives to gather data and analyze various aspects of the community (Bogardus, 1936). The scientific aspect of a social survey lies in its collection of empirical data, unbiased exploration of the causes and sources of observable events, and generation of generalized statements about social behavior. Surveys are not conducted solely to assess the sample under investigation; rather, they are carried out to gain a deeper understanding of the broader population from which the sample is drawn. The essence of a social survey is to acquire empirical verification of the collected data, as well as to provide logical explanations and analysis of social consequences.

I used open-ended questions for the household survey useful in qualitative research design and the unit of analysis is households of the Ajambari commune. I met with certain participants several times to answer my research questions based on my research problems. Throughout the household survey, I interviewed and observed them to empirically identify the reality of the social milieu. The one-to-one interview gave me more flexibility, allowed for two-way interaction, and enabled me to access rural people with low literacy rates and a high response rate. Collecting data for the aim of the research requires more time and resources; therefore, I stayed for three months to do so. In this way, I maintained prolonged engagement in the field interacting with my participants. This research is cross-sectional in

nature, as it examines the process and changes that occurred during the collectivization in the commune of Thabang, Rolpa over time. To explore the social activities associated with the commune, additionally, I talked to other members of households that are required to answer my research questions. The list of 33 households and the number of their members are given in Annex 4.

3.8.2 In-depth Interview

I conducted in-depth interviews with commune members and residents of Thabang to gather information based on the objectives of my dissertation regarding collectivization, the Ajambari commune, and social sustainability. This approach provided authentic data and a deeper understanding of participation within the commune. By directly addressing my queries to the participants and engaging in detailed discussions, I was able to unfold hidden perceptions of the commune's practices. The interviews allowed me to see the commune from the participants' perspectives and gain insights into their experiences and reflections. During these interviews, I met the participants in their living environments, explained the objectives of my study, and encouraged open and free conversations about the commune and its continuations. I gradually introduced additional questions, creating a comfortable atmosphere that encouraged them to speak freely about their experiences. An in-depth interview offers a profound understanding of oneself, capturing the experiences and perspectives of participants regarding social phenomena. It uncovers hidden perceptions, integrating common-sense interpretations, explanations, and reflections (Johnson, 2002). This method reveals suppressed feelings and conflicting emotions, moving beyond a limited set of predetermined questions and answers. In-depth interviews foster mutual self-disclosure and encourage participants to freely express their views. I approached them not only as a researcher but also as a writer, treating them with emotional sensitivity and respect for their work, as Douglas (1985) suggests for creating an emotionally supportive environment conducive to expressing personal experiences. Through these in-depth interviews, I collected narratives and local vernaculars directly from the participants. These narratives were not predetermined but were retellings of past experiences and situations, as described by Kumar (2011). Initially, some participants hesitated to share their perceptions, but over time, they felt more comfortable and willing to express their feelings. The in-depth interview and narrative collection process had a therapeutic impact (Kumar, 2011), making it easier for participants to share their experiences openly.

In-depth interviews are highly valuable as they provide comprehensive or specific knowledge about the current functioning and objectives (Williamson, 2002, p. 243). These interviews do not involve completely pre-determined questionnaires administered in a scheduled and flexible manner. It provided me with greater response depth and offered informants a greater opportunity to provide quality responses and additional information through conversational interaction during the interview, observations, and an exploration of their life experiences (Williamson & Johanson, 2018, p. 388). An in-depth interview is flexible in questioning and conversation flow. While the interviewer has a guide of questions to cover, it is adapted to the interview based on the participant's responses and followed up with additional probes to explore interesting or relevant topics further. This encourages participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and opinions in their own words, rather than being limited to predefined answer choices. It involves a guided conversation between the interviewer and the participant. The interviewer acts as a facilitator, guiding the conversation towards the research objectives while allowing the participants to lead the discussion based on their experiences and viewpoints. In-depth interviews are often exploratory in nature, aiming to gain insights into complex phenomena and understand participants' perspectives in depth. Researchers use in-depth interviews to explore new topics, generate hypotheses, and uncover emerging themes or patterns. In-depth interviews are a common method for collecting qualitative data. The rich, detailed narratives obtained through in-depth interviews provide valuable insights into participants' lived experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. In-depth interviews are a flexible and effective method for conducting qualitative research, allowing researchers to explore complex topics, gain in-depth insights, and understand the participants' perspectives in their own words. It is categorized as a qualitative interview as it encourages more dialogue between the interviewer and participants, which is not solely dictated by the interviewer's questions but also emerges from the interaction between both parties during the conversation (Baker, 1999, p. 247).

3.8.3 Observation

During the process of conducting surveys, interviews, or field visits, observation plays a vital role in gathering additional information relevant to the research. In my dissertation, I utilized the observation technique as a means of collecting data to observe the participants' actual social context, including their location, status, and activities. This provided me with valuable information about my topic. It is crucial to conduct observation carefully and align it with the

study objectives, as it necessitates a comprehensive orientation to witness the behavior and actions of the individuals or the environment under study (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p. 40). However, conducting participant observation is not always feasible in research.

As the Ajambari commune in Thabang is no longer active, I did not employ Thabang observation in my study. Nonetheless, the implications of collectivization remain relevant in rural Nepal, and it was important to investigate their social sustainability. Therefore, I employed non-Thabang structured and naturalistic observation techniques. Naturalistic observation involves observing individuals in their natural settings, while structured observation involves observing a specific setting using predetermined techniques (Bryman, 2008, p. 270). I prepared an observation checklist before going to the field (see Annex 2). In the field, I categorized and took note of what I observed during interactions with commune members and Thabang residents, paying attention to their surroundings, socioeconomic status, and interpersonal relationships. Then I prepared an observation protocol (see Annex 3), which I utilized in my dissertation.

3.8.4 Key Informants Interview

Subsequently, I conducted key informant interviews with 10 individuals from various fields, including scholars, senior journalists, and political cadres. These informants hold intimate knowledge regarding the establishment of the Ajambari commune and its collectivization process. The names of these individuals are provided in Annex 6 of the dissertation. Key informant interviews involve engaging with individuals who have previous affiliations with specific organizations, social programs, problems, or interest groups and possess extensive knowledge of the subject matter. These interviews aim to delve deeply into the informant's understanding, attitudes, practices, behaviors, and overall situation, allowing them to express themselves in their own words (Tylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 77). In-depth interviews are characterized by two important factors: face-to-face interactions and a comprehensive grasp of the informant's perspective. With this understanding, one can explore the levels of societal progress, the diffusion of change from higher to lower levels, and the pace of social transformation. In Thabang, Rukum, an in-depth interview revealed the extent of societal transformation in Nepal.

Key informant interviews employ an unstructured interview technique where questions are not predetermined, allowing for spontaneity and the development of questions during the

interview. Unstructured interviews involve dynamic discussions between the researcher and the informant, fostering fluid interaction and enabling the elicitation of in-depth information on the relevant areas of discussion (Ranjeet Kumar, 1999, p. 145). These in-depth interviews with key informants provide knowledge and information pertinent to the objectives of the dissertation. The premise of in-depth interviewing is that probing deeper into participants' perspectives yields more honest insights. It involves gaining a comprehensive understanding of the social context from the participant's perspectives and developing a keen awareness of their reality (Marvasti, 2004, p. 21). These face-to-face interactions between the researcher and the participants serve to better comprehend the informants' viewpoints on their existence, experiences, and challenges (Tylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 77). During my research, I conducted key-informant interviews with journalists, leaders, and significant informants from Thabang and other locations at different times throughout the study (see Annex 6). The data obtained from key informants is analyzed alongside the data collected from participants of the Ajambari commune to elucidate the concept and process of collectivization.

3.8.5 Review of Previous Documents and References

In this study, a variety of secondary data sources have been utilized, including information gathered from published materials such as journals, magazines, and books that discuss collectivization and the commune established by the Maoist party. In the study of the Ajambari commune, the secondary data sources include community members' diaries, village or municipality data, data from the Central Statistics Department, and government data. The dissertation employs archival records to analyze the collectivization and commune in Thabang, Rolpa, as well as events during the study period. This documentation method refers to the analysis of documents that contain information relevant to the phenomenon under study (Bailey, 1994, p. 194). The documentary method is used to categorize, investigate, interpret, and identify the limitations of physical sources, particularly written documents from the private or public domain (Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 61).

The dissertation has utilized documents written and published by the central committee meetings and national conventions of the Maoist party. These documents offer clear and comprehensive insights into the party's objectives, and strategies, as well as information concerning the collectivization and establishment of the commune. Official documents related to the collectivization and commune of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) at various times, particularly before and after the People's War, have been incorporated. These

documents serve specific purposes within various contextual assumptions. It is important to note that these documents were not intentionally produced for research purposes. However, they indirectly shed light on the social world of the individuals who created them. They serve as evidence of ideological, strategic, and tactical changes regarding collectivization and commune-based activities within the Maoist party. To assess the accuracy of the facts mentioned in these documents, this study has examined them within the context in which they were compiled.

3.9 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

I collected data using various methods, including in-depth interviews, observation, document analysis, archival research, and key informant interviews. Since I followed a qualitative research approach, the data are non-numeric and capture the qualities, characteristics, and meanings of social phenomena. The data are produced by coding and categorizing into separate themes to identify patterns and relationships. I employed qualitative data analysis techniques, such as sorting and categorizing field notes and systematically transcribing interviews to convert raw data into findings or results (Williamson & Johanson, 2018, p. 454). The primary goal of analyzing qualitative data is to generate significance and comprehend the information. This process involves arranging and structuring the data, categorizing it through coding, and then representing it through textual descriptions, tables, or visual aids (Creswell, 2007). The analysis is guided by research questions, with each question forming a significant coding category that can be further divided into sub-categories, leading to data reduction. Consequently, the interviews conducted with the participants have been transcribed, and the data has been categorized and analyzed separately. Coding has played a crucial role in the data analysis process by categorizing the data into themes, thereby connecting the research objectives. The analysis of the collected data has been carried out using interpretative and explanatory methods, following a qualitative approach.

Overall, I employed narrative and thematic data analysis to explore the establishment of the commune, its practices, and its social sustainability. I conducted in-depth interviews to collect narratives, which I categorized into various themes and analyzed accordingly. By interpreting the core narratives shared by participants, I aimed to understand their experiences and the outcomes of their initiatives. Narrative analysis involves interpreting stories shared in research contexts and everyday life (Parcell & Baker, 2017). This approach focuses on dialogic and performative aspects, exploring how, where, and to whom stories are told, the

identities involved in their telling, and their implications within larger communities or cultural discourses. It seeks to uncover the structure of narratives and their functions in providing meaning. Thematic analysis, a research method utilized to identify and interpret patterns or themes within a dataset, frequently results in new insights and understanding (Thomas, 2006; Elliot, 2018). This approach scrutinizes narrative content to underscore significant and meaningful moments in participants' experiences. In thematic data analysis, connections are made, patterns are identified, and these contribute to a deeper understanding. Emerging patterns from the data can be seen as thematic insights that reveal broader understandings derived from the entirety of the dataset. Social sustainability is assessed through the data extracted from these narratives and themes.

Table 3.2

Summary of Data Analysis and Interpretation

Components	Procedures	Outcomes
Data Reductions (Selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data)	a. Transcribing b. Coding	Description
Data Display (an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion, drawing, and action)	c. Categorization d. Abstraction	
Conclusions drawing & Verification (a form of thick description and the answers to the research problems)	e. Comparison f. Dimensionalization g. Integration h. Interpretation	Explanation/Interpretation

Note. Adopted from Miles & Huberman (1994, p.12)

Social sustainability is measured qualitatively by assessing social dimensions discussed in the literature review. Various aspects of social sustainability are collected through in-depth interviews and categorized into their attributes and analyzed to understand social sustainability. Themes of narratives are categorized into the attributes of social sustainability such as impacts of changed political power, changed class dynamics, inequality, economic

crisis, future prospects based on education and opportunities, social integration and cohesion, a contradiction within the commune, participation and decision making, and a sense of belonging based on housing and living conditions (Brundtland, 1987; Sachs, 1999; Dempsey et al., 2009; Cuthill, 2010). The research focuses on the lived experiences and perceptions of people and integrates these categories and themes to perceive the attributes of social sustainability.

Although qualitative research design was employed, certain tables and figures were utilized to visually represent specific themes within the study. The data collected from fieldwork, social surveys, documentary studies, archive studies, secondary sources, and key-informant interviews have been synthesized to draw logical conclusions. The data has been organized clearly and chronologically, with regular reviews conducted. Descriptive and narrative approaches have been used to present the findings of the analysis, providing insights into the social characteristics of the phenomenon under study. I am aware that data analysis enables the identification of connections, patterns, and a deeper understanding of the subject (Gelsne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 146). It offers a broader perspective that emerges from the entirety of the data.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

I ensured that all participants were fully informed about their involvement in the study, including the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and their rights to withdraw. Before their participation, I obtained explicit consent from each participant to include their perceptions in the dissertation. In the dissertation, I predominantly used participants' real names, while those who requested confidentiality were assigned pseudonyms to safeguard their identities. I guaranteed that participation in the study was voluntary and devoid of coercion. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. Throughout the research process, I treated all participants with respect, fairness, and dignity, ensuring that there would be no discrimination based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status. Furthermore, I provided participants with clear information on how their data would be utilized and disseminated in the dissertation, ensuring transparency and accountability in the research process.

3.11 Delimitation of the Research

This dissertation specifically concentrates on examining the Ajambari Commune of Thabang; therefore, it does not explore the specific details of other communes established by the Maoist party, namely the Juni Commune of Jajarkot, Balidan Commune of Rukum, and Jalajala Commune of Jelbang. Due to my inability to personally meet certain high-ranking Maoist leaders, I gathered information through meetings with other leaders. This research excludes the communes established in subsequent periods. Furthermore, the dissertation does not incorporate the political and armed struggle of the Maoist party. While investigating, I did not comprehensively cover all aspects of social sustainability, such as social capital and social justice. Instead, my focus was on elements that I deemed crucial in the Nepalese context, such as class dynamics and economic activities.

Chapter Four

Formative Stage and Foundational Narratives of the Commune

In this chapter, the process of conscientization regarding the establishment of the commune is discussed, starting from its formative stages and foundational narrative through the initiation of the Ajambari commune. The foundational narratives serve as the fundamental accounts of the establishment of the commune and provide a framework for comprehending the roles and expectations of individuals within society. These narratives play a central role in manifesting the social structure by endorsing, criticizing, generating, and altering perceptions of reality and relationships (Steffen, 1998, p. 478). This chapter also presents local vernaculars of Thabang for the commune that were empirically acquired from the field and differ from what is found in literature, academics, and standard news reporting. Members of some Thabang families had begun to live in groups to perform cooperative tasks like collective farming. In Thabang, the term 'commune' has become a popular buzzword with which everyone is familiar. The idea of a commune is particularly interesting in Nepal, as it was practiced by the Maoists in certain areas.

4.1 Historical Trajectories of the Maoist Party in Thabang

The Ajambari commune was not an isolated social entity; instead, it was intricately linked to the broader social, political, and communist movement that commenced in Nepal in 1951. After the first democratic movement of 1951²⁵, under the young leadership of Barman Budha, Chief Krishna Bahadur Jhankri Magar was attacked and beaten in May 1954. Hiding in the forest during the day and attacking at night did not stop. Meanwhile, in 1957, Barman Budha was arrested for a big fight between the two parties and put in jail. He met communist leader Mohanvikram Singh in jail. Mr. Singh taught communist ideology to Barman Budha, and the youths who used to go sheep herding were politically aware. A former leader of Thabang, Barman Budha²⁶ recalled the past:

The practice of going for the shepherding was continued since the time of my grandfather. The old man also used to go to the sheep sheds. At that time, the elders in the village used to reprimand the poor people a lot. The then chief and Congress leader Krishna Jhankri was a bully in the village. After the repression in the village,

²⁵ The first democratic movement in Nepal took place in 1951, led by the Nepali Congress, which employed armed resistance against the autocratic Rana regime.

²⁶ Interview in District News in 2020 by Durga Lal KC.

we young people lived in the shed for a long time; we couldn't come back to the village. In the sheep shed, there was a decision among the youths to beat up the elder Thalu of the village. After beating him, I was jailed for a month in 1957 as a communist. After that, I came to know what a communist is and became a communist (Budha, 2020).

After his release from prison, Mohan Bikram Singh came to Thabang and formed the Underground Communist Party and peasant organization in May 1956. The villagers elected Barman Budha as the chief, and in the general election of 1958, all the votes of Thabang went to the communists, and it was also led by Barman Budha (Rokka, 2011, p. 7). During the Panchayat period²⁷, he had become the Pradhan Panch²⁸ of Thabang. There had been frequent fights and clashes between the two opposing parties in Thabang, and the government forces continued their suppression efforts without cessation. During that period, the communist party initiated various social movements, including efforts to eliminate alcohol consumption and combat gambling, as well as a movement aimed at freeing villages from oppression. During the 1981 referendum, Thabang residents overwhelmingly voted in favor of the multi-party system, demonstrating their opposition to the Panchayat system. In 1982, when the reformed Panchayat conducted general elections, Thabang chose to fully boycott the process and abstained from voting, resulting in a zero turnout from the community.

In 1981, when the police began suppressing activities in Thabang, a group of people went to Banaras, India, and confided their grievances to Mohan Bikram Singh. However, he declined to return to Nepal and instead advised them to make a living in India through employment. In response, they left in frustration, labelling him a traitor (Ojha, 2021, p.120). Subsequently, Barman Budha extended his support to Mohan Baidhya, who was in charge of the Communist Party and frequently visited Thabang and formed the Nepal Communist Party (Mashal) in 1985, thereby splitting from Mohan Bikram Singh. Santosh Budha Magar, a 63-year-old participant and a leader of the Nepal Communist Party, emphasized Barman Budha's significant role in this endeavor:

Burman Budha played a pivotal role in transforming Thabang into a stronghold for the Communist movement. He was a dedicated and fearless individual who strongly upheld communist principles and led a modest life. Budha made significant

²⁷ In 1960, King Mahendra established the Panchayat system, which was a form of autocratic governance without any political parties. The king had complete control over the state's power during this time.

²⁸ Pradhan Panch was the chairperson of village Panchayat in the Panchayat system.

contributions to the unity of Thabang, leading the fight against local exploitation and rallying the entire Thabangi community against government oppression. His commitment to the people continued even after becoming Pradhapanch, as he tirelessly worked for their welfare. Budha successfully disseminated communist ideology throughout the entire Rolpa region, laying the foundation upon which the Maoist People's War later emerged. (Interview, September 24, 2022)

After the second people's movement²⁹, people of Thabang participated in the parliamentary election in 1991. Before the people's war started, CPN (Unity Centre) also formed a united people's front together with various elements of the communists to support the new democratic revolution by exposing the wrong activities of the government in the parliament and participating in the general election on May 1991. It became the third parliamentary party of the Parliament by winning 9 seats in that election. On the other hand, in Rolpa and Rukum, sporadic clashes were taking place in the villages against fake and absorbent. The Communist influence was increasing.

After the incident of beating in the village of Rolpa, the government launched the Romeo Operation in October 1991. Hundreds of women were arrested in the clash between women and the police in Uwakhola. Resham Kumar Shah, a 65-year-old former teacher from Thabang and a participant in Thulogaon, says -

The Romeo operation launched by the government further helped prepare the basis of the Maoist rebellion. The police raped the women, made them drink as much alcohol as they could find in the village. Entering the houses of the villagers, they mixed the grains available there and made a mess. The villagers were angry with the authorities due to this kind of police action. (Interview, March 27, 2022)

On the other hand, preparations for armed struggle were going on internally. The mid-term elections of 1994 were boycotted by the entire Thabang people due to the policy of the CPN-Maoists to boycott CPN (Maoist) emphasized the work of spreading public awareness in the third extended meeting held in February 1995. Under that, it has been emphasized to form a public opinion with the spirit of creating a radical change movement by conducting concrete programs at various levels through room meetings, corner meetings, general meetings,

²⁹ The second people's movement, known as the People's Movement of 2006, gained popularity as it marked the entry of the Maoist Party into peaceful politics and resulted in the cessation of King Gyanendra's direct rule. On the other hand, the first people's movement refers to the movement in the 1990s that aimed to bring an end to the panchayat system.

processions, pamphlets, walling, cultural programs, etc (CPNM, 1998, p. 323). It is planned to develop the work of bringing science to the people as a continuous process against the prevalent feudal and bourgeois culture, superstition, and orthodoxy in the society. In the unification Congress held in November 1991, it was mentioned that agricultural production associations would be established to implement the collective farming system by keeping the ownership of the land collectively. Under the slogan of plowing land, seizing the land of the feudal landlord and distributing it to the landless poor farmers, seizing the wasteland and distributing it to the farmers, seizing the crops of the feudal lords, motivating and organizing the farmers for cooperative farming, modernizing the rural agricultural production system, and local resources for a self-sufficient economy, a program was decided to emphasize the creative use of tools (UCPNM, 1991, p. 220). It seems that a plan had also been made to raise the slogans of the struggle for equal rights against the feudal patriarchal oppression, discrimination, and superstition in all spheres of economic, political, and social life, including ancestral property, on women.

In order to garner support for the people's war and to spread public awareness for radical social change, the CPN (Maoist) launched a Sija campaign by mixing the names of Sisne Himal of Rukum and Jaljala Pahad of Rolpa and Miteri from April 1995. Under this campaign, public service was conducted in Thabang, and various cultural programs were held to spread awareness among the people. A participant, Mekha Bahadur Rokka, a 63-year-old artist from Thabang, says:

We used to go from village to village. We used to sing and dance. Hundreds of people used to gather. Leaders used to make speeches. Many people were made conscious through cultural programs. The people were ready to support the change. This campaign lasted for about 6 months in Thabang. It was explained to the people why radical change is necessary. This prepared the basis of the people's war. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

Jumleni had captured public land in Patikhorre and made an apple farm in Thabang in 1992. The debate arose continuously and it was captured by Maoists when the civil war started in February 1996. At that time, a case was filed against 17 people. This sequence did not stop. The police arrested 4 people from Funtibang in Thabang in January 1997 and killed Lali Rokka and Dilman Rokka (Rokka Magar, 2011, p. 11). Against this, the Maoists took possession of Mulya Rokka's shop. After fake informants were expelled from the village, the

atmosphere in Thabang became favorable to the Maoists. The security groups formed in the villages were transformed into the people's militia.

When the Maoists initiated the war in 1996, Thabang became embroiled in the conflict. In 2000, during the general election, only two people from the district headquarters of Rolpa, Liwang, were airlifted by helicopter to vote, and the rest of the votes were not cast. Thabang suffered greatly during the war, with the Nepalese army entering the village on 28 March 2002, causing all the villagers to flee to the forest. The village was left deserted, and the army set fire to 13 houses, including the Maoist party office. They stayed in Thabang for 46 days, burning a total of 37 houses. The residents of Thabang returned only 48 days after the army had left, with more than 422 people displaced temporarily and 33 people losing their lives during the war (Rokka Magar, 2011, p. 116). Despite facing these difficulties, Thabang maintained their unity and actively participated as a community in all social and political gatherings.

4.1.1 Formation of Base Area and "People's Government"

Over the past thirty years, Nepal has experienced significant political transformations, including events such as the Maoist armed struggle in 1996, the second people's movement in 2006, the comprehensive peace accord that brought an end to the Maoist armed struggle, and the establishment of a republic, a secular, and an inclusive state. Maoists started armed struggle in 1996 and expanded continuously to about one-third of the territory of the country. The fourth national extended Maoist congress, convened in August 1998, decided to create a base area in their stronghold in the heartland where the armed struggle began in 1996. The base region had to sustain the guerrillas, and it was the area where the revolt had already taken control. However, guerrilla territory had to fight regularly with the established troops to maintain control. Maoists had the view that strong support from the populace, a powerful party, adequate territory, and the destruction of the opposition or class enemies were necessary for the development of a base area (CPNM, 1998, p. 421). Because of the Maoist-government conflict at the time, the base area might not have been permanent, but the Maoists tried to make it that way to establish a safer place free of any government apparatus.

Table 4.1*Timeline of the Ajambari Commune*

Events in Thabang	Date	National Events
Public Service Campaigns and cultural programs in the village and a group of 23 people involved from Thabang	14 April, 1995	'Sija' and 'Miteri' campaigns organized by Maoists in Rolpa and Rukum to seek support
The second meeting of the area committee of Thabang was held on 15 January 1996	November, 1995	Operation Romeo by the Government to control Maoist's activities in Rolpa & Rukum
Maoists captured Jumleni's Apple Farm in Thabang and a case filed against 17 people	13 Feb., 1996	Starting of the Maoist People's War
4 people were arrested and Killed Lali and Dilman Rokka	18 January, 1997	-
The Maoist militia fired on the army helicopter and could not land in Thabang on 18 Feb. 2001	May, 1998	'KiloSeirra Two' operation by the government to control Maoist activities
Maoists operated from Rolpa, Rukum, and Jajarkot as their base areas	August, 1998	Maoists announced the formation of base areas in mid-western
Army surrounded Thabang, camped for two days, tortured women, and old people, fired houses, and killed five people on 28 March 2002	26 Nov., 2001	The emergency came into force
Nepal Army again operated in Thabang. All people fled to the jungle and vacated all houses. The army set fire to 13 houses and destroyed people's property.	21 Sept., 2002	-
A special district, "People's Government of Maoists" was announced in Thabang	25 March, 2003	-
Establishment of the Ajambari Commune with 6 households	28 May, 2003	-
The commune in its peak with 33 households	27 May, 2005	-
The households started to leave the commune	21 Nov., 2006	The Comprehensive Peace Accord between Maoists and the government
The last 13 households Remaining in the commune	18 March, 2012	-
Three households separately living in the commune house	28 March, 2017	-

Note. Data collected from (Rokka Magar, 2011) and Jaya Prakash Rokka, a leader of the Ajambari commune, Thabang

After starting the armed struggle two and a half years prior, they claimed to have progressed to the point where they were setting up bases in their heartland. The goal of the base areas was to eliminate all traces of the previous state to pave the ground for the new democratic state. The Maoists argued that after abolishing the current government, it was necessary to create new systems and processes to fill the void. Netra Bikram Chand³⁰, 56 years old, a Maoist leader from the Mid-Western Bureau and current general secretary of the Nepal Communist Party, says:

In 1998, the Party introduced a policy for creating base areas wherever they achieved victory in the war. This strategy aimed to establish a secure space by removing the existing power and establishing a new one. The base areas were governed by new procedures and arrangements, including the formation of a people's government, a people's court, and daily activities for the residents. This approach was implemented to practice a new form of state in these regions. (Interview, February 26, 2023)

Along with increasing people's ability to use weapons, they also intended to construct and mobilize the New Democratic state, which they felt was emerging and at risk of being trampled by the old state. The creation of the New State had to ensure the inclusion of the lower classes, peasants, ethnic groups, and women in opposition to the comprador and capitalist in their vernacular. People's daily necessities, as well as their economic, social, and cultural requirements, had to be met by the new state. The Western and Mid-Western regions were specifically targeted for the development of base areas and the New Democratic State to create a democratic state for the local populace at the village, area, district, and region-wide levels.

The Maoists decided to launch the New People's Democratic program at the Second National Convention on February 8, 2001, by establishing a "New People's Democratic government" at the local and central levels (CPNM, 2001, p. 496). It adopted a policy of transferring all leaders' assets to the party and adopting proletarian practices. The party introduced the principles of collective production, collective labor, and collective cooperatives, ultimately leading to the establishment of the commune. The Maoists established the first People's District Government in Nepal in the Rukum district in December 2000, as a result of this decision, the formation of two governing powers in the nation was noticed. Later, in March

³⁰ Netra Bikram Chand serves as the general secretary for the Nepal Communist Party, which emerged as a separate entity after the division of the Maoist Party into two factions - the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist-Centre) and the Nepal Communist Party (Revolutionary-Maoist).

2001, the Rolpa people's government was established. "United People's Revolutionary Council" ³¹ was established as the central people's government with 41 members in September 2001 in the Rolpa district by the national assembly of delegates of local governments, front leaders, and Maoist party members. The assembly also decided that a 75-point draft served as the People's Council's minimum common policy, program, and law. The directory published by the People's Council stated that the objective of the new state was to prepare the base of new economic relations through autonomous and authoritative local bodies, political relations based on effective and responsible security and administration, and bring radical change in the economy through effective co-operative policy by using local resources, labors, and skills that apply to agriculture, forest and natural resources, industries, commerce, and the financial sector through the scientific distribution of land (Gyawali, 2006, p. 28). Baburam Bhattarai, a well-known leader of the Maoist party and the Chairperson of the "United People's Revolutionary Council", expressed in written form that:

The backward agricultural economy should be transformed into a developed industrial economy by co-operative, collectivization, and socializing, and the foundation of socialism should be prepared. In this way, a new form of state power can be built and moved forward in the objective ground. (Bhattarai, 2003, p. 55)

The primary aim of the People's council was to pursue an agrarian revolution, with a focus on the confiscation of land from wealthy feudal landowners and capitalists. This land seizure would occur without any form of compensation, alongside the abolishment of the feudal system of compulsory labor. The base area and people's government aimed to establish collective farming, cooperatives, and eventually communes as a part of their plan to create a socialist state in line with the Maoist party's vision. The Maoists took deliberate measures to ensure the active participation of women, Dalits, and ethnic groups in their movements and collective endeavors. Consequently, it becomes crucial to examine the status of women and the inclusion of Dalits within the commune. As Maoists gained control over the base areas, the established government was defeated and forced to vacate those regions. To fill the resulting vacuum, the Maoists established base areas, people's governments and communes, engaging in diverse activities aimed at resource mobilization.

³¹ The "United People's Revolutionary Council" was seen as a substitute for Nepal's central government and was presented as a blueprint by the Maoist Party for how the country would be governed once they came into power. It was a way for the Maoists to prepare for their eventual rule and establish their regime's practices.

The transformation of power dynamics in Thabang occurred when the established government was entirely displaced, and the Maoist party took full control, leading to the establishment of the commune. The Maoists sought to address the daily needs of the people, such as production, distribution, and consumption, through alternative methods. With the implementation of a Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, the commune's influence started to wane, and its members began to leave. Currently, the commune is no longer operational, with only three households remaining, each using separate kitchens. However, it had a significant impact on inspiring people to explore alternative ways of living by collective living, collective farming, and co-operatives.

4.2 Narratives and the Local Vernaculars of the Commune

The Maoist party propagated a narrative centered on collectivization and the commune, aiming to transform private property into collective practices and establish a socialist unit in areas where they held significant influence. In contrast, the local residents had a distinct perspective on the commune, viewing it as a solution to issues arising from limited agricultural production and a means to address labor-related challenges. Consequently, it becomes evident that the Maoist narrative leaned more towards ideology, while the local population prioritized practical measures to enhance their livelihoods. The following paragraphs delve into a detailed examination of both the narratives presented by the Maoists and the perspectives expressed in local vernaculars.

4.2.1 Narratives of the Maoist Party

Maoist documents and interviews with their leaders have revealed the party's perspective, goals, and intentions in establishing the commune. The Maoist party aimed to bring about a societal transformation by introducing economic initiatives that would move away from conventional production methods and increase output, leading to the development of socialism and a new democratic system at the local level. Maoist leaders stressed the importance of eliminating class status among all members of society by pooling all private property, including land and other belongings, under collective ownership. The Maoists aimed to create a socialist economy and eliminate the semi-feudal³² mode of production by establishing large cooperatives and communes to meet the needs of rural people and build a new state with a new economic system. The Maoists devised a strategy to create an

³² The Maoist party and other communist parties in Nepal characterized Nepal's mode of production as being both semi-feudal and semi-colonized. This assessment was based on factors such as the traditional land tenure system and the influence of India and Western countries on the country (CPNM, 1991, p. 191).

agricultural production association to maintain collective land ownership and put a collective farming system into practice³³. The Maoists also intended to alter the family structure, private property, love, marriage, and sexual behavior of people based on the proletariat's viewpoint (CPNM, 1998, p. 446). They aimed to fulfill the needs of health, education, agriculture, justice, development, construction, security, communication, and cooperation in the base areas. A Maoist document stated that:

It is necessary to take initiatives very seriously to resolve the conflict between the existing economic base and political infrastructure in the base areas. It is necessary to lay the foundations of a self-reliant economy by developing various forms and levels of cooperatives increasing employment and production, and laying the foundation of the base areas. (CPNM, 2003, p. 552)

Primary focus of the Maoist party, as such, was to establish an economy that could sustain itself and benefit both the local inhabitants and Maoist supporters. Their records indicate that they emphasized on enhancing the productivity of agriculture and specific industries, as well as carrying out their armed struggle. Furthermore, they founded schools and healthcare facilities to benefit the general public. In Mid-western region, the Maoist party established four communes in the Jajarkot, Rukum, and Rolpa districts. The Maoist leader, Netra Bikram Chand, recalls:

After our base area was formed, when people's power began to operate, I took charge of the base area in 2000. Leadership trusted me and gave me responsibility. The organs related to power have to think about and take charge of all these matters such as economy, law, justice, education, health, banks, industry, and development. We talked as a team. The party also helped. Among them, in the economic field, we put forward the policy of establishment of cooperatives, communes, financial systems, and industry. (Interview, February 26, 2023)

The Maoist party characterized the previous mode of production as a blend of semi-feudal and semi-colonized in their documents (CPNM, 1991, p. 191), and they aimed to establish a new system in base areas such as Thabang under the Mid-Western Command of the Maoist and the people's government (CPNM, 1998, p. 428). No feudal lords were discovered, but in Thabang, some individuals owned more land than the general population. Thabang was a

³³ At their sixth convention in 1991, the CPNM (Unity-centre), a former faction of the Maoist party, devised a plan to enhance agricultural productivity through the establishment of agricultural cooperatives and the implementation of a land reform initiative (CPNM, 1991, p. 220)

remote area that had seen a lot of unrest during the Panchayat system, and it was an ideal location for the insurgents to plan their activities without interference from the government. Santosh Budha Magar, a 63-year-old participant who serves as the in-charge of the Rolpa people's government and was a member of the commune, illuminates:

Our goal is to create a new democratic system and implement socialism by getting rid of the semi-feudal and semi-capitalist system. A plan was devised to establish a commune, co-operatives, and collectivization. To make this happen, families of martyrs, full-time members, and others facing daily struggles were selected to live in the commune. Although they couldn't manage the land of their own, living together would solve many of their problems. (Interview, March 25, 2022)

The Maoists strategized the collection of privately owned lands and engaged in deliberations regarding the participation of leaders, cadres, and individuals in the communes. The party maintained the records of households expressing their willingness to join the communes and shared this information with lower levels of organization. While initially, the party mandated the inclusion of leaders' families in the communes, after extensive discussions and meetings, the commune was eventually opened to the broader public. Jaya Prakash Rokka, a former in-charge, affirmed that thorough preparations were carried out before the establishment of the commune. He clarifies that their optimum goal was to establish scientific socialism and communism through the path of socialism, and they established people's government to solve the problems of general people. The Maoist group made significant efforts to align their narrative of social transformation, the establishment of socialism, and the formation of communal units with the specific challenges related to production and consumption in the local community of Thabang. Their objective was to appeal to and garner support from the local population. Examining how the local people perceived the narrative constructed by the Maoists in their vernaculars holds significance during the formative stage of the commune.

4.2.2 Local Vernaculars of the Commune

The inhabitants of Thabang had a distinct way of comprehending and perceiving the commune, rooted in their local interactions and communications. Their unique dialects and expressions reflected their rich cultural heritage and collective traditions, setting them apart from other communities (see the methodology section for this). To capture this connection to their locality, traditional culture, and distinctive perspective on the commune, I referred to it

as the 'local vernacular'. The Maoist party viewed it as a political and ideological matter, aiming to establish collectivization practices without gaining full control of the state during the People's War. They intended to solve the issues faced by the people in their base area and initiate a trial of socialism.

The Maoist leaders connected the commune to their party program and ideology, promoting it as a way to practice socialism in local areas. They believed that starting communes in the areas where they had strong support would serve as an experiment and an example for the rest of the country when they would gain control of the state. However, the local people had a different understanding of the commune than the party leaders. They were primarily concerned with their daily needs and livelihoods and hoped that joining the commune would provide an easier way to meet these needs and improve their standard of living. The local people viewed the commune as a solution to their immediate problems and family matters. Sarjita Rokka Magar, a 54-years-old participant from Thabang and a member of the commune presents, her view:

We faced several challenges, such as our younger members getting involved in armed struggle, a shortage of labor, and difficulties in meeting our daily needs. To overcome these complications, it was suggested that living in a group could provide a solution by allowing us to share our problems, and increase our collective labor force. We also recognized that private property was a major cause of our problems and therefore we decided to pool our resources together by mixing our property in a group. (Interview, March 21, 2022)

The general members of the commune were primarily focused on solving their daily problems, rather than being concerned about ideology and establishing a socialist state. Due to the fragmented land tenure and traditional agricultural practices, they struggled to meet their basic needs and increase their income. The people of Thabang faced three main challenges: young people leaving to fight in the Maoist conflict, a lack of workers for the fields, and government oppression of Maoist supporters. To cope with these challenges, household members relied on each other for support. Despite this, they were also taught about socialism and the goal of establishing a new state. Prabesh Rokka Aka Chhiring, a 45-year-old former in-charge of the commune from Thabang explains:

The socialist society of sharing and problem-solving was our only dream. We intend to live together, eat together, and work together. It was anticipated that it

would address the issues with conventional agriculture. Collective action could result in the emergence of a new society. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

During the interviews, it was discovered that they had difficulty working the land they owned and meeting their daily necessities. Only elderly and young persons, who were unable to serve in the military were present in the home. The party's full-timers and youth who had served in the military were required to return to their homes and engage in agricultural work during times of peace. However, this was not feasible during the intense period of armed struggle. At the peak of the war, the Maoist party implemented a policy mandating the involvement of one person from each household in the people's war, resulting in a shortage of labor within the village. As a solution, to address this labor deficiency in the fields and facilitate collective agricultural efforts, the idea of establishing a commune was conceived.

A different vernacular was discovered in Thabang that pertained to safety within the community. On the other hand, those who lived outside of the community experienced insecurity when living alone. Therefore, living together in a group makes people feel more secure. To curb Maoist activities in Rolpa and Rukum the Nepal army and police carried out multiple missions, including 'Romeo' and 'Kilo Sera' at different times. The Nepali army surrounded Thabang on September 21, 2002, and conducted a house-to-house search, subjecting those found in the houses to torture. Mule BK recounted his encounter with the army, which arrived at night, causing many people to flee to the forest. His father was apprehended by the army, who threatened to kill him and beat him on the suspicion of being a Maoist. Afterward, he was released back to his home in a near-death condition, as he was an elderly person in the village. At the time of operation by the Nepalese army, the village was vacated and all people hid in the forest. Army set fire to more than 13 homes in Thabang. At that moment, five ladies were killed (Rokka Magar, 2011, p. 13). 33 people were recorded to be killed during the Maoist armed struggle. Many more were full-time cadres and employed as combatants. Kashiman Budhha, a 71-year-old participant and a member of the commune from Thabang, informed me:

We were unable to predict when the insurrection and government forces would go to battle. There were always instances of terrorism. We hid in the forest day and night when the army and police came to our village. Youth had entered the party and the people's army to work. In our area, labor was in short supply. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

The inhabitants of Thabang had undergone torment and uncertainty from both the Maoist rebels and the government forces. Nevertheless, they usually favored the Maoist rebels and were apprehensive of the security forces. They yearned for the commune to protect them. The Maoist party and the local population had some similarities in the story they conveyed about the commune. Nonetheless, the people perceived the commune as a resolution to their daily necessities and labor scarcity, while the Maoist party considered it a means to institute a socialist unit and bring about fundamental changes in the production mode, which was more motivated by ideology. During my field research, I discovered that the Maoist party and the local people had different narratives and vernaculars about the commune. How was the conscientization used by Maoists to convince people to join the commune is an important question that is an important part of this research.

4.2.3 Persuasion to Establish the Commune

The Maoist party employed a multi-step approach to educate the general public about the establishment of a commune. Initially, they focused on highlighting the external challenges and influences that affected people's everyday lives, while emphasizing the importance of following existing values, laws, and social norms. This process was referred to as magical consciousness (Freire, 1972). The next step was to raise awareness about the causes of these issues and encourage people to compare their lives with others, which was called naïve consciousness. The Maoist party claimed that the main problems causing their difficult lives in Thabang were fractional land tenure, traditional farming, and private ownership. Santosh Budha Magar, a 63-year-old participant and the in-charge of the People's Government of Thabang, adds:

In every part of the village, we attempted repeatedly to persuade residents to join the commune. We didn't compel them at all. Agriculture was produced according to tradition under the previous regime, which was centered on exploitation. We had to change the system and put in a new production system. It would make their way of life simpler. We first chose to join the leadership level, then the martyr family, and lastly the combatant. We, however, made it open to all supporters and common people. (Interview, March 25, 2022)

As people began to recognize the need to address their long-standing problems, they were convinced to pursue social change, which is known as critical consciousness (Freire, 1972). The Maoists tried to persuade people to adopt alternative methods of establishing collective

ownership and farming instead of traditional agriculture. These three stages of conscientization were used by the Maoists to persuade people to establish the commune. However, the establishment of the commune was a carefully planned and organized event, and although the residents of Thabang were supporters of the Maoist party, they were initially hesitant to join the commune. Prabesh Rokka, aka Chhiring, a 45-year-old participant from Thabang and a leader of the commune, sheds light:

During the intensification of the people's war, the previous state structure became obsolete, leading to the establishment of people's governments and people's states in various locations within the Midwestern region. As the Maoist base area was established, discussions about creating communes took place at different levels of the party leadership. Many individuals, driven by the anticipation of a new system being established, decided to join the commune, recognizing its connection to both the party and the people. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

Maoists used coercion as a means of recruiting combatants and ensuring obedience among the population under their control (Graham, 2007, p. 237). However, interestingly, members of the commune did not mention coercion being used to persuade them to join. As per the aforementioned statement, people were not compelled to join the commune, although the Maoists made repeated efforts to convince them to participate. Several participants suggested that the formation of the commune necessitated extensive planning. Initially, when the Midwestern command of the Maoists decided to create a commune and make their leaders proletarian, some medium-level leaders of Thabang were willing to submit their property to the party and commune. Many individuals and supporters who chose not to join the commune also mentioned that the Maoists did not force them to do so. Subsequently, the families of supporters and ordinary people began joining the commune. However, there were specific criteria that had to be met for someone to become a member of the commune, and without fulfilling these criteria, joining the commune was not possible.

4.3 Background and Class Analysis of Members Before Joining the Commune

The socioeconomic background is crucial for evaluating Thabangs in communal and group activities. It reflects an individual or group's social and economic status within society's hierarchical structure. This background is a significant factor in various fields, including health and education, and it underlies societal attitudes and political interests (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Schultz, 2005; Breen & Jonsson, 2005). Understanding people's

socioeconomic status is a key to grasping social inequality. Marx emphasized the role of social class in shaping behavior (Marx & Engels, 1848), while Max Weber identified three dimensions of social status: power, status, and class (Weber, 1947). Moreover, socioeconomic status is often defined by a combination of factors like education, income, and occupation. Information about residence, ethnicity, and religion also reveals disparities and influences individuals' privileges, power, and control, defining their social standing and living conditions (APA, 2007, p. 1). This information sheds light on why individuals join communes. Building on these theories, I have researched the socioeconomic backgrounds of Ajambari commune members in Thabang, spanning different levels of landholdings.

4.3.1 The Diverse Spectrum of Landholdings

Landholding is a significant measure of the socio-economic status of households, serving as a fundamental asset for obtaining livelihood and sustaining cultural practices (Dhakal, 2011, p. 35). In Nepal, land ownership is closely linked to economic prosperity, social status, and political power. It is a crucial determinant of income, food security, and equity and is considered the most valuable possession of the people, signifying their identity, power, wealth, and political access (Regmi, 1999a, p. 1). As the primary driver of economic productivity and survival, land has a far-reaching impact on various interconnected social, political, and economic factors, ranging from education to access to necessities such as water and electricity (Wickeri, 2011, p. 932).

The most valuable resource in Nepal's rural, agrarian economy is land. Nearly 60% of Nepalese people rely on agriculture as their primary source of income. However, land is limited in the hands of a small number of people; 31% of agricultural land is owned by the richest 7% of households. 54% of farmers in Nepal possessed less than 0.5 hectares of land in 2011–12. Additionally, up to 85% of rural households are classified as land poor, and 29% of rural households lack access to land (Pandey et al., 2011, p. 244). For this study, it is noteworthy to explore the commune members' land possession and their perception of their socio-economic status.

Table 4.2*The Landholdings of the Households of the Commune*

Landholding	No. of households	Percentage
1 Hectare - 2 Hectare	6	18.18
Between 0.5 to 1 Hectare	8	24.24
Between 0.3 to 0.5 Hectare	9	27.27
Between 0.1 to 0.3 Hectare	7	21.21
Landlessness	3	9.10
Total	N= 33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

In the commune, all members were farmers who cultivated a portion of land primarily for their own consumption, and they were classified into rich, middle, and poor peasants based on their land ownership. Approximately 42% of the commune members were categorized as rich peasants, who had a surplus of produce that they sold to maintain their elevated social status. The members from the upper class admitted that not all of the land was suitable for farming and only a small fraction of it was utilized for that purpose. Nevertheless, they could not generate greater agricultural output from their land compared to the other social classes. Middle peasants, who constituted 27% of the commune, did not hire or sell labor as a commodity (Seddon et al., 2002, p. 50). Poor peasants, who owned a very small amount of land and struggled to feed themselves for an entire year, accounted for more than 21% of the population and often relied on working for others, such as tenants and sharecroppers. A single Dalit household of the Ajambari Commune owned no land other than their house and two households found that they sold all their land to join the commune.

Despite the varying economic backgrounds of the Ajambari commune members, which ranged from wealthy to middle-class and poor, they all came together in unity. Once they joined the commune, the land was combined and utilized collectively, with products shared among all. Jaya Prakash Rokka emphasized that each individual, regardless of their previous wealth, received an equal share of the land, resulting in a harmonious and egalitarian community. Even those who came from distant places and had no prior land ownership were also treated on par with others. Furthermore, each member pursued different occupations to cater to their daily needs, which I have elaborated on in the subsequent section.

4.3.2 Occupational Backgrounds

The variation in job roles results in varying degrees of social and material disparities among individuals, also known as social classes, and this distinction is fundamental to the formation of the class system. Establishing people's socioeconomic position is greatly influenced by their occupation, which reflects their level of education, income, and social status (Krieger, Williams & Moss, 1997; MacIntyre & Hunt, 1997). Furthermore, occupation can be categorized into agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, which encompass various skill sets, expertise, and resource control, particularly in non-farm sectors (Wright, 1980; Goldthrope, 1980). In rural areas of developing nations, agriculture remains the primary means of production that provides livelihood and income for people. However, relying solely on agriculture is often inadequate to meet daily needs, which drives individuals to seek other options. Although non-agriculture job opportunities are limited in rural areas, some people take on locally available jobs, while others move to different areas in search of employment opportunities. The occupational pattern in Thabang was similar to that of other rural areas in developing countries.

Table 4.3

Major Occupation of Households Before Joining the Commune

Types of occupation	No. of Households	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	16	48.48
Agriculture and Wage wage only	14 3	42.42 9.10
Total	N= 33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

The commune's primary occupations were agriculture and wage labor, with the former being the main source of income. Previously, Thabang lacked non-agricultural sources of income, with only limited wage opportunities such as house construction and agricultural labor available. Thus, people either relied on agriculture for subsistence or supplemented their income with limited opportunities for menial labor. Out of all the households, nearly 45% were involved in both agriculture and wage labor, while the remaining 48% relied solely on agriculture to sustain their livelihood. Dhana Lal Buddha, a 59-year-old participant from Thabang and a member of the commune shed light on their condition:

We lacked sufficient land and could not produce the necessary grains to feed ourselves throughout the year. A small portion of our land allowed us to grow a meager crop of potatoes and corn. Other agricultural production was nonexistent. As a result, we worked in the village to support our families. There were only two jobs available: building houses and working on farms. Instead of paying us as we toiled in the fields, they gave us some food. (Interview, September 20, 2022)

Thabang is located in the hilly central region of Nepal, approximately one hundred miles from the district headquarters of Libang in the Rolpa district, and does not offer many job opportunities in non-agricultural sectors. The people were involved in agriculture and also raised some domestic animals such as goats, cows, and oxen. During the summer, the men would travel to *Gwala* (see Annex 8), taking their herds of domestic animals to the high hills and returning only during the winter, specifically during the harvest season. Apart from farming, construction work, and agriculture-related jobs, there were not any other employment opportunities available. The arguments of Seddon and his friends based on the mode of production of Nepal are more appropriate:

Much recent discussion has centered around the most adequate conceptualization of the process of underdevelopment whereby a pre-capitalist society with its own internal dynamics and distinctive history is incorporated within the economic and political system dominated by the capitalist mode of production and its political and ideological superstructures and yet remain itself predominantly non-capitalist in terms of its indigenous modes of production. (Seddon et al., 2002, p. 20).

Thabang's mode of production was analyzed based on landholding and occupation, revealing a pre-capitalist structure. The residents owned small plots of land from 0.3 hectares to 0.5 hectares and some cattle with 4 to 5 cows and 10-20 goats, primarily engaging in traditional agriculture, which was deeply rooted in their indigenous production methods. Additionally, some individuals practiced *parima* and *Jhara*, labor-intensive activities without monetary compensation. Until 2008, Thabang faced geographical isolation, lacking road connectivity, which required the use of donkeys and porters to transport essential supplies. This lack of infrastructure presented significant challenges for engaging in market activities within Thabang. Consequently, the community relied heavily on locally consumed goods for their daily needs. In the subsequent section, I have discussed how differences in landholdings and occupations contribute to variations in income.

4.3.3 Traditional Agriculture for Income

The determination of social class is closely tied to the distribution of income, which influences the supply and demand of goods and services, market inefficiencies, and negotiating abilities (Proudhon, 2011; Wright 1985). The income level of individuals determines their social status, and there are different income levels for various classes. The wealthier class has a higher income while the poorer class has a lower income. Household income status indicates the resources available to it and influences the standard of living. The reason for the income disparity is due to factors such as education, occupational skills, social prestige, and exclusivity (Wodtke, 2016, p. 19). Despite all members of the commune working in agriculture and labor, their social status was determined by their varying income levels.

Table 4.4

Income level of households before joining the commune

Group	No. of Households	Households (%)	Maize (In Quintals)	Potato (In Quintals)
High Income	7	21.22	20-30	30-60
Upper middle-Income	8	24.24	12-20	20-30
Lower middle- Income	10	30.30	5-12	10-20
Low Income	8	24.24	1-5	5-10
Total	33	100	-	-

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

The Thabangi people's income sources were not diverse, and the income levels of these households were found to be quite comparable. Other than agriculture, they had no other employment. The main staple harvest of Thabang was maize and potatoes. Crop yield and income varied according to the ownership of land parcels. Only 20% of households sold more than 50 quintals of corn and potatoes. They made between 2 and 3 lakh Nepalese rupees every year. Their income during the formative stage of the commune was the same as the national average income of Nepal in 2004/5 (NLSS, 2011, p. 43)³⁴. However, other homes only had enough money to cover their basic needs. Some households holding small land parcels said that they had enough production to sustain for only five to six months. They had to look for labor for another six months to manage household resources. However, since it was centered

³⁴ The NLSS report from 2010/11 compares the nominal average household income in Nepal between 2003/04 and 2010/11. The report indicates that in 2003/04, the nominal average household income in Nepal was Rs. 80,111. This is comparable to the households in the Ajambari commune, as both the formation of the commune and the NLSS conducted in 2003/04 occurred during the same period (NLSS, 2011).

on *Parima* (see Annex 8), the wage has nothing to do with farming. It was based on little construction projects like house construction or wage labor outside of the village. These households made up a percentage of greater than 50. It reveals that the individuals who joined the commune had significant difficulty managing their means of subsistence. In addition to agricultural income, there is also revenue generated from the cultivation of *Bhango* in Thabang.

4.3.3.1 *Bhango* as a Source of Extra-Income

During my initial visit to Thabang in April 2021, I was engaged in conversations with the locals to gain insights into the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the area. It was during these interactions that the topic of *Bhango* (see Annex 8) cultivation and cocaine production was brought up. Kashiman Budha specifically highlighted that *Bhango* serves as the primary source of income in Thabang. Intrigued by this revelation, I developed an interest in returning to Thabang in September or October to witness the cultivation of *Bhango* firsthand. When I revisited Thabang in September 2022, I noticed that every household had *Bhango* plants growing alongside maize in their fields. In Thabang, the term "Bhango" refers to marijuana or cannabis, which is utilized for various purposes such as making thread, bags, and traditional *Khado* (see Annex 8) clothing. The seeds of *Bhango* are also used for the preparation of pickles and are often exchanged for rice. Thus, *Bhango* holds significant value as a versatile and useful plant for the people of Thabang. It is important to note, however, that the government had implemented a ban on *Bhango* cultivation in 1979. I am eager to explore the effects of this prohibition on the income of the Thabang community, with Hira Rokka Magar offering valuable insights on the matter. Hira Rokka Magar, a 63-year-old participant and resident of Thabang, clarifies:

The prohibition on *Bhango* cultivation did not have any impact on the income of the residents of Thabang. People in Thabang persist in planting *Bhango* in their fields. Particularly in the upper part of Thabang, on the hillside, the growth of *Bhango* thrives. As a result, individuals can earn income ranging between 4 to 5 lakhs Nepalese rupees. It is known that people offer gifts such as vegetables and goats to the police, and the police turn a blind eye to the *Bhango* cultivation activities. (Interview, March 31, 2022)

During my interviews regarding the cultivation of *Bhango* and income generation in Thabang, I encountered reluctance from people to disclose their earnings. Nevertheless, I did

witness a woman actively involved in the process of extracting cocaine, palpably rubbing her hands as she did so. Such activities appeared to be prevalent in Thabang. Srikumari Rokka, a women's rights activist, mentioned that *Bhanggo* cultivation serves as a traditional means of livelihood for the women in Thabang, who also use cloth made from *Bhanggo*. Additionally, Kashiman Budha informed me that buyers clandestinely visited to acquire hashish, with the police seemingly unaware. The price of hashish ranges from 18,000 to 20,000 Nepalese rupees per kilogram. Police officer Binod Ghimire acknowledged the geographical challenges that make *Bhanggo* farming easier but assured efforts were being made to control and regulate it gradually. He denied claims that the police permit *Bhanggo* cultivation. A notable incident took place in November 2018 when Dil Kumari Jhakri from Thabang was apprehended in Ghartigaun, Rolpa, with 9 kilograms of cocaine. This incident highlights the significant presence of *Bhanggo* cultivation and cocaine production in Thabang. These occurrences suggest that the ban on *Bhanggo* in Thabang lacks effectiveness and that it continues to generate income, supporting livelihoods in the area. Furthermore, as an attempt to mitigate the conflict, certain initiatives like the Rapti Integrated Rural Development project were undertaken in Rolpa.

4.3.3.2 Initiatives to Eliminate Inequality

The Rapti Integrated Rural Development project³⁵ was initiated in 1980 to enhance the living standards of families residing in the Rapti zone. The project aimed to achieve this by increasing income and production levels, as well as improving local control over agriculture, health, education, resource management, and family planning systems. It was implemented in Dang, Pyuthan, Salyan, Rolpa, and Rukum. RIRDP implemented a range of initiatives, including adult literacy programs, rural infrastructure development, community forest projects, and agricultural training. This involvement of peasants in development activities was notable (Paudel, 2016). Additionally, the project also served as an instrumental factor during the Maoist uprising. The emergence of new peasant leaders within the RIRDP framework played a significant role in uniting local dissatisfactions and orchestrating resistance against landlords, moneylenders, and state authorities, further contributing to the overall Maoist people's war. RIRDP launched a literacy program in Thabang by using the school teachers. Santosh Budha Magar, a leader and former teacher, said that teachers also taught rebellious literacy to peasants in the night and also the history of village uprisings.

³⁵ RIRDP was launched by USAID in 1980 with an investment of 33,634 million us dollars and a 23% contribution by the government of Nepal. The phase I was completed in 1986 and phase 2 was completed in 1998.

Lali Rokka, who was killed during the Maoist armed struggle, was a social health worker by the training provided by RIRD. He formed a women's group and launched a literacy program too. He also got training and introduced vegetables, potatoes, and fruit farming in Thabang. Later, she joined the basic health-training program including vaccination and midwife support, and became a female community health volunteer for Thabang. She was a student of Santosh Budha Magar and spread revolutionary ideology in Thabang. Later, she was killed by the police in 1998. Kashiman Budha, a member of the commune also received training in vegetable cultivation in 1985 in Mustang, Nepal, organized by RIRD. According to Kashiman Budha, he was the sole Thabang in that particular training program. Unfortunately, he mentioned that he did not receive any assistance or support from RIRD during or after the training. People still relied on traditional agriculture for sustenance only.

I found that before 2008, the area lacked road connections to nearby regions such as Libang and Sulichaur in Rolpa, Rukum, and Dang. Only after 2008, roads were constructed to link Thabang with these areas. However, before the construction of the road in 2008, transportation in Thabang relied heavily on donkeys and porters, and the agricultural practices were traditional and focused on subsistence farming. Despite the construction of a road connecting the administrative headquarters of Rolpa district, Libang, it did not extend to Thabang. Subedi (2005, p. 247) argues that foreign aid investments in the agricultural sector failed to establish connections between agricultural development and socio-economic and infrastructure sectors. Furthermore, investments in the road transport sector did not yield positive impacts on agricultural production or marketing. Even after two decades of implementation, the Rapti Integrated Rural Development project could not effectively address regional disparities and sectoral activities, including agriculture, forests, and irrigation. Additionally, there remained an imbalance in the distribution of road networks, rendering many highland areas inaccessible (Gurung, 2005, p. 50).

While conducting my fieldwork in Thabang, it came to light that RIRD had introduced literacy programs and training initiatives for the local peasants. However, despite these efforts, there was little noticeable improvement in the income of the people. Thabang continued to be secluded and was viewed as a marginalized or shadow territory. As a result, productivity levels remained extremely low, and the overall quality of life in the area was considerably impoverished during the establishment of the commune. Despite RIRD's efforts in implementing a literacy program, a significant portion of Thabang's population still grappled with illiteracy, a topic that I have further discussed in the subsequent paragraph.

4.3.4 Educational Variations

The level of education that people attain is influenced by their position in the social class hierarchy, and conversely, education is considered one of the indicators of social class. Individuals who come from more privileged social backgrounds are more likely to receive a higher level of education, while those who come from lower social classes have fewer opportunities to obtain better education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Goldthorpe, 2000). Analyzing the educational background and its function in persuading people to join the commune is crucial. According to functionalists, education serves two societal functions: first, manifest functions of socialization, the transmission of norms and cultures, and social control; and second, latent functions of courtship, social networks, and group work (Hallinan, 2000, p. 2). Critical theorists contend, however, that the educational system upholds the status quo and maintains the dominance of strong groups. In his critique of the educational system, Freire focuses on the pedagogy of acquiring a thorough comprehension of the world that facilitates the perception and revelation of purported political and social issues. Upon analyzing the educational backgrounds of the members of the Ajambari commune, it was discovered that there was a degree of variation in the level of education they had achieved.

Table 4.5

Educational Level of Household Heads of the Commune

Educational Level	No. of Household Head	Percentage
Bachelor	3	9.1
Intermediate	2	6.1
Up to 10 class	5	15.1
Literate	17	51.5
Illiterate	6	18.2
Total	N= 33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

Shree Bir Malabhadra Secondary School was founded in Thabang in 1976. Subsequently, in 2008, it was upgraded to a higher secondary school. Additionally, there were primary schools in Funtibang, Therlabang, Maranthan, Jhakebang, and Dahabang. To address the issue of low literacy levels, certain informal literacy programs were initiated in Thabang. Despite these efforts, the overall literacy level among commune members remained relatively low. The educational status of the Ajambari commune's members is shown in Table No. 5, which

highlights the lower level of education among them. Less than 16% of members had education beyond the secondary level, while more than 15% were illiterate. In the vicinity of Thabang village, there existed a school that offered education up to the lower secondary level. Consequently, students were required to travel to either Libang, the district headquarters of Rolpa, or Dang to pursue further studies. Regarding their education level, Nevertheless I met a member of the commune who left school after a short time of study, which covers more than 15 percent. The category literate covers the group who have taken informal classes and can simply read and write. Illiterate members had not taken any informal classes and completely could not read and write. Illiterate people have more vulnerability to challenges in social and economic situations and capabilities, as well as feelings of fear, insecurity, and helplessness (Martine & Fernandez, 2010, p. 35). Ram Kirini Rokka, a 43-year-old participant and a leader of the Ajambari Commune, mentions:

The majority of the commune's residents were illiterate. They did not have time to study because they had extra housework to do. They had to work in the fields to provide for their family and graze the cattle. They did, however, participate in the movement and were quite politically informed. They were easily persuaded to live in the commune as the new social structure. (Interview, March 25, 2022)

Due to a higher illiteracy rate among family members, particularly women, in the commune, these individuals were more susceptible to concerns about unfavorable economic and political situations. This fear motivated them to engage in the collective endeavor. Educated individuals predominantly assumed leadership roles within the commune, while others followed the assigned tasks. During my conversations with commune members, those who had basic literacy skills expressed their concerns and anxieties regarding personal issues. On the other hand, the educated individuals discussed broader topics such as the Maoist ideology as a whole and the party policies. Education constitutes a significant aspect of the commune members' awareness; nonetheless, it is crucial to analyze gender roles and their connection to educational opportunities.

4.3.5 Male Domination in the Commune

The involvement of women in the Ajambari commune provides insight into the prevailing social dynamics and aids in understanding the daily experiences and power dynamics between men and women. Traditional patriarchal norms dictate that men have authority over household matters. Analyzing the role of gender gives roots of women's subordination and

classes of household: higher or lower. The women who do not find meaningful work in a full-time public workplace do not get emancipation (Friendan 1963, p.2). Scott (1988) asserts that gender plays a crucial role in shaping social interactions and serves as a key mechanism for demonstrating power dynamics. Permitting women to participate in outdoor activities by releasing them from domestic responsibilities is important. While liberal feminism focuses on individual rights and freedoms, socialist feminism sees the gender divide in labor and production as the root issue (Kachuck, 1995).

The heads of households are the main income earners and providers of food within the household (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 302). They also wield the highest level of authority over the entire household's property. In Nepalese society, men hold patriarchal power, and women are excluded from various social, economic, and political sectors (Shrestha & Gartoulla, 2015), affecting all communities and ethnic groups. However, in certain ethnic groups such as Limbu, Gurung, Rai, Magar, and Sherpa, women play significant roles in household tasks alongside men. By studying the gender roles within communes, we can identify particular characteristics of households that motivate them to become part of a commune.

Table 4.6

Household head of members of the commune

Types of Household Head	No. of Household Head	Percentage
Male Headed	27	81.8
Female-Headed	6	18.2
Total	N= 33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

The data presented in the table indicates that more than 80 percent of households in the commune were male-headed and only less than 20 percent were female-headed. The women in the Thabang did not have work that made extra income to the household but had been working on the land to cultivate traditional crops. The land was not registered in the name of women, and men were allocated to work outside. However, the women in Thabang from Kham Magar had the power to decide the household activities. Ram Maya Rokka, a 69-year-old and a member of the Ajambari commune member, discloses:

It was not only the decision of my husband. He discussed it in the house and we decided together to join the commune. Not only that I was involved in the mass

meeting discussing the commune. I knew many things that the old system would not improve our condition, and then I was ready to join the commune. (Interview, March 21, 2022)

Ram Maya's statement indicates that both husband and wife shared equal involvement in household decision-making. Another commune member, Bal Prasad Gharti from the nearby area of Phuntibang, had an intriguing story about his decision to join the commune. Although Bal Prasad and his elderly mother became part of the commune, his wife, Janpura Gharti Magar, was reluctant to join. Despite her husband's insistence, she adamantly refused to participate and even expressed a preference for being beaten or killed rather than being compelled to join. Her reasoning behind this decision stemmed from her aversion to living in communal settings. In another instance, Tula Pun decided to join the commune independently of her husband. Her husband, dissatisfied with the restricted environment of the commune, left on the first night and ventured to India in search of employment. These incidents serve as examples that highlight the agency of Kham Magar women in making decisions regarding household matters, as observed by Molnar (1981). In the subsequent section, I have explored how ethnic composition plays a crucial role in establishing the commune.

4.3.6 Ethnic Background

The analysis of ethnicity is significant in Nepal since there are 126 ethnic groups documented in the 2022 population census, each with distinct social and cultural circumstances and varying levels of social status. Moreover, ethnicity is widely discussed and connected to various aspects of society, politics, and economics, making it a highly debated issue (Gellner, 1997; Shneiderman, 2009; Pandey, 2010; Lawoti & Hangen, 2013). Even within the same ethnic group, resource distribution and social class differ significantly, as noted by Pandey (2010). The Nepalese society faces a significant problem of patronage-based domination, resulting in a division of people in each caste and ethnic group between rulers and the ruled (Pandey, 2010, p.162). Consequently, examining the ethnic backgrounds of commune members and investigating the divisions within them is crucial.

As Thabang is a native of Kham Magar, most of the commune's members (over 90%) also belong to the Kham Magar community. Only a small minority, less than 10 percent, of the households were from the Chhetri and Dalit ethnic groups. Dhanaraj Rawat, who hailed from Dang but resided in Phuntibang near Thabang after marrying a Magar girl, affirmed that there was no discrimination or distinction based on ethnicity among the commune members.

Although there are approximately 188 Dalit households in Thabang, they did not have a significant presence in the commune. Ganga BK, a 52-year-old participant and the wife of a Dalit member of the commune, emphasizes:

Specifically, no instance of untouchability discrimination was observed. However, leaders of the commune were responsible for decision-making, and we, as individuals, were not actively engaged in those processes. In terms of household responsibilities, there was no contention when it came to cooking, and the tasks were shared accordingly. However, a tragic incident occurred when my husband was killed in a shop, which instilled fear in us. We felt a sense of isolation and insecurity within the commune, as there was no one to offer support or protection. Consequently, we made the difficult decision to leave the commune following the loss of my husband's life. (Interview, April 4, 2023)

The sense of isolation and insecurity experienced by a single Dalit household within the commune highlights the dominance of the Kham Magar community and the lack of consultation regarding the issues faced by the Dalit family. They had to manage and contemplate their future independently, without external support. On the other hand, the remaining members of the commune shared a collective cultural background encompassing customs, beliefs, values, language, religion, and heritage specific to the Kham Magar community. It is important to note that the Kham Magars, as an ethnic group, have historically encountered marginalization in Nepal and have struggled to achieve recognition and integration from the government. Although there were no overt signs of discrimination or negative attitudes towards other ethnic groups among the commune members, it is worth mentioning that the leaders of the commune consistently came from the Kham Magar community.

Table 4.7

Caste/Ethnic Composition of Households Members of the Commune

Caste/Ethnic Category	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
Kham Magar	31	93.94
Bramin/Chhetri	1	3.03
Dalit	1	3.03
Total	N=33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

In summary, a small segment of the commune consisting of 11 households, which accounted for approximately 33% of the population, held a higher social status due to their ownership of more land and greater income than the rest of the population. They were educated and could communicate and implement the Maoist party policies within the commune. This higher class controlled the entire commune program and held leadership and management positions, enjoying greater privileges than the other households. Meanwhile, a larger percentage of the commune's population belonged to the lower class. They owned less land and could not meet their basic needs. They had only basic literacy without formal schooling, and many were illiterate. The lower class tended to follow the directives of the higher class, and thus, it is evident that two distinct social classes existed within the commune.

The majority of households in the commune were led by males, with only a small percentage headed by females. This implies that the Kham Magar community was still male-dominated. Additionally, nearly all households in the commune were from the Kham Magar community, with only one Chhetri and one Dalit household. The Chhetri and Dalit households were in the minority and did not hold leadership positions in the commune. Therefore, the Kham Magar communities, who belonged to the higher class and held dominance in Thabang, were the primary leaders of the commune. The Maoists had their objectives and narratives of establishing the socialist unit in Thabang to ensure changes to people, which is discussed in the following paragraph.

4.4 Investment in the Commune and Criteria for Being a member

There were not certain criteria to join the commune, such as being family of martyrs or insurgents or family of burnt houses. As Jaya Prakash Rokka, the informant of Thabang, informed me, general people, who would like to join, could be members of the commune. However, one criterion was that they should believe in collective residing and submit the property they had to commune, such as land, utensils, luggage, and other materials. Jaya Prakash Rokka, a 54-year-old participant from Thabang and a leader of the Ajambari commune, reveals:

Except for the husband, wife, and children, we agreed that we would not have even a needle. We believed in common property, but not in private property. By submitting our registration to the party, we managed to keep our land within the commune. We also donated our kitchenware and cash to the commune. To construct a new

collectivization and socialist system, great sacrifices had to be made. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

Upon joining the commune, the land they possessed individually (as indicated in Table 4 2) was integrated into the collective system, becoming the primary source of production. Nevertheless, discrepancies were discovered between land submission and investment. Those who lived far away from the commune left their land, while those who lived nearby combined their land. Some individuals mentioned that they were unable to register their land in the name of the commune. Despite this, Pharke Bahadur Rokka, a 63-year-old participant from Thabang, decided to sell his land and house to contribute to the commune's investment. He elucidates:

Many people had merely provided their names, although they were the owners of the land. They did not exhibit all of their assets either. To contribute to the commune, we sold our home and property. I was really dedicated to the commune and thought that the implementation of a new system and transformation would help our miserable situation. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

This statement revealed additional inequalities that existed since the inception of the Ajambari commune. Some individuals were unable to sell their land at that time, so they joined the community without doing so. It was a massive number, about 70% who only submitted land without selling. Furthermore, more than 20% of the commune's members who lived far away had not yet provided their land to the commune.

Table 4.8

Investment in the commune

Investment	Households	Percentage
Submit land without registration	23	69.70
Submit money after selling land and house	1	3.03
Not submit land	9	27.27
Total	N= 33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

All members of the Ajambari community brought livestock such as cows, oxen, and goats with them except for their land. The group had over 20 cows/oxen and 40 goats at once. Additionally, the members brought metal pots, plates, and utensils with them to the

community. Most of them sold their gold and silver jewellery to contribute funds ranging from 50 thousand to 4/5 lakh Nepalese currency to the community, establishing their ownership of the commune. Rampuri Rokka Magar decided to sell her gold rings and a few silver coins, resulting in an investment of approximately 50 thousand rupees. Similarly, Karda Rokka sold her copper plates and pots, leading to an investment of around 40 thousand rupees. Above all, Kitab Jhakri contributed one and a half lakh rupees to join the commune. Ram Kirini Rokka, the leader of the commune, stated that the mandatory investment required to join the commune granted ownership within the community. Consequently, it was discovered that most of the members of the commune had contributed a certain amount of money, as well as utensils, parcels of land, and livestock. However, those who did not have money were also included in the commune. The total amount reached about 7/8 lakhs. Now, it is important to discuss who joined the commune at first after fulfilling the criteria.

4.5 Who Joined the Commune at First?

After deciding to establish a commune in the base area, starting the commune was very difficult as informed by the participants. It was new for the Thabangi people and took a long time to prepare. Geographically, Thabang was far and not accessible by the road. In the time of armed struggle, the Thabangi people faced hard times from the security point of view and economically also. To solve the problem of economic hardship and to exercise a new system of production, they decided to establish a commune including the people who agreed on it. The commune was a novel concept for Maoists, and they engaged in multiple discussions with higher-ranking party leaders regarding its establishment. After unanimous agreement to establish a commune in their base areas, the regional bureau decided that leaders at the district level and leaders above the district level up to the central level would voluntarily join the commune³⁶. Additionally, a policy was formulated to include members of the public who expressed interest in participating.

Initially, the emphasis was on implementing the commune from the top level of leadership, and it was mandatory for them. Subsequently, it was made accessible to the general public as well. Netra Bikram Chand, a Maoist leader, stated that a majority of the leaders from Thabang participated in the commune. Meanwhile, on 29 March 2002, the Nepal army surrounded the village of Thabang and set fire to nineteen houses during the Maoist armed struggle. The people felt more insecure and faced more difficult situations. The Maoists

³⁶ Interview with Netra Bikram Chanda, a leader of the Nepal Communist Party.

established the people's government in the Rolpa district on 25 February 2003 under the chairmanship of Tejman Gharti Magar. The Ajambari commune was established on 27 May 2004 when three houses from the burnt house family and three from the supporters of the commune decided to join. The families from the burnt houses were willing to join the commune, but this was not the only reason for their decision. They had been aware of the commune's principles for a long time. Moreover, other leaders also wanted to join the commune to establish a new socialist society. Based on my interviews with participants, I discovered that the establishment of the commune was not just a one-time event. The leaders had a long-term vision of creating a socialist state, and the commune was seen as the starting point for this, as it provided an alternative to private ownership of production. Based on these issues, Hit Prasad Rokka, a 53-year-old participant and a local leader of the Ajambari Commune, clarifies:

To begin with, we urged the people to form a commune in Thabang. This might address our ongoing problems like lack of labor and basic needs. Several times throughout the planning meeting, we made an effort to persuade individuals who chose not to participate in the people's war to do so. We had to spend more time preparing, but after a half-hour drive from the main Thabang, in Rachibang, our six households were ready to launch the commune. (Interview, March 27, 2023)

Initially, the commune comprised of six households consisting of upper-class individuals who were educated owned more land, and were politically active in the Maoist party. They believed that the party intended to establish a commune, and after its formation, everyone in Thabang would join. Five more households later joined, including two from the common people. Kitab Jhakri proposed the idea of living collectively with the leaders to change the current production system and create a new one. Raj Kumar Rokka observed that people frequently entered and left the commune. In the climax, a total of 33 households and 165 individuals from a mix of Maoist leaders, cadres, martyr's families, combatant families, and general people became members of the commune. They believed that the commune could solve existing problems of production, consumption, and distribution, and it would continue to operate.

I have also explored why a big number of households did not choose to become a part of the commune. To achieve this, I interviewed non-members of the commune, taking into account their socioeconomic status. The majority of individuals residing in Thabang had various reasons for not joining the commune. Within this group, 25 individuals were from the Kham

Magar community, while the remaining 8 belonged to the Dalit community. It's important to note that the selection ensured an equal representation of both men and women. Each individual had a different socioeconomic background and shared their unique story. Out of the 33 individuals, 12 stated that they were not ever invited to join the commune by anyone. I discovered that their socioeconomic status was lower than that of the commune members, and they did not hold any political position in the party. The individuals had a small amount of land ranging from 0.3 to 0.5 acres, which was insufficient to provide sustenance for the entire year. As a result, they looked for work in the nearby village. Those who belonged to the Dalit community were not invited to participate in the commune due to their low socioeconomic status. Additionally, many Magars, who were also in a similar financial situation, were not included in the invitation to join the commune. This indicates that only the wealthy, politically influential groups, and those with higher socioeconomic status were invited to join the commune. Contrary to what the commune leaders claimed, the narrative of the general public being invited to join the commune was false. Instead, it appeared to be an activity that favored specific social classes, effectively excluding individuals from lower classes and lower castes.

During my interviews with people from Thabang and its surrounding areas, I found a second group of individuals who stated that their partners were not interested in being a part of the community. Their experiences and stories differed from those of the first group. Dal Bahadur Pun, a 64-year-old participant from Thabang reflects:

We people living alone might also invite conflicts with our family members, which can make it challenging to live in a communal setting or participate in larger groups. It was decided that whether we lived in happiness or misery, we would work and sustain ourselves independently, doing manual labor, and eating on our own. (Interview, April 3, 2023)

The statement indicates that both the husband and wife had equal involvement in family matters, demonstrating that both genders were actively involved in decision-making regarding family affairs and allocation of labor and resources. This finding was uncovered by Molnar in her research conducted in Thabang (Molnar, 1981, p. 203). Although men were primarily responsible for activities like herding and tilling, and women were primarily responsible for child care, cooking, and other household chores, both genders played a role in decision-making regarding the allocation of resources and labor. While men held the final

authority in decisions regarding property and major household expenses, both husbands and wives were involved in these decisions.

The third group articulated unique and thoughtful opinions. As the state had not made any significant changes and the people's struggle had not been successful, they felt that the time was not right to establish a commune. They believed that the leaders were moving too quickly to found the commune. This group of people wasn't wholly opposed to the concept of starting a commune. Instead, they recommended starting the commune first and then gradually integrating them into it. They continued as a reserve unit as a result. They couldn't directly say no when the commune's leaders asked them to join. This group expressed reservations about the date of the commune's founding but supported the leaders and had faith in the commune's goals and ambitions. Surya Lal Budha of Duldada, near Thabang and Tejman Garti were the leaders of this type who were active in the Maoist party. Yet, some people thought that the commune would not exist for long. They said that establishing socialism and a commune was a difficult and time-consuming task that took several years to accomplish. They were unwilling to join the commune as a result. Lastly, some people were found negative to the establishment of the commune. Mool Prasad Pun, a 53-year-old participant who lives opposite the Ajambari commune in Chalabang, near Thabang, expresses his hostility:

Although they persisted in trying to get me to join their commune, I never believed in their ideology or appreciated their methods of working. I found that they could not solve the everyday problems faced by people effectively. Furthermore, many of their leaders and followers didn't even join the commune themselves. When they erected a volleyball court on my property, I took action and removed the poles. Although they threatened to punish me, I wasn't intimidated and never acted aggressively towards them. (Interview, September 25, 2022)

This particular group of individuals held skepticism regarding the effectiveness of the commune. Some believed that having a larger gathering of people in one place did not necessarily result in better productivity. Overall, there were five distinct categories of people, with some choosing to adopt a "wait and see" approach to observe the commune's activities in the future. Others, while being supporters of the Maoist party and residents of Thabang, had no intention of joining the commune.

I interviewed some teachers in Thabang who experienced challenging circumstances during the war period. They were caught between pressure from both the Maoist and government factions. The government urged them to focus on their job and not support the Maoists, while the Maoists wanted their support and assistance in party activities. Many teachers ended up supporting the Maoists but were unable to join the commune at that time. Madan Rokka, a primary teacher from Gobang, which is close to the commune, was pressured by members of the commune to join, but he refused. He remembered how difficult and uncertain life was during that period and felt it was not the right time to establish a commune. Although the Maoists pressured him to leave his job, he chose to stay.

Ram Maya Rokka Magar, who worked as a teacher at Bir Balabhardra Higher Secondary School, also chose not to join the commune. Her husband was also a teacher, and they both felt that the Maoists were hurrying to establish the commune without considering the long-term sustainability of such a system. They believed that industries, employment opportunities, and stable income sources were necessary for the success of a commune, as traditional farming alone would not suffice. The Maoist party campaigned heavily for the establishment of the commune, but many teachers, including Ram Maya Rokka Magar, chose to wait until the commune was more stable before joining. It is evident from the teachers' accounts that the Maoists were too hasty in their efforts to establish the commune, and it took more time to become fully operational. However, many teachers supported the Maoists and the people's war; they could not join the commune due to their government jobs.

A solitary Dalit household was residing in the Ajambari commune from Telkhola, which was situated three hours away from Thabang. In the entry in the Commune, Dalits were discovered to be excluded. The main concern was why Dalits did not enroll in the commune. The Dalit community in Thabang, comprising over one hundred and fifty households, ranks second in number after the Kham Magar community. During my visit to some of the Dalit households, it is apparent that their economic situation is significantly inferior to that of the Magar community. Many Dalits can be found sitting outside their homes without any work to do. Their houses are modest and typically made of mud and stones, with few chickens and no other livestock. Due to a lack of land ownership, Dalit families in Thabang could not keep cattle and could not rely on agriculture for their livelihood. Although some Dalits work as laborers in the area's house construction projects, their employment opportunities are limited. Despite their marginalization, the Dalit community in Thabang has assimilated into the Kham Magar community, often speaking the Kham language fluently and wearing traditional Khado

attire. On the economic conditions of Dalits, Hira Bahadur Pariyar, a 56-year-old participant and resident from Thabang, expresses discontent:

Due to the Kham Magar's majority in the region, Dalits were excluded from receiving land in the past during the distribution of *Patasu*³⁷ land. Members of the upper class justified this decision by stating that Dalits already had the privilege of participating in *Bista*³⁸ and receiving a share of grains during the harvest season, which they claimed was sufficient for their livelihood. However, the meager portion of grains received was not enough to sustain them throughout the year, leading to the impoverishment of the Dalit community. As a result of their marginalization, Dalit education levels are often low, and many are compelled to seek employment in foreign countries, often in menial positions. (Interview, September 19, 2022)

Hira Bahadur revealed that Dalits were not allowed to participate in the commune due to their inadequate property. When Hira Bahadur tried to join the group, the leader questioned him about his lack of land and insufficient property. This suggests that Dalits were excluded because of their low economic status, while individuals belonging to higher classes who possessed property were allowed to join the commune. The process of exclusion is a multifaceted and intricate one that involves power dynamics operating across several dimensions, including economic, political, social, and cultural. This results in a range of inequalities characterized by limited access to resources, capabilities, and rights, which prevent individuals from participating in typical societal activities and relationships. This state of exclusion is a combination of interlinked issues such as inadequate skills, low income, poor housing, and unemployment (Levitas et al., 2007; Popay et al., 2008). Like these arguments, I discovered that Dalits in Thabang were marginalized as a result of their poor socioeconomic level when I visited their homes and spoke with them. Untouchability practices were common between Dalits and Kham Magar before the Maoist People's War. These factors made it difficult for Dalits to join the commune. To gain more insight into this issue, I queried Lap Bahadur Rokka, a 52-year-old participant and non-Dalit member of Ajambari Commune, regarding why Dalits had not joined the commune. He provides perspective from his standpoint on this issue:

³⁷ Before being distributed to the populace, *Patasu* was the dominant Thabang land.

³⁸ A system of patronage that exists in the community between members of a higher caste and Dalits is represented by the term "*Bista*." As part of this arrangement, Dalits get a piece of the grains in exchange for doing things like making shoes, clothing, and iron utensils.

Although Dalits were not deliberately prevented from joining the commune, it was observed that their level of awareness and understanding of the commune's ideology was insufficient, which resulted in their lack of interest in participating. Therefore, the plan was to incorporate them into the commune when their level of awareness and understanding increased. They were included in all activities and were provided training on the commune's ideology. (Interview, March 25, 2022)

The leaders of the commune, including Lap Bahadur, expressed a defensive view regarding the involvement of Dalits in the commune and the Maoist people's war. However, upon investigation, the reality in Thabang turned out to be different from their claims. In my interview with Hiku Nepali, she shared her strong opposition to the idea of elite domination in politics and society. She criticized the exclusion of Dalits from economic activities, such as consumer committees in development projects, and rejected the notion of equality between higher castes and Dalits. Hiku Nepali also mentioned that she had participated in building a commune house for over a month, as it was mandatory for all households, but despite her efforts, she was not invited to join the commune. Only elites and people with higher social status were allowed to reside in the commune. Nirmal Pariyar also admitted that discrimination against Dalits continues to this day. Analysis of all these different groups in Thabang has made the study easier.

4.6 One Thabang, Three Worlds

While visiting Thabang, I noticed that the community could be classified into three discernible groups based on their socio-economic status and the exclusion situation discussed above. The class refers to a group of people who share similar socioeconomic characteristics, such as income, occupation, education level, and social status. Class distinctions often reflect inequalities in wealth, power, and access to resources within a society. Class can also encompass cultural and lifestyle factors, shaping individuals' identities, values, and opportunities. In sociology and other social sciences, class is a central concept used to analyze social stratification, mobility, and inequality. The first group, made up of Kham Magar individuals, enjoyed more privileges and had access to higher education and political power. They participated in social initiatives such as development work and education programs. Additionally, they had connections with state-level organizations, and their children were pursuing higher education outside the village. This group played a significant role in political movements and was influential in local elections. Many of them had been

active members of the Maoist party during the armed struggle. I met them while they were engaged in constructing community buildings, attending school committee meetings, or participating in cooperative meetings.

The second group in Thabang is comprised of Kham Magar individuals from the lower class who face significant challenges in meeting their daily needs. They have access to only small plots of land and lack opportunities to improve their economic status. Their children are typically unable to pursue higher education and instead work in agricultural fields. Many members of this group are illiterate and work as *Gwala* herders, caring for cows and goats. The higher classes, who are the contractors, employ the lower-class Kham Magars as laborers, but with limited benefits. I observed that they tend to follow the lead of the higher class in social and political activities. During the armed struggle, I found that many of them remained in *Gwala*. Hira Bahadur Pariyar, one of my participants from Thabang, reported that some individuals within this group are experiencing even more dire circumstances than the Dalits.

The third group in Thabang is composed of Dalits who were excluded from the land registration process, rendering many of them landless. The grain offerings provided by their Bista are insufficient to meet their daily needs, prompting many to migrate to India in search of employment opportunities, where they often engage in small-scale labor work. Educationally, the Dalits have lower levels of education than other groups within the community. According to one Dalit participant, they do not participate in consumer committees or development activities. They acknowledged that the armed struggle of the Maoists had eliminated some instances of untouchability, but the economic conditions of Dalits remained very poor. The aforementioned evidence serves to validate the claim that Dalits are the social group that experiences the greatest levels of vulnerability and deprivation (Bishwokarma, 2018; Cahurasiya et al., 2019, Pariyar & Lovett, 2016). However, recently migrated Dalits who purchase land for farming have moved into the lower-middle-class category, and their social conditions are somewhat better than those of those who migrated earlier. The upcoming section provides a comprehensive conclusion encompassing all relevant literature, the initiatives taken by the Maoist party, their narratives, the participation of members, and their socio-economic backgrounds.

4.7 Conclusion

The establishment of the commune by the Maoists in Thabang was driven by a significant shift in power dynamics. The existing government was entirely displaced, and Thabang became a stronghold of the Maoist party. In 2001, the Maoists decided to create a base area and a "People's government" to effectively regulate the daily activities of the people and exert control over resources. Within this base area, the Maoists propagated a new socialist ideology, aiming to eradicate the concept of private property. Their vision was to expand this ideology through armed struggle once they would achieve success. This vision aligned with the social transformation advocated by Marx and discussed in his works, which called for a classless society with a socialist economy (Marx & Engels, 1848). It involved a fundamental and comprehensive change in society (Sztompka, 1992; Portes, 2010; Haas et al., 2020), rather than a gradual process. The Maoists sought to alter the entire structure of society to establish a new social order based on the collective utilization of resources.

Nevertheless, there was a disparity between the narrative propagated by the Maoists and the perception of the local people in the commune. The people did not view it primarily as an ideology but as a practical solution to address their daily livelihood challenges. For them, the establishment of the commune served as a means to overcome labor shortages and increase agricultural production.

Initially, the Maoist leaders, supporters, and families of martyrs and combatants were willing to become part of the commune. However, through regular meetings, the general population was made aware that the root cause of their troubles was the previous system of exploitation and private property. They were convinced that the alternative way of living was through collective solutions and were inspired by Freire's process of raising consciousness (Freire, 1972). The first six people in the commune possessed political awareness and a conscientious drive to alter the prevailing social hierarchy. Their initial action of forming and joining a commune aimed to serve as a model for change. While they weren't subject to local exploitation, they endured national isolation and resided far from the seat of power. However, after a year, other households who were affiliated with the Maoist party gradually joined the commune.

The Maoists attempted to increase the number of people joining the commune, but many were unwilling to do so. Those who were uneducated and owned less land were particularly hesitant to join. They believed that the commune would not be sustainable in the long run and

that living with so many people would create more problems than it solved. It is noteworthy that despite the significant presence of Dalits in Thabang, they were not extended an invitation to join the commune. The fact that Dalits were not invited to join the commune indicates that there was still discrimination between higher and lower castes in Thabang during the Maoist armed struggle. Magars were commonly perceived as belonging to a higher caste with a privileged social status, whereas Dalits were often viewed as members of a lower caste with limited land ownership rights. Consequently, from the beginning of the commune in Thabang, there were disagreements and controversies. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the commune had faith in it, viewing it as a solution to their daily necessities and feelings of insecurity.

Chapter Five

Dynamics of Collectivization: Process and Practice

This chapter explores the social transformation within the Ajambari commune, achieved through the implementation of collective values, norms, and social order, while rejecting private ownership and arrangements, as analyzed by Marx (1884), Farley (1990), and Sztompka (1993). It delves into the transformative practices of communal living, collective farming, and cooperative activities that characterized the Ajambari commune. The dynamics of collectivization in the Ajambari Commune, which was established on May 28, 2003, in Rachibang, situated adjacent to Thabang in Rolpa. The Maoist party embraced the commune as the most advanced form of cooperation, emphasizing both collective living and farming in 2003. Thus, the commune's internal framework centered around three fundamental elements of collectivization: collective living, collective farming, and cooperatives, which delineated the social transformation within the commune. Many scholars have evaluated collective living, a significant feature of the commune, from Marxist, structural, and also functional perspectives (Attwood, 2012; Zavisca, 2012; Harris, 2013). Furthermore, many academics argue that the main focus of a commune is collective farming, which involves multiple individuals working together on a shared plot of land to generate agricultural produce (Sajesh & Ramasundaram, 2013; Mirdula, 2018). In addition, the integration of cooperatives within communes has attracted the attention of scholars (Munkner, 2016; Rajasekhar et al., 2020). The commune engaged in collective living, farming, and cooperatives, which led to changes in social institutions, norms, values, modes of production, class structures, and social relationships. These transformative potentials established a collective social order with a new set of rules, altering established patterns of relationships and behaviors, cultural practices, and socialization, as discussed by Parsons (1951). In this regard, I have conceptualized and analyzed these activities in the Ajambari commune.

5.1 The Collective Living in the Ajambari Commune

The more striking side of the commune is collective living with the ideal commune housing, feeding, and clothing its members and caring for their children (Wesson, 1962, p. 384). Although comparable activities were attempted to attain equality while residing in the same apartment, the emphasis was mostly placed on common production and consumption. The women stopped doing their own housework as well. They didn't turn over their responsibilities to the common kitchen or the nursery for their kids. As a result, it differs

greatly from a nuclear family's lifestyle of private activities in a home. Instead, collective life allowed for the sharing of resources and issues.

The most talked-about collective living practices were examined from Marxist perspectives to eliminate any class variation and through political instigation by the state itself in Soviet Russia, China, and other communist countries (Attwood, 2012, p. 904). The Soviet administration, according to Attwood, believed that social equality would only be attained if all citizens had comparable living conditions and there was no class-based. Freeing women from indentured service also encourages people to collectivize, aids in embracing a proper socialist style of life, and alleviates the severe urban housing crisis. In the following paragraph, the collective living in the Ajambari commune and everyday activities are discussed.

A group of six households made the collective decision to unite on May 28, 2003, and become a part of the Ajambari Commune. They chose to establish their new dwelling within the residence of Tara Prakash Rokka. Initially, they faced considerable challenges as they had to share a single room with their children, lacking separate accommodations for each family. Jaya Prakash Rokka, the leader of the Ajambari commune, informed me that for approximately one and a half years, they lived modestly, making significant sacrifices. The wife of Tara Prakash Rokka, Ram Maya, a 69-year-old participant and a member of the commune remembered those days:

My spouse established a commune, which I believe was advantageous for cohabitation and facilitated our work. All the families reached a mutual decision to live together. Initially, we resided in a shared house and utilized a common kitchen. Daily tasks were distributed systematically, ensuring everyone contributed equally. The children were accommodated in a separate residence. (Interview, March 22, 2022)

Ram Maya's statement reveals that the members consciously decided to establish the commune and live together in a commune house. They embraced this new way of living without hesitation and were happy to initiate this envisioned social transformation. The members of the commune brought their own beddings and kinds of stuff such as big utensils, some grains, and plates. Over time, they constructed toilets and arranged sheds for their cows, oxen, and goats, and water for them. Commune leader, Jaya Prakash, further expressed that the difficulties of residing in a communal space with uncivilized conduct resemble living in

an animalistic manner, and it is a problem we aim to address. After a year, they constructed a communal house with 16 separate rooms for each family, allowing them to have their own space. Through the process known as *Jhara*, a representative from each family in Thabang actively took part in the construction of the communal house, ensuring that everyone made contributions to the endeavor. With the new house in place, collective living became much easier. The single kitchen, cowshed, and two living rooms with stores made the commune more vibrant and functional. By doing so, the members of the commune set an example of collective activities and demonstrated a strong commitment to the commune, establishing a new social order based on collective values and norms while abandoning personal interests and private arrangements.

Nevertheless, living in separate rooms within the commune also promoted privacy among its members. Sharam Rokka Magar, a commune member, explained that if they were dissatisfied with something, they could retreat to their rooms. This separation allowed them to discuss future plans with their spouses and maintain privacy regarding familial matters. Consequently, having separate rooms for couples within the commune had the added advantage of preserving individual emotions and opinions regarding collective activities. Several members recognized that the presence of individual rooms in the commune offered convenience without compromising the unity of the community. This indicates that members of the commune still maintained some private interests and engagements while living there. Over time, as the commune eventually disbanded, it became clear that private matters persisted within the collective environment.

The infrastructural conditions of the commune house were very detrimental, made up of stones and mud like other types of Nepalese houses. However, it was intentional that community living arrangements differ from other living arrangements in terms of social structure and physical location in that they entail communities sharing resources and adhering to directed and governed by themselves with common beliefs and principles (Hilder et al., 2018). This collective living style was assumed to foster a sense of community built on equality and friendly neighborliness that allowed residents to fulfill their needs without explicitly relying on outside institutions or the government. Overall, this style of living aimed to provide improved affordability, stronger social cohesion, enhanced happiness, and increased independence.

5.1.1 Everyday Activities in the Commune

Daily, the commune held meetings of members to gather and address the everyday issues and find solutions, as well as assign tasks to its members. All members of the commune were assigned to various departments. These departments included management, people's mobilization, mess, agriculture and livestock, economics, as well as health and sanitation. Each department was responsible for specific tasks, and the activities in the commune appeared highly organized. A group of members was assigned to *Gwala* with herds of cows, oxen, and goats. Multiple other groups were dispatched to various locations across the land for agricultural purposes. Another group was designated to procure goods from market areas, while yet another group labored in a clothing weaving factory. The effectiveness and activity level of each department were remarkable. Within the Ajambari Commune, it was discovered that tasks were assigned without gender bias. Both men and women were allocated responsibilities, irrespective of the traditional gender stereotypes. For instance, men were also involved in kitchen-related tasks, while women were entrusted with responsibilities in the hotel sector. These divisions of labor demonstrate that the commune members were actively engaged in securing subsistence for the community, establishing a functional system within the commune. It appears that the commune was well-organized and systematic from its inception.

The members conveyed that they were engaged in activities from sunrise to sunset every day, leaving them with minimal leisure time. They had to efficiently allocate resources to provide sustenance for all members and their children, resulting in a demanding workload, with each unit tasked with distinct responsibilities. About the everyday activities, Ramkirini Rokka Magar, a leader of the commune, said that each member of the commune was allocated to various units, including distinct entities such as regular mess, production, health, factory, vegetables, and field units. Furthermore, each member was assigned to a specific party organization, such as a district committee, area committee, or cell committee. Separate organizations were established for students, farmers, women, and children. All tasks were efficiently managed and delegated accordingly. The members adhered to discipline and operated as a cohesive army formation.

Table 5.1*Allocation of tasks in the Ajambari Commune*

Department in the commune	Number of Members	Task Allocation
Management	6	This is the higher body of the commune that managed the commune and also coordinated with the party.
Mess	2	cooking breakfast, lunch, and dinner and cleaning from morning to evening.
People's Mobilization	9	This department allocated and transferred the members where it was required.
Agriculture and Livestock Department	57	This department was the main functional body of the commune. These members were divided over all the land by dividing sections of 10 to 15 people for agricultural work from morning to evening.
Economic Department	7	They managed the income of the commune, collected income from shops and hotels, and distributed it where it was required.
Health & sanitization	5	Two nurses and three members were given responsibility for the health checkup. They also overviewed sanitation of the commune.
Total	86	-

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

Apart from engaging in production, distribution, and consumption tasks, the commune also actively participated in various recreational activities. The commune had distinctive attire that was unique to its members, and they consistently moved in a disciplined formation. Cultural programs and ideological training were organized periodically by the Maoist party within the commune. Different levels of party committees were established, and the commune operated under the scrutiny of the Maoist party. Prominent leaders frequently visited the commune, while the combatants, although rare, occasionally worked in the fields and relied on the commune for their sustenance. Continuous training programs were regularly held in the commune. These sessions included feedback from political leaders on the implementation of collectivization, the importance of political ideology, social change, and the significance of

the People's War. Sarjita Rokka Magar, a 60-year-old participant and a member of the commune discloses:

The cultural programs were highly enjoyable, with dancing that would continue until late at night. Whenever the party organized training sessions, it meant spending the entire day there. As a member of the women's department, I had the opportunity to listen to leaders who visited and spoke about women's liberation. Their message emphasized the importance of revolution and transforming the existing system to achieve progress. The commune regularly hosted numerous programs, fostering a vibrant and active environment. (Interview, March 24, 2022)

Each individual within the commune acknowledged that their involvement entailed striving for success. They possessed a strong determination to prove them and were prepared to go to great lengths to ensure the prosperity of the commune. As a result of their collective efforts, the commune successfully operated for over a decade. Nevertheless, it was observed that regular members of the commune were primarily involved in the daily tasks related to farming and other productive endeavors, whereas leaders and prominent members dedicated their efforts to managerial responsibilities and additional activities beyond the commune's boundaries. It appears that tasks were divided rationally to ensure collective activities and the involvement of every member in the commune's responsibilities. On one level, the commune seemed successful in achieving social transformation by instilling collective norms and values among its members.

5.1.2 The Common Kitchen

The kitchen serves as more than just a reflection of people's preferences in consumption; it also acts as a gathering place for daily interactions among members and a means of strengthening relationships. The sociological examination of the kitchen reveals that it is a space that serves multiple functions and holds significant social importance, being considered the central hub of a household (Cosentino, 2019, p. 11). The kitchen is not only a place where daily activities are carried out but also plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing social and cultural identities. The kitchen mirrors the ongoing social changes and transformations in our society, effectively showcasing our lifestyles, characteristics, behaviors, and growth. It is a space where we not only engage in practical and social activities but also foster educational interactions, social connections, and expressions of affection and love.

At the Ajambari Commune, they set up a collective kitchen where commune members, exceeding one hundred, shared their everyday meals. The experience of having meals together with everyone brought them immense happiness. They would patiently line up and wait for their turn, and it was our responsibility to clean their own plates. Overall, they truly relished the experience of having a collective kitchen. The responsibility of overseeing the kitchen was shared on a rotational basis. As per the accounts shared by the commune members, a man and a woman were designated to oversee the responsibilities of the kitchen daily. They would wake up early in the morning and begin their day by making breakfast ready, consisting of tea and a few chapatis. Subsequently, they would proceed to prepare lunch, snacks, and dinner. Their engagement in kitchen activities continued throughout the day. Furthermore, the members also took it upon themselves to clean the large drums used for cooking. Tikasari Rokka, a 46-year-old participant and a member of the Ajambari commune, elucidates:

I spent a considerable amount of time working in the kitchen, and the responsibility for managing it was assigned to different individuals on a rotation basis. Throughout this time, the kitchen was always filled with the aroma of *Aato*, a traditional dish prepared in our kitchen. Because rice was scarce during those days. Fortunately, the leaders took charge of managing our food supplies. The evening before, we would decide what dishes to cook for the following day. As a snack, we often enjoyed roasted corn. (Interview, March 28, 2023)

Based on Tikasari Rokka's account, it can be inferred that there was a restricted range of food options available. The commune members cultivated various vegetables such as lettuce, peas, beans, cauliflower, mustard, brinjal, etc., primarily for internal consumption. There was a shortage of both rice and meat in the commune, making them scarce resources. Rampuri Rokka Magar, another member of the commune, mentioned the challenges of managing meat for such a large group of people. The commune faced a lack of nutritious food options. However, during festivals, they occasionally enjoyed delicious meals. Despite the members working hard from morning to evening and the commune being well-organized, subsistence farming proved challenging. Additionally, the size of the commune made it difficult for members to establish strong connections with one another. Communication was primarily limited to the nearest individuals and close friends. With a lack of shared interests beyond their work schedules, there were limited topics for conversation and interaction. Some members were not even recognized by others, indicating that living in such a crowded

environment did not foster strong connections, as conveyed to me. Therefore, issues among the commune members appeared to stem from the establishment of collective living within the commune.

5.1.3 Progressive Marriage and Collective Child Rearing

Sociologists view marriage as a societal establishment, a socially approved sexual union, and a commitment to procreate and care for children, which also fosters love and emotional bonds between individuals of opposite genders (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Coltrane & Collins, 2001; Trost, 2010). Marriage serves as the fundamental requirement for forming a family. The rituals and cultural practices associated with the marriage process vary across different societies. Kham Magars of Thabang have matrilineal cross-cousin marriage practices, and marriage is permitted within the same lineage of Magar, but not a localized group (Molnar, 1978, p. 17). However, it is not as strong as before, and love marriage is increasing. In Thabang, the Kham Magars practice a cultural tradition in which they engage in matrilineal cross-cousin marriages. This custom permits them to marry individuals from their own Magar lineage, but it restricts marriages within a specific localized group. However, this practice has weakened over time, and there is an increasing trend towards love marriages. Marriageable girls are afforded a degree of autonomy to engage in intimate relationships with potential marriage partners in social gatherings where teenagers come together in the evenings for activities like singing and dancing.

The Ajambari commune sought to implement an innovative approach to the marriage process, moving away from traditional methods. However, I found a combination of progressive marriage and traditional customs was utilized to arrange marriages in the commune, as Zharkevich found mixed types of marriage in the Ajambari Commune (Zharkevich, 2019, p. 128). A total of three marriages were organized within the commune. The sons of Pharka Bahadur Buddha and Ram Maya chose to marry individuals from outside the commune. Purna Kala, the daughter of Surya Rokka, married the son of Kitab Jhakri. The commune provided financial assistance of 3 to 4 thousand rupees for managing the wedding expenses. The Maoist party advocated for the *Pragadibadi Bibaha*³⁹ (Progressive wedding) to be conducted simply in the presence of party members. Purna Kala recollected her own

³⁹ In a progressive wedding, the boy and girl who get married sit on the stage and garland each other. The people present give the marriage legality by clapping. Some have their own opinions on good wishes. This is a simple type of marriage introduced by Marxists as an alternative to traditional marriage, which is practiced by many couples in Nepal.

wedding ceremony, expressing that she developed an affection for Bhakta while studying in the twelfth grade, and they had a modest wedding. In contrast, the two marriages conducted outside the commune followed traditional marriage customs. This suggests that the *Pragadibadi Bibaha* did not gain popularity, and the traditional approach to marriage continued after the Maoist party underwent a peaceful transformation.

In the commune, a lady named Asna underwent a progressive marriage process that differed from the traditional method of arranging marriage between boy and girl with the involvement of their family. She was in love with a young man outside the commune and decided to elope with him. The boy's father proposed marriage with flatbread and milk, as alcohol was prohibited within the commune. There were extensive discussions within the commune, and eventually, they reached a compromise to incorporate elements of both traditional and revolutionary marriage processes. Following the completion of the progressive marriage within the commune, upon the bride's arrival at her husband's home, a customary ritual took place. This ritual involved the veneration of the central pillar of the house, which was adorned with a tika made from rice, turmeric, and milk. Additionally, flowers were offered as a gesture of respect (Zharkevich, 2019, p. 686).

In the Ajambari commune, childcare services were provided within the Ajambari Commune. Initially, a nurse was responsible for taking care of the infants. Sharam Rokka Magar shared her personal experience, mentioning that in 2008, there were three mothers in total, and their relatives provided them with separate supplies of clothing and food. The commune also allocated two thousand rupees to support the dietary and overall care of the children. After the first month, the young children gathered together in a single room, where one woman would attend to them at a time. The mothers resumed their regular work while the designated caretaker looked after their children. In general, the priority was placed on working in the fields rather than dedicating a large workforce to childcare. The Ajambari commune implemented a novel approach to marriage and adopted a new system for collective child-rearing, distinct from traditional private and individual methods. This approach allowed individual mothers to participate in other communal activities.

5.1.4 Collective Living for Children and a Model School

The Ajambari commune attempted to implement collectivization for all households that joined, aiming to eliminate any kind of private engagement. Consequently, children who accompanied their parents to the commune were provided with separate housing near the

main commune. In total, there were seventy children officially registered in the commune, but only 56 of them lived there. Some children either didn't come with their parents or were studying outside of Thabang. These children had their own dining area, and cooks from the main commune would come daily to prepare their meals. Nabin Rokka Magar recollected his time living with his parents in the commune and mentioned that only younger children lived separately. Purnakala Rokka, when reflecting on those days, recalled that they had to wake up early in the morning and help the main community with specific tasks in the fields before going to school. The children were taught the value of labor. On Saturdays, it was mandatory, and on other days, before and after school, children had to assist the older members of the community with their work. Purnakala finished her twelfth grade while residing in the community. They had to provide compulsory tuition to younger students. There was a daily attendance check, and the children had to walk in a line. Purnakala fondly remembered those days as very enjoyable because she had many friends. Several child clubs were formed, focused on games, and they frequently organized competitions. These clubs held games every evening, offering regular opportunities for children to participate in various sporting events.

The commune not only took care of the children of its members but also assumed the responsibility of educating them. During the height of the Maoist People's War in Nepal, three Maoist model schools were established in the mid-western region. One of these schools was set up in the Gobang side of Thabang, providing primary-level education to children residing in the commune. The building was built by the people and party cadres in collaboration. The school admitted not only students from the commune but also those from families of martyrs, members of the Maoist insurgents, injured and troubled individuals, as well as common families. The school had a mess for food for students, which was provided by the village party committee. At its peak, the school enrolled around one hundred students. The Maoists designed a curriculum up to grade three, while grades four and five followed the government curriculum. Upon completing fifth grade, students were required to transfer to Bir Balabhadra School in Thabang, a government-run institution. Initially, Balabhadra School offered education up to the tenth grade, but in 2011, it expanded to include the twelfth grade as well. Lalchandra Rokka, a 53-year-old teacher at Maoist Model School, Thabang recalls:

There was a total of five or six teachers at the school who received minimal wages as pocket money. Our primary objective was to contribute to the larger movement. The curriculum itself was prepared by the Maoist party, which emphasized the importance of collective benefits over personal interests. The teachings also emphasized the idea

that children, youth, and adults should all be armed and that the existing government needed to be replaced. During the morning assembly, an international song was played to foster a sense of global unity. Additionally, the concepts of "Red Salute" and communism were taught to the students as part of their education. (Interview, March 25, 2022)

This statement reveals that the school had its own unique approach to educating children, distinct from the existing educational system. The Maoists and the commune aimed to educate children based on their own ideology and sought to gain their support from an early age. On May 25, 2009, the Maoist model school underwent a merger with Bir Balabhardra School. As a result, three teachers from the Maoist model school were also appointed to work in the newly merged institution. However, these teachers have been working temporarily since then. Among them was Lalchandra Rokka, who served as both a Maoist cadre and a teacher. He expresses dissatisfaction with the current situation, feeling that he contributed significantly to bringing about change but ultimately achieved very little. Initially, there were discussions about a complete revolution in education, but it has only resulted in reforms. Overall, the Maoists emphasized the children and aimed to instill their ideological principles of establishing collective units within them.

5.2 The Non-Farm Activities

From the inception of the commune, the Ajambari Commune endeavored to sustain themselves through a range of activities, laboring from morning to evening to enhance their quality of life. The commune did not rely solely on agriculture for subsistence but also pursued non-farm activities to generate extra income and sustain its livelihood. These pursuits included establishing a communal hotel and shops, acquiring donkeys and a vehicle, and engaging in industrial practices to produce clothing from *Bhango*. Additionally, the commune actively participated in a hydroelectric project and took on the construction of a communication tower. These endeavors underscored the commune's commitment to diversifying their income sources, contributing significantly to their overall sustainability. Commune members, involved in these activities, shared their practices and experiences with me during interviews.

5.2.1 The Commune Hotel and Shops

In Thabang, the Ajambari Commune operated a communal hotel and a shop to generate income for collective purposes. The Commune Hotel was popular within the community, attracting visitors from outside who frequently visited. It offered a variety of food, sweets, and accommodations, featuring four beds. A particular food item called *Jerry* continues to be a subject of discussion even to this day. When the Maoist guerillas arrived in Thabang, they frequently expressed a strong preference for consuming Jerry. The commune members were deployed for the work in the hotel. Mainly, Saram Rokka Magar, Sumanti Rokka, and Ramkirani Rokka worked in the hotel. The Commune Hotel made a lot of profit for the Ajambari commune. The income generated by the hotel had to be calculated daily and reported to the commune. Saram Rokka Magar, a 46-year-old participant and a member of the commune, elucidates:

In the communal hotel, we prepared various food items like samosas, jerry, barfi, and laddoos. The hotel was efficiently managed and operated. During that period, our monthly income ranged from 10,000 to 25,000 rupees. Although there were instances of lack of transparency among some members during the rotation, even losses were accounted for. Based on the positive outcomes observed during my tenure, I was entrusted with additional responsibilities. This continued for a period of 9 years. However, with the decline of the commune, the communal hotel ultimately had to shut down. (Interview, March 28, 2023)

In addition to the communal hotel, the Ajambari commune also operated a grocery store that stocked various grains, shoes, slippers, and stationery items. In 2003, there were only a few shops, about four to five, in Thabang. As a result, the shop thrived in those circumstances. At that time, the goods were transported to Thabang from Phuliban and Shulichaur in Rolpa using donkeys. The communal hotel and shop also took care of the expenses related to students in the commune, including fees, uniforms, and stationery. Lap Bahadur Rokka was entrusted with the responsibility of running the shop in Thabang due to an injury he sustained, which resulted in the loss of his left hand. Since he was unable to engage in other forms of work, the shop was assigned to him to manage.

The Ajambari commune established stores in Phuliban and Shulichaur in Rolpa, managed by Kitab Jhakri. These stores were larger than the one in Thabang and offered a variety of products such as clothes and rice. They supplied the necessary groceries to the commune.

Transportation was limited to donkeys during that time. They procured shoes, clothes, food, copies, and pens from other places to fulfill the needs of the commune's members. Due to a lack of sufficient potato and maize production within the commune, they had to source food supplies from their shop. Although the shop in Thabang was relatively larger than others, acquiring goods during that period posed challenges. When goods were supplied to the commune and payments were delayed, other shopkeepers exerted pressure on Kitab Jhakri to settle the outstanding dues. The income generated from the donkeys was minimal.

In Shulichar, there was a combined store serving both Ajambari and Jaljala communes. In 2009, they relocated from Shulichaur to Phuliban, where their daily income increased to approximately 2 to 3 thousand rupees. Additionally, they operated a utensil shop and a hotel. Many people passed by their establishment, contributing to the flourishing of their business. At times, they even cooked food throughout the night without getting any sleep. However, the income and expenses remained balanced. Kitab Jhakri, a 61-year-old participant and a member of the commune, elaborates:

Eventually, the commune accumulated a debt of approximately 4 lakh and 50 thousand rupees, which they could not repay. Consequently, I had to close the shop in 2016. Along with a vehicle, I had a loan of 14 lakh rupees. When the commune members went their separate ways, I continued to run the shop by myself and expanded it by adding more utensils and raising some boiler hens. To finance my second son's journey to Japan, which cost 15 lakhs, we all contributed to paying off the loan. I take responsibility for the loan and acknowledge the need to repay it to the rightful parties. (Interview, April 3, 2023)

Based on this information, it is evident that the Ajambari commune had three shops and a hotel to generate income and meet their needs. However, their income was insufficient to adequately support their members. The commune could only allocate a meager amount of two hundred rupees per month for the personal expenses of their members. This sum was significantly inadequate considering the various necessities such as clothing, footwear, and supporting their children. In challenging situations, such as when the children fell ill, the allocated funds were quickly depleted. To cope with these circumstances, Ramkirini resorted to collecting discarded slippers from gutters and repairing them for her own use. Managing personal expenses with such a limited amount proved to be exceedingly difficult. This indicates that difficulties persisted in the commune, as the revenue from shops and hotels was insufficient to sustain it for an extended period.

5.2.2 Owing Donkeys and a Vehicle

The commune not only owned shops and hotels but also explored other means to facilitate its activities. The Ajambari commune possessed a fleet of 13 donkeys, which served as a means to transport goods and also generated income through renting them out to external individuals. The donkeys proved to be a lucrative source of revenue for the commune approximately, about 60 to 70 thousand rupees yearly. However, when the road connecting to Thabang was established in 2008, the donkeys became obsolete and were no longer in demand for work. Consequently, the commune decided to replace the donkeys with a mini-truck. Eventually, the commune sold each donkey for a price of 80 thousand rupees. Kitab Jhakri, a 61-year-old participant and a member of the commune, expands:

Together with Jaljala Commune, we made a joint purchase of a new vehicle, specifically a Swaraj Mazda mini truck, for 15 lakh and 75 thousand rupees. The payment was made in installments, with an initial down payment of 35 percent. We used this vehicle to transport various items. Our Ajambari commune, Jaljala commune, and another cooperative from Gam, Rolpa also held minor shares in the ownership of the truck. Unfortunately, the vehicle did not function well, encountering numerous issues. The engine malfunctioned multiple times, necessitating four rebuilds. Furthermore, it even tipped over on one occasion, resulting in significant losses. Eventually, we managed to sell it for 5 lakhs. The total amount of 5 lakhs was divided among three partners, with 2 lakhs being distributed between two communes and 1 lakh being allocated to the cooperative. The vehicles caused considerable difficulties and troubles for the commune as a whole. (Interview, April 3, 2022)

Kitab Jhakri was entrusted with the complete responsibility of overseeing the vehicle while also managing the shop in Shulichaur, Rolpa. Unfortunately, the commune faced financial difficulties in bearing the losses incurred by the vehicle. Jaya Prakash Rokka acknowledged that it would have been wiser to abstain from purchasing the vehicle in the first place. The commune had entered the transportation business to improve their income. However, their limited knowledge and experience in handling vehicles resulted in significant financial setbacks, hampering the commune's progress. As the vehicle's condition deteriorated over time, the commune experienced a gradual decline in its earnings from it. Ultimately, they decided to sell the vehicle at a minimal price. As a result, the commune was unable to invest in alternative income-generating initiatives for its improvement. It appears that the other

measures pursued by the commune were unsuccessful, leading to significant losses and ultimately causing its dissolution.

5.2.3 The Commune Industries, Hydroelectricity, and Communication Tower

The Ajambari commune also experimented with various local industries, but unfortunately, they struggled to effectively manage them. They had approximately two cloth-weaving looms and produced items like bags, mufflers, chadars, and tatan fabrics. However, these industries lacked specialization within the commune. When I encountered Lal Singh Magar, he was operating his own outdated loom, previously used during his time in the commune. Lal Singh had received training in cloth weaving at the district level, and his wife and other family members were also involved in the industry. However, due to the lack of success, Lal Singh eventually decided to leave the commune. After departing from the commune, Lal Singh took on various jobs such as labor work, masonry, and carrying loads, which earned him an income of two hundred and fifty rupees. Presently, his earnings have increased to over nine hundred rupees. Pharka Bahadur Budha, a 61-year-old participant and a member of the commune, manifests:

Initially, I got employment in the party's small-scale industry, which was managed by the regional bureau. However, we did not receive any income, and our compensation was solely based on a labor charge of two hundred rupees per month. Subsequently, after joining the commune, I also took part in industrial activities within the commune. Unfortunately, as time passed, the goods we produced experienced a gradual decline in their market demand. As a result, I decided to shift my focus to agriculture. (Interview, September 19, 2022)

During my fieldwork, I observed that the commune had not established a diverse range of industries. Surya Lal Budha, a local Maoist leader, said that the Maoist party had set up a paper industry and a dry food chips industry to boost production and generate income. However, they had to rent the machinery from an owner. Despite this, the production and income were quite successful. However, Budha chose not to join the commune as he had a personal interest in pursuing farming and intended to join later when the commune's ideological work improved. Deu Prasad Kami from Koijabang, near Thabang, worked in a leather processing and footwear manufacturing industry established in Jajarkot. He was part of a group of six laborers involved in producing various types of shoes such as civil shoes, school high-tech, boots, dams, and goldstars, which were supplied to the external market. The

income generated from this industry belonged to the Maoist party, while the laborers received a monthly wage of approximately one thousand rupees initially, which later increased to two thousand rupees. Hit Prasad Rokka stated that the commune itself did not establish any major industries. This lack of substantial industrial development indicates that the Ajambari commune did not prioritize increasing production through the establishment of diverse industries.

During the Maoist armed struggle in Thabang, there was a shortage of electricity. To tackle this issue, the commune implemented an electricity project near the Rachibang water source. GTZ provided a turbine that produced 1.5 KW of electricity. A portion of the electricity was consumed by the commune, while the rest was distributed to villagers near the commune for a small fee to run the project. The local people's government effectively implemented a cooperative model to establish a 3 KW electricity project, with local community members investing in it. They also ensured the distribution of power lines to the village. Subsequently, the Nepal government established a solar power system in Thabang, generating 150 KW of electricity. This electricity was supplied to larger villages and the surrounding areas. Additionally, the commune constructed a communication tower on a high hill in 2013 with support from Nepal Telecom, which continues to pay rent to the commune. Initially, the commune received 55 thousand rupees, followed by a monthly payment of 25 hundred rupees. It is worth noting that the cash is currently held in the names of two individuals, Jaya Prakash Rokka Magar and Lap Bahadur Rokka, as acknowledged by commune leader Jaya Prakash. These various initiatives exemplify the effective operation of the Ajambari commune, engaging in a range of activities that could sustain it over a prolonged period. However, the growth of industries and other endeavors gradually declined due to limited opportunities and inadequate leadership.

5.3 Collectivization of Land and the Collective Farming

A key aspect of the Ajambari commune was collective farming, which required compulsory land integration from its members. However, it was different than the practiced in Soviet Russia, China, and another Eastern Europe. In the 1920s Soviet Industrialization Debate, Stuart (1972) released a standard study on the little-discussed topic of the collective farm in Soviet agriculture and covered the USSR's agricultural and development experiences. He identified three basic types of Soviet land holdings: Kolkhoz (community farms), Sovkhoz (state farms), and the private subsidiary sector used to assemble agricultural products. He

claims that the collective farm was intended to accomplish two goals at once: to produce an agricultural surplus and to exert political control over the surrounding area. The land holding by the Ajambari commune was voluntarily annexed, and some of these lands were bought by the local people at nominal prices. So, there were no state farms and community farms in the Thabang, but private lands were used to farm in the commune. Jaya Prakash Rokka, a 63-year-old participant and a leader of the commune, notifies:

Only four households possessed additional land near the community. In total, we collectively owned 2 hectares of land, which we refer to as 40 *Hal*. Certain individuals within the commune, such as Jelbang and Uwa from Rolpa, resided far away, making it challenging to integrate their land. We managed to acquire a small number of plots at a significantly low cost of 15 to 20 thousand rupees. This arrangement appeared to result in fragmented agricultural practices. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

Upon visiting the Ajambari commune and speaking with its members, I discovered that the information provided by Jaya Prakash Rokka was inaccurate. The commune actually possessed a minimum of 5 to 10 hectares of land, which was located approximately 2 to 3 kilometers surrounding the commune, served diverse purposes, and was actively utilized. Hence, there was no shortage of land within the commune. However, the agricultural production was limited to maize and potatoes.

The process of integrating land into the commune in Thabang was not primarily driven by political motivations. The leaders incorporated land into the commune based on decisions made by the Maoist party. Additionally, common individuals voluntarily contributed their land to address their daily needs. Contrary to what we often hear about the Maoists forcefully confiscating land from the higher class, I did not get information directly from participants. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that some land was seized from aristocratic individuals who departed the village following pressure from the Maoist party (see Annex 7). These confiscated lands were not allocated for use by the commune. The upper-class members willingly participated in the commune, preventing any confiscation-related issues from arising.

The Ajambari commune integrated four different types of land. The first type of land was located near the commune and was incorporated directly into it. The second type of land was acquired through purchase, but it constituted only a small portion. The third type of land was

situated a bit farther from the commune, while the fourth type was quite distant and couldn't be integrated. The previous paragraph has discussed three types of land. However, there was an additional type of land that was integrated into the commune, but the members did not reside within the commune itself. These members lived approximately 2 kilometers away from the commune in their own homes, while their land was incorporated into the commune. Chholbang and Jurbang were also slightly far from the commune, and members named Bar Prasad Gharti and Kashiman Buddha belonged to these areas. It took them about 2/3 hours to walk from their houses to the commune. Their land was also made collective property, and whenever there was work to be done, the commune members had to walk to those locations to carry out the tasks. Karda Rokka, a 68-year-old participant from Therbang and a member of the commune of Therbang, conveys:

We resided at a slight distance from the commune. I contributed approximately 20 kilograms of copper and nine thousand rupees to the commune. Additionally, we possessed around one hectare of land, which was incorporated into the commune. Despite this integration, we were granted permission to continue living in our own house. Whenever there was work to be done in the field, the members of the commune would also come and join us. And when necessary, we would visit the commune and stay overnight. The maize and potato crops produced on our land were taken to the commune for sustenance, and a portion was allocated to us for our own consumption. (Interview, March 27, 2023)

Upon conversing with the commune members, it was revealed that the process of integrating land did not adhere to legal procedures. Rather, individuals willingly provided their registration to the commune as an expression of their consent to integrate their land. As a result, the ownership of the land did not directly transfer to the commune itself. The members retained private ownership rights as long as they resided within the commune. Upon leaving the commune, they would take their registration papers with them, making each land integration appear temporary. Additionally, when the members purchased land, the transactions were not legally registered. They would simply provide monetary compensation to the sellers. In instances where the commune's influence diminished, the land would be returned to the individuals, who would then repay the money received during the initial transaction.

In addition to discussing the unification of land, I enquired about the seized land in Ajambari commune from the commune's leader, Jaya Prakash Rokka. He stated that there were no

instances of confiscated land within the commune. The local leader of the Maoist party, Dhaplal Pun, admitted that land was confiscated in two or three separate portions in Thabang from individuals who held negative views about the Maoist activities. However, they eventually reached a compromise with the Maoists, leading to the return of the land. Nonetheless, I discovered evidence in the diary of a local Maoist leader named Harka Bahadur Gharti, which indicated that they did confiscate some land and were in the process of documenting it. It was mentioned that the confiscated land was effectively utilized for collective production. However, some residents of Thabang informed me that they were forced to work in these fields, and the produce was claimed by the Maoists themselves. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Maoist party did seize some land in Thabang, but the Ajambari commune did not possess such land. Instead, the land was collected from the commune members themselves, and some additional land was purchased for the commune at a minimal price, as per the information provided to me.

5.3.1 Agricultural Initiatives

The formation of the commune was anticipated to resolve the issues of low agricultural production and initiate the modernization of farming practices as discussed in chapter four. However, despite the establishment of the commune and the integration of land, agricultural modernization did not take place. In the initial stages, the commune experienced a shortage of food. Rammaya Rokka, a member of the commune, mentioned that they initially had to borrow food to sustain themselves. Subsequently, they faced food scarcity and had to borrow from villagers, indicating that the scarcity extended beyond the commune. The main crops produced were maize, beans, and potatoes. The commune farmed twice a year, yielding 32 quintals of wheat or barley, 96 quintals of maize, and around 100 to 150 quintals of potatoes. Raj Kumar Rokka, a 65-year-old participant and a leader of the commune, asserts:

There was an increase in agricultural production within the commune, and steps were taken to modernize farming techniques. We stored maize and potatoes in entire rooms, ensuring a year-round food supply for all commune members. However, these provisions were strictly for our own consumption, as they were sufficient to meet our needs. We did not engage in selling them, as our focus was solely on ensuring sustenance for the commune. (Interview, September 26, 2022)

The commune had a collective ownership of approximately 20 cows, 4 buffalos, and 8 oxen. The cows were raised both to obtain manure and for giving birth to oxen. The oxen were then

utilized for plowing the fields, as tractors were not available. Hence, the rearing of cattle in the commune followed a completely traditional approach without any hybrid methods. Daily, two members were specifically designated as *Gwala* to take responsibility for the care and well-being of these animals. There were attempts to raise pigs, but the commune's objective in this regard was not achieved. They also made an effort to cultivate fish, but unfortunately, these endeavors did not succeed. The leaders were preoccupied with managing logistics for the commune members, which hindered the success of agricultural activities. As a result, no income could be generated from agriculture.

It was observed that the commune followed traditional farming methods, indicating a restricted level of modernization. The utilization of oxen for tilling and the absence of diverse seed varieties were noticeable. Supplying affordable fertilizers and seeds to enhance agricultural practices, along with addressing the 40-point demands put forth by the Maoists to the Nepalese government in 1996⁴⁰. It was highlighted that assistance should be extended to facilitate the distribution of agricultural products to the market. The 75-point directory of the United People's Revolutionary Council of the Maoist party stated that farmers would receive fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, and agricultural equipment affordably and conveniently on land (Gywali, 2006, p.26). There would be a particular focus on the growth of agricultural sectors, and steps would be taken to ensure the efficient organization of agricultural markets. Despite claims made by the Maoist party to introduce new agricultural technologies, these advancements were not implemented during the establishment of the commune. Fertilizers were scarce, and only organic fertilizers were utilized. As a result, the commune lacked a range of agricultural practices, leading to limited production. Despite Jaya Prakash's assertions about the commune's superiority, there was no significant increase in productivity. The Maoist party did not invest in the modernization of agriculture in the commune. Most of the leaders were primarily focused on managing armed struggle rather than promoting agricultural modernization. Consequently, there was little emphasis on agricultural development and training.

5.3.2 Veggie and Herb Cultivation

The Ajambari commune's experimentation included growing vegetables and planting herbs. However, the lack of skilled personnel led to the failure of these initiatives. The commune

⁴⁰ The 40 points demands concerning livelihood and agricultural development were presented to the Nepal Government by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai of the then United People's Front in 1996 before starting people's war by Maoist.

engaged in the restricted growing of vegetables and herbs. To facilitate this endeavor, the commune constructed a small irrigation canal specifically to irrigate the vegetable farms. The commune cultivated vegetables such as mustard greens, cauliflower, beans, and cabbage, but solely for internal consumption. Kashiman Budha, who dedicated three years to gathering salt in Koilabas, India, and subsequently transitioned into a wood chipper, was assigned the task of engaging in organic vegetable farming within the commune, alongside five other members. The training offered by the Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project in the 1990s proved instrumental in enhancing their skills in potato cultivation and vegetable farming. Kashiman Buddha applied his newfound expertise within the commune. Since the commune had to feed more than a hundred individuals, there was a heightened demand for vegetables. Therefore, there was no intention or necessity to sell any excess produce.

The Ajambari community made efforts to grow medicinal plants as a means of generating additional revenue to sustain their commune. They cultivated various herbs such as Castanopsis, Rhem Australe, Mugwort, and wild potatoes. The task of cultivating these herbs was entrusted to Pharka Bahadur Rokka, a 63-year-old member of the Ajambari commune. He illuminates to me:

Following a decline in factory production, I shifted my focus towards cultivating herbs in the commune. I introduced *Katus*, *Padamchal*, *Tite*, and *Banaalo* (see Annex 8) plants to our plantation. *Katus* thrived and yielded plentifully. We obtained *Tite* from Kathmandu, but unfortunately, it did not thrive well. On the other hand, we successfully grew *Padamchal* plants and managed to sell them, earning around 8 to 10 thousand rupees. As for *Banaalo*, I discovered it and planted it, but I am unsure of its outcome as I had already departed from the commune. (Interview, September 19, 2022)

The cultivation of herbs in the commune appeared to be more of an experimental endeavor rather than a well-structured plan. Although the commune initiated the plantation of certain herbs, they did not approach it with a serious commitment to production and marketing. Over time, the efforts gradually ceased when Pharka Bahadur, who was responsible for the herb cultivation, departed from the commune. With no one to carry on these plantations, they were eventually discontinued. The commune once again failed to improve its options and experiments for sustaining itself.

5.3.3 The Story of Apple Farming

Apple farming was another attempt by the Ajambari commune that failed to yield production, ultimately leading to its isolation. During the field visit, it was witnessed that the state of a vast apple farm was left uncared for in Chalabang, situated across the commune east of Thabang. While investigating the situation, it was revealed that the Maoist party and the local residents were involved in this agricultural project in the commune. In 2006, several thousand apple trees were planted on the land belonging to the local people, with the assistance of the commune members. The locals utilized the *Jhara* method to dig pits, while the Maoist party provided the plants. I obtained a copy of the circular from the Maoist Village United People's Council in Thabang, dated January 5, 2006, which outlined the Agricultural Cooperative Model Apple Farm (see Annex 7). A committee comprising nine members was established to oversee this apple farm initiative. Additionally, it was decided that households would contribute Rs 20 per pit for the digging process. Surya Bahadur Rokka, a 65-year-old participant and a member of the commune, integrates:

I also own land in the apple farm where apples were cultivated on plots owned by various individuals. We resided in a commune, and some members of the commune actively participated in digging apple pits. However, the overall involvement of the commune itself was limited. The Maoist party supplied apple seedlings for cultivation, but unfortunately, the project did not succeed as anticipated. Last year, only four apples were harvested and brought in. Additionally, the farm is located quite a distance away, making the situation less than ideal. Regrettably, the outcome did not meet our expectations. (Interview, March 19, 2022)

Apple cultivation is a challenging endeavor that requires significant time and care, as it typically takes several years, ranging from 4 to 8, for the trees to bear fruit. Unfortunately, many individuals were unable to adequately protect their apple farms. At one point, the Maoist party established a security team to address the issue of cattle grazing. However, this measure proved ineffective, as the Maoist party eventually abandoned the armed struggle in favor of a peaceful political approach. The apple farms faced additional challenges due to the actions of Gwala, who allowed cattle grazing starting from November each year, causing further trouble. Despite these difficulties, there is one notable success story involving Ram Bahadur Budha. Initially, he declined to become part of the Ajambari Commune, citing concerns about the feasibility of living together with multiple households. However, he eventually became involved in apple farming alongside numerous other villagers, as

compelled by the Maoist party. Now, he possesses 110 apple trees and earns an impressive annual income of 3 to 5 lakhs. In addition to his apple harvest, he cultivates 10 to 12 quintals of maize and 15 to 20 quintals of potatoes. Ram Bahadur Budha, a 55-year-old participant from Chalabang and the apple farmer, informs:

The Maoist party enforced people's participation in the apple farming initiative. Initially, the party intended to oversee the entire process for the benefit of the entire commune. However, when peace arrived, this plan didn't go as planned. Both the Maoists and the commune distanced themselves from it, resulting in insufficient pruning and fertilizer application. Many individuals abandoned the care of the apple plantation. Nevertheless, after two years of apple planting, I received training, which proved valuable for adopting proper cultivation techniques. Despite the promising income generated from apple farming, the local conditions here are not ideal for optimal apple growth. (Interview, September 17, 2022)

Based on Ram Bahadur's account, it becomes evident that the villagers themselves lacked interest in apple farming. Planting apple trees in Chalabang was made mandatory for all residents, but they lacked sufficient knowledge about the intricacies of apple cultivation. Additionally, they did not receive any training before embarking on the apple plantation. Since apple trees take time to bear fruit, people were ill-prepared to protect the young apple plants. This highlights the importance of proper preparation and training before implementing any farming initiative. The Maoist party made an effort to enhance the income of the people by introducing new initiatives like apple farming. However, they eventually discontinued this program and never fully implemented it.

5.3.4 The Innovative Truffle Project

Truffle production showed promise for the Ajambari commune, but it took a long time to produce results. To date, the commune has not benefitted from it. The Ajambari Commune undertook a trial truffle cultivation project, a type of mushroom, as part of the research conducted by the Department of Biology at Tribhuvan University. This initiative marks the second truffle cultivation project in Asia and the first in South Asia. Initially, the commune imported 300 fruit trees from abroad, with each plant costing about 200 dollars. The expenses for this venture were covered by Tribhuvan University. Truffle grows on the roots of trees and is the focus of this cultivation effort. The fruits of truffles are in high demand and can be sold for prices ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 dollars per kilogram. During the appropriate

season, each plant can yield up to 200 grams of truffle fruit. It has the potential to yield fruit consistently throughout 50 to 60 years.

According to herbalists at the university, the truffle fruit grows beneath the surface of the tree, making it difficult to locate. Consequently, to search for these fruits, individuals must be prepared to spend around 12 to 15 lakhs rupees and import a trained dog from abroad. Initially, representatives from Tribhuvan University visited to assess the progress of truffle cultivation. However, it has been quite some time since their last visit. There were discussions about the possibility of taking farmers to France for training once successful truffle cultivation was achieved. Tara Prakash Rokka, a 71-year-old participant and a leader of the commune, elaborates:

Following the period of peace, Dr. Giriraj Tripathi from Tribhuvan University arrived and assessed the local environment. Based on his observations, he decided to provide plants that are well-suited for truffle cultivation. Currently, it is the stage where these plants need to grow and eventually yield mushrooms. The truffle mushroom is found in the roots, but the method of extracting it remains unknown to us. We are currently making efforts to seek guidance from Dr. Tripathi. We have entrusted the responsibility of managing the truffle cultivation to the Ajamabari People's Agricultural Co-operative. (Interview, April 6, 2023)

The initiative taken by the Ajamabari commune indicates their pursuit of new and productive endeavors to enhance the economic state of the community. However, their truffle cultivation has not yet yielded any mushrooms, and they are still unaware of the proper methods involved. Unfortunately, when attempts were made to meet with Dr. Tripathi, he was unavailable. The impoverished Thabangi community anxiously awaits the opportunity to harvest truffle mushrooms. It appears that the issue of projects being abandoned is a common problem in Nepal, and Thabangi is no exception to this trend.

5.3.5 *Bhango* Farming and Hashish Production

The Ajamabari commune's quest for income extended beyond shops, hotels, and other activities; they also developed strategies for generating additional income. During my field research in Thabangi in September 2022, I discovered that every household possessed a certain amount of *Bhango*, which was used for various purposes such as exchanging seeds for rice and utilizing its bark for making yarn and weaving clothes. This aspect intrigued me, and I became curious to determine whether the commune itself cultivated *Bhango* in their fields.

To gather more information, I enquired with Kashiman Buddha, Kitab Jhakri, and Jaya Prakash Rokka. However, they informed me that the Ajambari commune did not engage in the cultivation of *Bhang*. Nonetheless, they highlighted the significance of *Bhang* for the villagers and the challenges faced by the police in controlling its distribution. Kitab Jhakri, a 73-year-old participant and a member of the commune declares:

The commune served as a genuine institution, and we aimed to serve as a role model for others. Given that *Bhang* was illegal in Nepal, we decided not to cultivate *Bhang* within the commune. Instead, we sought alternative sources of income, such as running hotels and shops. I managed a shop located in Sulichaur, Rolpa. (Interview, April 3, 2023).

Kitab Jhakri and the commune leaders were determined to maintain a positive image of the commune. They believed that conveying a positive message to the community regarding their commencement was crucial, as it would discourage negative conversations. This paved the way for the possibility of conducting similar alternative initiations in the future. In line with this commitment, Jayaprakash Rokka revealed that when members left the commune, they had pledged not to speak ill of it. However, it was discovered that *Bhang* was indeed being produced in the Ajambari commune, generating significant revenue for the community. Nevertheless, this operation was kept hidden or undisclosed. Sarala Rokka Magar, a 54-year-old participant and a member of the commune discloses:

A substantial amount of *Bhang* was produced within the commune, along with a separate assignment for certain women to manufacture hashish. Each year, we were able to produce approximately 12 to 13 kilograms of hashish, which had a market value of over 17 to 18 thousand dollars per kilogram. Additionally, we engaged in yarn production within the commune and sold it, with some of the yarn being utilized to create clothing and bags. (Interview, March 25, 2023)

The revelations about the commune brought to light their proximity to other villagers who also cultivated *Bhang*. It was evident that they were facing economic challenges, which compelled them to explore various income-generating opportunities. Despite attempting to hide the unfavorable elements of the commune, the reality was slowly coming to light. While concealing the cultivation of *Bhang* might not seem substantial, it's crucial to acknowledge that the production of hashish, as practiced in the Ajambari commune, is a significant component. It has been discovered that *Bhang* cultivation is employed for various purposes,

including extracting fibers and using its seeds, and serves as one of the income streams for the Ajambari Commune, even though it has been prohibited in Nepal since 1979.

5.4 Cooperative Networks in the Commune's Surroundings

The establishment of cooperatives could not be neglected in the research, as they were crucial collective activities both within and around the Ajambari commune. The Maoist party emphasized the significance of cooperatives in their efforts to establish the commune (CPNM, 2003). Consequently, co-operatives were regarded as a necessary condition for the commune's formation. Netra Bikram Chand stated that the commune represents a higher level of co-operatives, and they aimed to establish multiple co-operatives in proximity to the commune⁴¹. Chand believes that co-operatives serve as agents of transformation within society, specifically addressing class conflicts. The remarkable qualities of co-operatives exemplify the potential to replace the current oppressive and impoverishing system where labor is subordinate to capital, with a democratic and welfare-oriented system based on free and equal collaboration in production. The co-operatives in the context of Thabang, had two importance to change the production relationship and to increase the production (Chand, 2008, p. 93). The Maoist party believed that the first aspect holds theoretical political significance, while the second aspect is more practical. By effectively balancing these two aspects, self-sustaining domestic production can be achieved.

Following the strategies outlined by Marx and Lenin in their writings (Chand, 2008, p. 87), the Maoist Party implemented a policy aimed at establishing cooperative ventures to contribute to the formation of a socialist state. Marx regarded co-operatives as a novel mode of production and a self-managed system that eliminates private property (Marx & Engels, 1848). Lenin, on the other hand, viewed co-operatives as a crucial organizational stage in the journey towards socialism (Lenin, 1923). Hence, co-operatives served as ideological means for the Maoist party to pave the way for the establishment of the commune and socialism. The Maoist party made a decision emphasizing the importance of developing diverse types and levels of cooperatives, as well as promoting employment growth and increased production, to establish a self-sustaining economy in the base areas (UCPN, 2004, p. 552). To meet these requirements, strategic initiatives will be implemented by forming and organizing a cooperative department specifically in the base areas. These types of cooperatives provide an alternative to capitalist systems and privately owned means of production, as highlighted

⁴¹ Interview with Netra Bikram Chand in April 2023 for this dissertation as a key informant participant.

by Wright (2010) and Harnecker (2013). They go beyond the solutions proposed by Rajasekhar et al. (2020), which primarily address issues like poverty, hunger, poor health, inadequate education, lack of access to clean water, and substandard sanitation.

Furthermore, the Maoist party formulated a plan stating that cooperative production offers greater advantages and values in terms of advancing productive capacities when compared to individual production (Bhattarai, 2006, p. 106). Conversely, if individuals are allowed to produce in isolation over an extended period, various factors will lead to the concentration of means of production in the hands of a few capitalists while others suffer losses. Moreover, in the capitalist and imperialist world, small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs alone are unable to compete with large capitalists and eventually face bankruptcy. Therefore, it is crucial and beneficial to organize production cooperatively to prevent class divisions, and inequalities, and protect owners of small means of production from financial ruin. Besides these significant policy considerations, other practical reasons support the need for cooperative production. Following a protracted people's war, a substantial portion of the labor force must be engaged in military activities for an extended period. The war may result in families being separated and displaced, rendering some elderly, disabled, or families with only children unable to participate in productive work. Additionally, there could be blockades imposed by the enemy. In such circumstances, cooperative production becomes both necessary and advantageous. About the co-operatives established by the Maoist party, Dhaplal Pun, a 58-year-old participant and a resident of Thabang informs:

I didn't become a part of the commune, but instead, I joined the co-operatives that were set up in Thabang. All the sections of the village participated in these co-operatives. The village was divided into smaller groups, each consisting of 15 to 20 households, and these groups actively participated in the co-operatives. Every household in the village was involved, leaving none behind. The Maoist party had formulated a policy to engage everyone first in the cooperatives and then eventually in the commune. (Interview, April 7, 2023)

Mr. Dhaplal's statement implies that the Maoist party devised a strategic plan to establish a variety of cooperative systems that involved the entire population in Thabang and other regions under their control. During my interaction with several residents of Thabang, they informed me that they actively participated in these cooperatives, adhering to the rules set forth by the Maoist Party. It was evident that every individual contributed to the functioning of these cooperatives. The Maoist party considered cooperatives as a crucial means to train

people to work together in groups and address economic challenges, particularly unemployment. While capitalist cooperatives primarily aim to alleviate economic vulnerabilities by distributing a portion of the production among cooperative members, the Maoist perspective on cooperatives transcends this functionalist approach. After eliminating class disparities and dominance through the implementation of socialism, the cooperatives fostered by the Maoist Party aimed to emancipate people from all forms of discrimination (Chanda, 2008, p. 86). This demonstrates that the Maoists viewed cooperatives as an ideological tool to establish socialism in the base areas.

5.4.1 The Production Co-operatives

Three types of cooperatives- production, distribution, and finance- had been established in Thabang, aiming for social and economic transformation. Production cooperatives encompassed both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, including industrial production. During the initial stages of the people's war and the establishment of people's power, it was imperative to adopt even the most basic forms of production cooperatives (Bhattarai, 2006, p. 107). Consumer cooperatives were organized to ensure the availability of affordable and easily accessible consumer goods such as salt, oil, sugar, and others required within the local community or village. They also facilitated the sale of locally produced goods like food, fruits, furniture, and more at reasonable prices. Similarly, establishing a local financial cooperative or credit union provided essential loans to individuals, particularly impoverished farmers, local industries, and local businesses by mobilizing local capital. These initiatives significantly contributed to the self-sufficiency of the locality and mitigated potential financial crises. These were similar categories as Harnecker (2013) classifies co-operatives into three types based on the activity of its members. First, Cooperatives for the production of goods and services; second, Cooperatives for the consumption of goods and services; and third, mixed cooperatives.

Initially, a group of 5 or 6 households living in a particular section of the village formed production cooperatives in 2001 intending to enhance agricultural output. Each cooperative consisted of approximately 15 to 25 members who alternated their work in the fields. These agricultural cooperatives aimed to cultivate crops such as maize, wheat, buckwheat, barley, and potatoes, to generate income by selling these grains. The objective was to improve the economic self-sufficiency of the individuals involved through these production cooperatives. Individuals engaged in labor sharing among themselves, resembling a system akin to *Parima*

(see Annex 8). The collective of workers within the production cooperatives was referred to as *Parima Dal*. There were 20 to 25 *Parima Dal* in Thabang alone, and the members of *Parima Dal* actively participated as agricultural laborers in various farming activities. Junpura Pariyar, a 45-year-old participant and a resident of Thabang, unfolds:

Due to the limited size of our land, we faced significant challenges. We only had a small plot, approximately the size of one *Hal* (see Annex 8) ox, which yielded a meager harvest of one or two quintals of maize. This was insufficient for sustenance. Instead of joining the commune, I participated in a peasant group. This group primarily consisted of Dalits, and our activities involved threshing corn, planting potatoes, chopping firewood, planting soybeans, sowing barley, and digging fields for different purposes. In exchange for our labor, on certain occasions, we got the necessary amount of five *Pathis*⁴² of corn for our food requirements. I worked diligently every day, but it was disheartening to see that the authorities took away all the productions we managed to cultivate. (Interview, March 30, 2023)

Based on Junpura's account, it was observed that they received a portion of grains in return for their labor within the commune. However, upon interviewing other residents of the commune, they informed me that they did not receive any grain as compensation for their work. This suggests that the distribution of grains was provided solely to those who required it for their subsistence. Dhaplal Rokka, a local leader and resident of Thabang, also disclosed that they were obligated to provide grains to the Maoist party combatants when requested, and at times, they assisted the commune with food supplies as well. The purpose of establishing the production cooperatives extended beyond supporting the local community, as it also aimed to aid the Maoist party in their people's war. The production co-operatives were effective from the establishment of the "People's Government" of Maoists in Thababng in 2001 and it was stopped after a comprehensive peace accord in 2006⁴³.

The type of cooperative described here resembles the concept of labor cooperatives discussed by Netra Bikram Chanda (2008, p. 89). These cooperatives operated with the primary objective of increasing production, utilizing labor resources, and fostering political consciousness to establish socialism. They incorporated certain elements of socialism and facilitated the pooling of labor, land, livestock, and skills, thereby addressing the limitations

⁴² *Pathi* is a measurement unit for grains stored in bushel-like vessels in Nepal, equivalent to approximately 4.54609 liters or 3.2 kilograms.

⁴³ The Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed by the Nepal Government and Maoist Party in 2006 and announced that the People's War of Maoists was ended and they entered into peaceful politics.

of individual households and mutual inadequacy. These cooperatives effectively addressed the challenges faced by individuals with surplus land but limited labor, as well as those with abundant labor but insufficient land. They initiated new production relationships and promoted a collective mindset. However, there remained room for further development, specifically in the form of semi-social cooperatives and full social cooperatives, which would entail the elimination of private ownership and the establishment of collective ownership. Additionally, the local people's government in Thabang established labor cooperatives in units 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10, involving every member of the community⁴⁴. They also established semi-social cooperatives in units 1 and 8, engaging all individuals. The semi-social cooperatives were more developed compared to the labor cooperatives, as they allowed personal ownership of land, oxen, and other resources (Chanda, 2008, p. 90). However, labor, cooperative practices, investments, and consumption remained collective. Participation in at least one cooperative was made compulsory for each member of every household in Thabang. It appears that large-scale production co-operatives were established throughout Thabang, and this process seemed more forceful than spontaneous.

5.4.2 The Consumption Co-operatives

The Maoist party established consumption cooperatives as the second type of cooperative. They initiated three stores in collaboration with the local community for this purpose. Dhaplal Pun was one of them who led a grocery shop as a distribution co-operative, offering a range of products including rice, vegetables, locally made items, daily necessities, and even shoes and clothes. In this cooperative, more than 15 people were engaged and shared the profits. They also supported the party, collected the production from villagers, and repaid the profit after selling these items. This kind of cooperative shops in Thabang provided goods at more affordable prices compared to other stores. Additionally, the goods produced by the production co-operatives were gathered, divided into portions, and distributed to the areas where they were needed. Dhaplal Pun, a 59-year-old participant and resident of Thabang, elaborates:

Upon the directive of the party, we established a co-operative shop. Around five to six families collaborated and invested in this venture. In Thabang, there were only a limited number of similar shops available. These establishments offered groceries at highly affordable prices. Remarkably, the shop maintained efficient operations

⁴⁴ The paper was presented at the third convention of the people's representatives of Thabang Local People's government (see Annex 7, Panel 12).

throughout the Maoist people's war. The income generated from the shop was either shared among the shareholders or allocated to the local party committee. However, the shop did not undergo official registration with the government. Unfortunately, after the establishment of peace, sustaining the business became challenging, leading to the distribution of the remaining goods among all those involved. Some individuals opted to take shoes, while others selected clothes, and some preferred rice, vegetables, and various other items. (Interview, April 7, 2023)

Dhaplal's statement indicates that three shops were established under the Maoist party as consumption cooperatives. Only a limited number of private shops were permitted to open by the Maoist party. These shops operated in the form of cooperatives with the participation of four to five households. The goods were sourced from Libang in the Rolpa district and Khabang in the Rukum district. Netra Bikram Chanda reported that there were eight consumption cooperatives in Rolpa district and twenty-three similar cooperatives in Rukum, all of which were profitable⁴⁵. These cooperatives were not autonomous but were directed by the Maoist party. It was discovered that a portion of the income generated by these cooperatives was utilized to support the Maoist people's war.

Additionally, in Thabang, there was a medical cooperative where Rajkumar Budha, Mul Bahadur Budha, and Dhanish Budha previously operated their medical practices. However, with the establishment of the Maoist village people's government in Thabang, these three medical shops were merged into the cooperative in 2001. The cooperative took great care to ensure that the shares of all three individuals were properly maintained. Mul Prasad Budha informed me that the cooperative provided healthcare facilities and medicines at affordable prices for the people of Thabang. Notably, many Maoist guerrillas also received health services from them. Mul Prasad Budha himself became a member of the Ajamari commune and actively served in the healthcare department. These consumption cooperatives were established in limited numbers but provided efficient and affordable services to local people. Their motive seemed to be demonstrating the benefits of collective activities, even though they generated only a small amount of profit.

⁴⁵ Interview with Netra Bikram Chand in April 2023 as a key informant participant for this dissertation.

5.4.3 The Finance Co-Operatives

Thirdly, there was a financial (or credit) cooperative established locally in 2003 to provide necessary loans to everyone, especially poor farmers, or to invest in industries, businesses, etc. by mobilizing local capital. This was expected to help in making the locality self-reliant and avoid a financial crisis. The Village People's government of Thabang had established a financial co-operative under its supervision. Bar Prasad Gharti Magar, a 57-year-old participant and member of the commune, as well as the chairperson of the Village People's Government, illuminates:

In Thabang, we had established a single financial cooperative. The cooperative was responsible for collecting the income generated from shops, hotels, and cooperative medical. Additionally, we gathered shares from individuals, ranging from 1 to 2 thousand rupees, with a maximum limit of 5 thousand rupees. We also levied taxes on goods that were sold. Our total deposits amounted to approximately 10 lakhs. We provided loans to the public, albeit in smaller amounts and at lower interest rates. Moreover, we supported the party by contributing towards their expenses. Running shops, hotels, and tea shops during that time was extremely challenging. Whenever the army or police conducted raids in the village, we would move all our goods to the jungle temporarily and resume our operations once they had left. (Interview, March 29, 2023)

Surya Lal Budha was an active member who was involved in the financial cooperatives. According to his information, the cooperative possessed a substantial amount of over 6 lakh rupees. Additionally, I came across evidence in Harka Bahadur Budha's diary (see Annex 7, Panel 11), which indicated that they had saved 6 lakhs and 47 thousand rupees after deducting expenses of 2 lakhs and 74 thousand from a total income of 9 lakhs and 22 thousand rupees between 2002 and 2006. Surya Lal Budha himself had borrowed a loan amounting to 4 to 5 thousand rupees. Many other individuals from the general population also availed themselves of loans from the financial cooperatives. The borrowed money had to be repaid within six months to a year, with an interest rate of 2 percent. Therefore, it is evident that the financial cooperative operated efficiently and extended its services not only to Maoist cadres but also to the general public, catering to their needs for smaller loan amounts.

Furthermore, Netra Bikram Chand mentioned that the people's government initiated a cooperative with an initial investment of 20 lakhs, which made 50 lakhs⁴⁶ profit. He recollected that after the establishment of the cloth-weaving, noodle, and biscuit industries by the people's government, the dependency on external sources for noodles and biscuits in Rukum-Rolpa ceased. According to Chand's account, the economic growth rate in Rukum and Rolpa was highly favorable during that period. Bar Prasad's statement confirms the existence of a financial cooperative that collected funds and provided loans. However, it contradicts the Maoist claim that such cooperatives would support the initiation of businesses or small-scale industries. Instead, the loans were primarily intended to cover daily expenses and immediate needs. A portion of the income was allocated to cover the expenses of the Maoist Party during the People's War. The establishment of the finance cooperative had dual benefits: it supported the party's expenses and demonstrated the value of collective initiatives by showing people that they could save money and access loans when needed.

5.4.4 *Sahid Marga*: The Collective Effort

The members of the Ajambari commune also participated in various collective activities driven by shared goals. The Maoist party initiated a road construction project in Thabang, connecting it to Dang under the name of Martyrs. This project stands as a prominent example of the collective efforts of the people of Rolpa and the engagement of the commune members. It commenced in 2003 as *Jhara*, involving one representative from each household in Thabang, who volunteered their services without receiving any wages. The road, known as *Sahid Marga* (see Annex 8), was dug from various locations, including Thabang, Mirul, Gharti Gaun, Darbot, Tial, Holeri, and Tribeni. For three years, the local people persistently worked on excavating a road, managing to complete approximately 100 kilometers of track from Nuwagaun, located in the Tribeni Rural Municipality, to Thabang. However, there were still certain areas along the route where guard posts needed to be blasted to ensure further progress. Netra Bikram Chanda, a 56-year-old participant and the general secretary of the Nepal Communist party, clarifies:

We have collectively made a firm decision and envisioned the construction of the Martyr's Way. The arduous journey to and from Thabang posed great challenges for the people, who had to endure long walks. It was recognized that connecting Thabang with a road was essential for its development. The main resource for achieving this goal was the active participation of thousands of people. It was not only the residents

⁴⁶ Interview with Netra Bikram Chand in February, 2023 for this dissertation as a key informant participant.

of Thabang but also individuals from Rolpa and Dhaulagiri, who joined forces in road construction efforts. (Interview, February 25, 2023)

The construction of the Martyr's Road in Thabang was enforced with the mandatory involvement of every household in the village. The project was supervised by the Local people's government of Thabang, which was affiliated with the Maoist Party. Each unit of the Thabang village was assigned a quota specifying the number of people required to participate in the construction. According to a diary written by one of the leaders of the Local People's government, specific numbers of individuals were requested from various area units. For example, 400 people were asked from the 2nd area unit, 200 people from the 10th area unit, 400 people from the 4th area unit, and 400 people from the 5th area unit, for one month dedicated to digging the Martyr's road. This demonstrates that a significant number of individuals were involved in the construction of the Martyr's Road, responding to the call made by the Maoist party. The leader also compiled a record of individuals who did not participate in the road construction project. Among them was Bhume Rokka from Thabang, who informed me that they were assigned additional tasks such as school construction, fieldwork, or other voluntary work as a consequence of not taking part in the road construction activities. Moreover, the remaining individuals were allocated to other collective projects, including the construction of schools, irrigation facilities in the Ajambari commune, and the establishment of Martyr's memorials in Thabang.

The involvement of local residents in road construction has been halted due to the Nepal government's decision to invest in the Martyr's Road project since 2008. Despite the significant investment made by the government, the construction of Martyr's road remains unfinished. Presently, Thabang has three connections: one from Dang and Libang in Rolpa, another from Khabang in Rukum, and a third one from Shulichaur. During my previous visit to Thabang from Sulichuar, I observed that the road was still incomplete and had steep sections. Currently, buses are operating between Dang and Thabang, as well as jeeps running from Libang to Rolpa. Additionally, bus service is available from Rukumkot to Thabang, making it accessible for transportation. The primary credit for these advancements goes to the Maoist initiative and the people of Thabang and Rolpa. Thus, Martyr's Road, or Sahid Marga, became a stepping stone for the social transformation of Thabang, with the active involvement of commune members.

5.4. Reinforcement of Collective Living, Collective Farming, and Co-operatives to the Commune

The commune served as the central organization for collective living, collective farming, and cooperatives implemented by the Maoist ideology and the residents of Thabang. Both the Maoist group and the commune members shared the belief that the introduction of collective living, collective farming, and cooperation played a crucial role in fortifying the commune⁴⁷. Collective living played a crucial role in the creation of the commune, as stated by Chhiring, the commune's leader. Chhiring emphasized that living collectively transformed individuals' emotions and fostered a sense of collectivity. In the commune, everyone shared the same meals, clothing, and living space, which promoted a sense of equality. This emphasis on collective living was deemed vital in the pursuit of socialism. Rather than opting for individual lifestyles, the commune was established with a focus on communal arrangements. Personal issues were approached as collective challenges, including the education of children and addressing health concerns. The practice of collective living facilitated the provision of diverse training opportunities such as cooking, farming, and education.

Collective farming formed the foundation of the commune, serving as its mainstay. The commune members dedicated themselves to cultivating crops necessary to sustain the entire community. From dawn till dusk, they toiled diligently, cultivating maize, wheat, barley, potatoes, and various vegetables to meet their nutritional needs. The consolidation of individual lands into the commune exemplified the commune members' commitment to collective ownership, as land held significant value as a primary form of property in Nepal. This merging of land underscored their dedication to the principles of collective living. Within the commune, a more advanced form of collective farming and collective consumption was put into practice. However, outside of the commune, the people's government of Thabang had established a separate system of collective farming. People were willing to contribute their labor and distribute the resulting production outside of the commune to gain insights into collectivization principles. When the commune needed labor, individuals volunteered to work within the commune.

⁴⁷ Interview with Netra Bikram Chand in April 2023 as a key informant participant for this dissertation.

Additionally, the Maoist local government established 25 production, 3 distribution, and 2 financial cooperatives in Thabang to bolster the commune⁴⁸. The objectives of the commune, both political and ideological, were effectively communicated to the public. Financial and material assistance was extended to aid in the construction of the commune's physical infrastructure. The common people were actively encouraged, both ideologically and politically, to embrace communication. They were organized into labor cooperatives and semi-social cooperatives as part of the communalization process. The labor cooperatives also provided support to the commune whenever needed. Additionally, there were consumption cooperatives located in four to five places in Thabang, as well as a shop and hotel operated by the commune. Both the commune and these establishments mutually supported each other. The local people's government considered the commune as an important department, and the commune's leaders were always invited to meetings to present reports and address any issues⁴⁹. The local government placed significant emphasis on involving households in Thabang to support the commune. They were determined to ensure the success of the commune at any cost and were willing to resolve any challenges faced by the commune.

5.5 Conclusion

The Ajamabri commune was established to promote collective living, despite having limited facilities. Commune members carried their own luggage and utensils and also contributed some money for the collective functioning of the commune. Upon observing the commune houses, I noticed that they followed a traditional design, with each household assigned a separate room and a dedicated kitchen. Interviews with commune members revealed that their living conditions were similar to their private households. They had restrictions on personal food preferences and actions, but there was a strong sense of collective unity during the initial stages of the commune. They were prepared to successfully implement collective practices. One notable change was that leaders were assigned specific job schedules, and there were occasional assemblies to discuss and address any relevant issues. Collective living strengthened the bond among the commune members. Additionally, the commune took on the responsibility of caring for the children, relieving the members of that burden. Education for the children was provided through the model school operated by the Maoist party, ensuring that they received proper education without any difficulties.

⁴⁸ The paper was presented in the third convention of people's representatives of Thabang Local People's government (see Annex 7, Panel 1 and 2).

⁴⁹ The diary of Harka Bahadur Gharti provided evidence that the leader of the commune had submitted their report during the meetings of the local people's government (see Annex 7, Panel 3 and 7).

The commune primarily engaged in collective farming as its main activity. The land was obtained from commune members, although not all members had an equal share of land. Only a small number, specifically six members, possessed larger portions of land, and some individuals from outside Thabang did not have any land integrated into the commune. While the commune made efforts to diversify its farming practices, it predominantly relied on traditional methods, cultivating crops such as maize, potatoes, barley, and buckwheat. Vegetable farming was limited to meet the commune's own consumption needs. However, attempts to cultivate herbs, apples, and truffles proved unsuccessful. Relying solely on farming hindered the commune's sustainability. The commune attempted to generate additional income by engaging in the production of *Bhango* and hashish. However, despite these efforts, the collective farming production remained just enough to sustain the commune members without improving their living standards or generating extra income for the commune.

The co-operatives supported the functioning of the commune, as they were conveniently located near the commune and provided training to ordinary individuals on working collectively. The Maoists initially formulated a plan to establish various types of co-operatives, including labor or production co-operatives, consumption co-operatives, and financial co-operatives. Subsequently, they established the commune as a higher level of collectivization and co-operatives. In Thabang, the Maoist party's base area, the co-operatives motivated and engaged people in productive activities. Simultaneously, cooperative and communal shops were successfully established in Thabang. Additionally, the cooperative medical system provided affordable medicine to the local population. These activities contributed to an elevated level of economic engagement in Thabang during the time of the Maoist armed struggle.

Chapter Six

Present Status of the Ajambari Commune and the Social Sustainability

This chapter examines the present condition of Ajambari commune and the attributes leading to its dissolution. To accomplish this, an assessment of the social sustainability of the Ajambari commune has been undertaken, with a particular emphasis on the distinctive attributes that contributed to its sustainability. Additionally, it explores the continuity of the commune's practices and addresses the challenges and opportunities it encountered in maintaining sustainability while adapting to evolving circumstances. The central inquiry revolves around identifying contradictions and economic possibilities within the commune. Specifically, it investigates whether class contradiction was prevalent within the commune and how perceptions of belongingness and future prospects changed over time. Furthermore, the chapter explores why some members left the commune prematurely, examining the conditions that led to their departure. Replicating a commune of this nature may present challenges, and the chapter considers the potential obstacles. The actions undertaken by former members of the Ajambari commune after their departure shed light on their altered perspective regarding the communal objective, which is also a topic of discussion. The collaborative endeavors pursued outside the confines of the commune currently demonstrate the enduring influence and shared values inherited from the commune's dissolution. Lastly, the chapter evaluates whether the anticipated social transformation was successfully achieved within the commune.

6.1 Present Status of the Ajambari Commune

When I visited the Ajambari commune in April 2022, I saw four buildings: one with 18 rooms and another with six rooms, totalling 38 rooms. Three of these buildings were used for collective living, and one housed oxen, cows, and goats. A larger room served as the kitchen. Many rooms are now locked, and I couldn't see inside them. Participants informed me that they are currently vacant. There is one big tap and three toilets still in use. I found that three households are still living there, each with a separate kitchen. There was once a collective living arrangement for more than a hundred members. The Ajambari commune remained active until 2017, operating in the aftermath of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, a pact between the Maoist Party and the Government of Nepal aimed at concluding the people's war and transitioning into a peaceful Maoist party. Despite this broader political context, the commune persisted for an additional decade. Over time, however, a gradual exit of commune

members occurred, resulting in only three households remaining by the end of 2017. The disbandment of the Ajambari commune seems tragic, as it was a significant initiative undertaken to establish a socialist unit by the Maoist party and commune members, who had pursued it with great enthusiasm. Although the remaining three households chose to live separately, they continued to reside in the commune house, maintaining a degree of cohesion. Notably, they established separate kitchens and pursued individual agricultural activities. Despite this shift towards individual pursuits, the households continued to assist each other when needed. The trajectory of Ajambari Commune's evolution reflects the Maoist party's transition from armed struggle to parliamentary politics, with both entities shifting from collective to more individualized activities. I intend to thoroughly examine the attributes that led to the operational breakdown of the Ajambari Commune.

6.1.1 Three Households in the Commune House

When I visited the Ajambari Commune house in March 2022, three elderly women were preparing food in the kitchens of three commune houses (see photographs in Annex 8). These families continue to live in the commune due to their emotional attachment. However, they have different kitchens and living areas and work on separate plots of land. They collaborate on certain tasks as needed but do not share all responsibilities. The first family, headed by Surya Bahadur Rokka Magar, primarily resides in the commune. However, their presence is seasonal, as they frequently engage in work on the surrounding land. Their son and daughter-in-law do not permanently live there but visit when they have land-related obligations. Ramkirini Rokka Magar, Surya Bahadur's daughter-in-law, held a significant position within the Ajambari commune as the in-charge. She was later elected as the vice-chairperson of the Thabang rural municipality. On occasion, she also spends time in the commune house.

Ram Maya Rokka's household is the second family currently residing in the commune. Ram Maya, a 69-year-old widow, is the wife of martyr Tara Prakash Rokka, who lost his life in the Lamjung district during the Maoist armed struggle. After establishing the commune, her husband joined the party and left her in the commune. The commune was established in Ram Maya's house, initially comprising only four rooms. Over time, the commune itself expanded and constructed approximately 24 additional rooms. Ram Maya owns the land surrounding the commune and actively works on it. Occasionally, her son and daughter-in-law, who work at the Thabang Health Research Centre, visit to assist her. Ram Maya feels dissatisfied with the party and commune split, reminiscing about the good times they had when they were

united. Since the dissolution of the commune, she has been working on the land alone, feeling a sense of solitude.

The third household residing in the commune is that of Raj Kumar Budha Magar. The house originally belonged to Raj Kumar and was given to the commune. However, he has now reclaimed ownership of his house. His land is located in the vicinity of the commune. Raj Kumar has two sons who are pursuing careers in the medical field in Thabang. Raj Kumar's wife, Sarjita Rokka Magar, who is 60 years old, shares her sadness over the dissolution of the commune. However, she is not inclined to establish the commune again. They are currently constructing a house in Thabang because their previous house was destroyed by the Nepal army in 2001. Raj Kumar initially had no intention of dissolving the commune, but he criticized the leaders, claiming they were not righteous and sought a life of luxury. After everything was dissolved, he found himself alone in the commune.

The departure of commune members did not occur simultaneously, but rather unfolded gradually, with a continuous process of joining and leaving. Different households had distinct timelines for joining and leaving as they pursued collective goals. Initially, six households became part of the commune, followed by an additional five households in the second phase. Subsequently, over time, a total of twenty households departed from the commune by 2013, while thirteen households remained. It is important to note that the decision to dissolve the commune was not made by its members; instead, it was determined by the Maoist party, leading to the dissolution of the people's government, the people's court, and the commune in 2007. Jaya Prakash Rokka, a 54-year-old participant and a leader of the commune, broadens:

Leaving the commune was not a premeditated decision. Members who desired to venture outside would express their intention to engage in external activities, and their departure would be permitted. It was mutually agreed upon not to speak negatively about the commune while leaving. We focused on the positive aspects of our efforts, acknowledging that discussing failures was discouraged and unpleasant experiences were to remain within the commune. We even documented our thoughts through writing. At present, there are still thirteen families residing in the commune who do not identify themselves as having left. We are contemplating the possibility of reuniting by convening a meeting with them. As members of the commune, we frequently engage in discussions about our shared experiences within the commune. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

Jaya Prakash, who played a key role in founding and ensuring the prosperity of the commune, was an ardent supporter with an exceedingly positive outlook. Nevertheless, upon interacting with other commune members, I discovered that they held a different perspective. Although the members of the Ajambari commune discuss its past activities, they are currently involved in various individual pursuits. Initially, many members were hesitant to discuss any negative aspects, instead attributing the commune's failure to the leaders and the Maoist party. It became evident that they had lost faith in the commune's potential for success. They preferred to exert extra effort outside the commune to secure their own futures. Initially, the commune thrived, but the situation deteriorated when members began prioritizing their interests. When I interviewed the commune members, I discovered that they were focused on their private arrangements and showed no interest in rejoining the commune. This suggests that the likelihood of re-establishing the commune was not possible.

6.1.2 Who Left the Commune at First?

Based on the previous analysis, it is evident that there was a lack of equality among the members of the commune. Some individuals had the freedom to leave and work outside the commune, while others were required to work for the commune throughout the day. Commune members informed me that joining and leaving the commune was an ongoing occurrence. The leaders, formally speaking, did not leave the commune. However, several members decided to leave initially, including Bal Prasad Gharti, Gaj Bahadur Rokka, Bar Prasad Gharti, and Pharke Bahadur Rokka. Each of them had their own reasons for leaving the commune. Bal Prasad Gharti's departure was influenced by his wife and children's refusal to join the commune. Nevertheless, Bal Prasad joined the commune with his mother in 2004. However, when he realized he was only receiving a meager amount of 200 rupees per month and was not granted the freedom to work outside, he grew dissatisfied with the commune environment. Additionally, his mother disliked being isolated from their neighbors in the village while residing in the commune. After a year, they decided to return. Bal Prasad expressed that he initially joined the commune because he had faith in the leaders but was disappointed by seeing their behaviors within the commune, leading to his eventual departure.

Bar Prasad Gharti, who served as the chairperson of Thabang village's people's government under the Maoist party, expressed his willingness to reside in the commune as directed by the central committee of the party. However, his residence in Chhorlabang was located a bit far

from the commune's location in Rachibang. Despite this distance, his family was also prepared to live in the commune, with the expectation that a branch of the commune would be established in Chhorlabang. Occasionally, members of the commune would come and assist with work in their fields, although this arrangement was not always feasible. Unfortunately, the establishment of the branch commune in Chhorlabang did not materialize. The people in the area were unprepared for it, and no other families in Chhorlabang were ready to join the commune. Bar Prasad found himself having to travel far for work and attend frequent meetings, leaving no one to take care of their cows and land in Chhorlabang. Consequently, after one year, Bar Prasad decided to leave the commune as it was not functioning well. Further, Bar Prasad Gharti, a 54-year-old participant and a member of the commune, admits:

The commune was established as a representation of socialism, but I believed that it was not the right time for its formation. Subjective and factual preparation was necessary beforehand. Although there were extensive discussions, many individuals were not in favor of it. The party had not yet gained control over the state, so there was little possibility for the commune to thrive and expand while remaining within it. Imposing the commune solely from a top-down approach would not have been feasible. It was essential for the commune to have independence in various aspects such as politics, ideology, culture, society, and economy, but unfortunately, this did not occur there. It was necessary to align with the customs and culture of the surrounding village, but there was a lack of compatibility. Different rituals, cultures, and behaviors were required within the commune, but it lacked them, hindering its growth and prosperity. (Interview, March 29, 2023)

Furthermore, Bar Prasad added that in Soviet Russia, the government established a commune only after Lenin completed the revolution in 1917. Similarly, in China, the commune was established after the revolution was completed in 1949. However, in Nepal, a commune was formed before the revolution was completed, resulting in its lack of success. Some leaders exhibited a behavior where they did not stay united, and while some discussed establishing the commune, they were ready to maintain separate interests at an individual level. There was a lack of harmony among them. If the central committee had declared that no one would be left behind, the situation could have been different. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Furthermore, the level of consciousness among the leaders was also low. Therefore, Bar Prasad believed that it was the leaders' responsibility to abandon the commune, and the

political situation was unfavorable for establishing the commune, rather than it being a result of the people's initiative.

Indra Bahadur Budha served as the head of Jaljala Commune in Jelbang. However, despite his leadership role, his family actively participated in the Ajambari Commune with great enthusiasm and a sense of collective unity. Although Indra Bahadur himself was responsible for the commune, he believed that the commune had not yet reached a mature stage. His family contributed land, goods, and livestock to the commune as their way of participation. Additionally, Indra Bahadur's maternal uncle also resided in the commune. Unfortunately, when his wife fell ill, she had to stay at the Teaching Hospital of Kathmandu for one or two months to receive treatment. The commune provided financial support for the medical expenses, but the family also managed to arrange some money on their own. During that time, Indra Bahadur's mother-in-law, who stayed at home, noticed that the commune members did not come to work on their land, which caused her some distress. After his wife recovered from her illness and returned home, they decided to leave the commune in 2006, only a year after joining. They departed from the commune together with their children.

I met Gaja Bahadur Budha in Duldanda, near the Ajambari commune, who became a member of the commune in 2005 and departed from the commune in 2007. He believed that the absence of leaders staying within it would hinder any progress. He held the belief that having only general members in the commune would lead to a lack of meaningful developments. The commune lacked essential information, and even its members were unaware of the rules, regulations, and plans of the commune. Consequently, they perceived the situation as unfavorable and unsatisfactory. Each member had their own unique narrative of joining and eventually departing from the commune. However, they discovered a common pattern: the commune's lack of progress and the leaders choosing to reside outside, citing various reasons. They observed that the work within the commune had become repetitive and lacked any sense of optimism or hope. Consequently, they yearned to explore opportunities beyond the confines of the commune and sought to venture outside, prepared to face the challenges and seek new prospects elsewhere.

Table 6.1*Reasons of Departing the Commune*

Reasons	Number of Members	Percentage (%)
Leaders abandoned the commune	7	21.21
The party left the ideology	9	27.28
Thought not running well	6	18.18
Did not like activities	5	15.15
Desire to private pursuits	6	18.18
Total	33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

The members of the commune expressed various forms of dissatisfaction, which can be categorized into five types. Many of them held the party responsible for deviating from the original socialist ideology and straying from the initial narrative. These individuals, including Jaya Prakash Rokka, Tara Prakash Rokka, Kitab Jhakri, Hit Prasad Rokka, and Prabesh Rokka, were middle-level leaders within the commune. The second category of members attributed their discontentment to both the higher-level party leaders and local leaders who chose not to reside in the commune. Another group of members believed that the commune would not function effectively and expressed their dislike for its activities, prompting them to seek independence. Thus, it became evident that there were multiple factors contributing to the decision to leave the commune. However, the main reasons cited by every member during the conversations were the peaceful course of the Maoist party and the leaders' apathy towards the commune. These factors played a significant role in the dissolution of the commune.

6.2 Social Sustainability of the Ajambari Commune

The factors mentioned above, as expressed by the commune members, should align with the attributes of social sustainability. Analyzing the prolonged existence of the Ajambari commune necessitates a focus on social sustainability. The Ajambari commune lacked the crucial qualities of social sustainability essential for maintaining the envisioned social transformation. The altered political landscape, state policies, and decision-making processes had negatively affected the commune's existence. Class disparities contribute to inequality in

collective activities. Economic endeavors, crucial for supporting equality and enhancing the quality of life (Cuthill, 2010), face challenges. The Brundtland Report's recommendation to meet present needs without jeopardizing future generations' resources is pertinent to evaluating the Ajambari commune's sustainability (Brundtland, 1987). Social sustainability hinges on the continuous and future progression of political, social, and economic transformations constituting social dynamics. Attributes such as social cohesion, participation, and a sense of belonging, explored in the sustainability study of the Ajambari commune (Chiu, 2003, Dempsey et al., 2009, Murphy, 2012), play pivotal roles in achieving social sustainability. The subsequent section delves deeper into an examination of the attributes of social sustainability that were absent in the Ajambari commune.

6.2.1 Dissolution of "People's Government" and the Commune

The primary reason for the Ajambari commune's dissolution was the agreement between Seven political parties and Maoists on November 8 and the Comprehensive Peace Accord of November 21, 2006, signed between the Maoist party and the Nepal government. These agreements marked the conclusion of the decade-long People's War and included provisions to disband the People's Government, People's Court, and the communes established during that period. Clause 3 of the November 8 agreement and clause 10 of the Comprehensive Peace Accord stated that the People's Government, People's Court, and all other government-related bodies that had been under the leadership of Maoists would be dissolved following the formation of the Interim Legislative Parliament on January 15, 2007 (Comprehensive Peace Accord, 2006). This created an opportunity for commune members to opt for collective activities within the commune while engaging in private endeavors outside its boundaries. The Maoist party underwent a strategic shift from armed struggle to peaceful politics in 2005, as decided during the central committee meeting held in Chunbang⁵⁰. It allied with seven other political parties and entered into twelve-point agreements. The party actively participated in the Second People's Movement in 2006, leading to the cessation of direct rule by the king and the reinstatement of the dissolved parliament. Subsequently, on November 22, 2006, the Maoist party, along with the alliance of these parties, signed a Comprehensive Peace Accord, officially marking the end of the People's War. As part of the peace process,

⁵⁰ In 2005, the Maoists decided during a Central Committee meeting of Chunbang to adopt a strategic approach involving an all-round conference, an interim government, and the election of a constituent assembly. This decision led to the establishment of a republican democracy and paved the way for dialogue with seven political parties in Nepal, ultimately resulting in a comprehensive agreement being reached (CPNM, 2013, p.569).

the People's Liberation Army was confined to seven cantonments under the supervision of the United Nations. The Maoist party decided to participate in the interim parliament, interim government, and constituent assembly elections. To facilitate this transition, the Maoist party announced the dissolution of the People's Government, People's Court, and the commune in 2007, initiating the process of dissolving the commune. Despite this, the Ajambar commune continued to operate until 2017, as it was no longer under the direct responsibility of the Maoist party. Santosh Budhha Magar, a 63-year-old participant and the leader of the commune, elaborates:

Following the peace process, the party decided to dissolve the people's government, the people's court, and the commune. This decision was driven by ideological reasons but represented a departure from the party's historical commitment to serving the people through these structures. It marked the end of the party's pursuit of socialism, as it became entangled in revisionist tendencies. Despite this, the commune managed to sustain itself for ten years through the dedicated efforts of its members. However, the absence of party support significantly weakened the management of the commune once the leadership departed. (Interview, March 22, 2022)

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord, the Maoist party experienced a split in 2012, resulting in the establishment of two factions. Subsequently, in 2014, Netra Bikram Chanda formed a separate party. Within the Ajambari commune, the majority of members believed that the party's leadership had betrayed the Maoist party's goal of establishing scientific socialism and therefore supported the split. However, some members remained loyal to the established faction. Despite the division within the commune, it continued to operate for a couple of years. Both groups engaged in criticism of one another. The established faction accused the leaders of the commune of abandoning their responsibilities and neglecting the commune's activities, while the rebellious faction accused the party of deviating from the revolutionary path.

6.2.2 The Changed Class Dynamics in the Commune

The dynamics of social class among party leaders, commune leaders, and general members underwent alterations following the comprehensive peace accord. These changes resulted in increased inequality among commune members, causing dissatisfaction and ultimately leading to the commune's dissolution. Even though the leaders and individuals within the commune were proletarianized according to Maoist principles, the class contradiction within

the commune remained unresolved. Leaders submitted their land to the commune, but not legally, and got it returned after the commune's dissolution. These leaders did not live continuously in the commune. Most of them lived outside the commune. Ram Kirini Rokka, a 48-year-old participant and the former in charge of the commune, discloses:

The primary leader of the commune was frequently absent; he was rarely residing within the commune. On the occasions when he did visit, separate meals were prepared for him, claiming that his wife was unwell. Eventually, he ceased coming to the commune altogether. Similarly, the other individual in charge of the commune primarily worked outside of it, often giving various reasons for their absence. Those who held dual responsibilities within the party and the commune tended to prioritize their party-related work. Consequently, the leaders initially stopped visiting the commune, although they maintained that they were not abandoning it. (Interview, March 24, 2022)

The leadership of the commune was dominated by individuals from the higher social class who possessed more land and higher levels of education. The allocation of leadership positions in the commune was determined by the Maoist party committee of Thabang. Santosh Budha Magar, a central committee member of the Maoist party, held a prominent leadership role in the commune but did not spend much time residing there. Additionally, Jaya Prakash Rokka, Chhiring, and Ram Kirini Rokka Magar assumed positions of authority within the commune. There were disagreements between Ram Kirini and the former leader of the commune. Initially, these leaders showed negligence towards the commune and gave less time to its management. This implies that the higher-class members of the commune did not prioritize the proper administration and functioning of the commune.

In the past, the chairperson of the Maoist party, Prachanda, leader Baburam Bhattarai, and Barsaman Pun frequently visited the Ajambari commune. But, after the Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed, they never visited the commune. When I was visiting the commune house during my fieldwork, Barshaman had a program to visit Jaljala, a high hill passing Thabang. He did not take a rest in the Thabang but went straight to Jaljala by motor. Ram Maya Rokka, a 63-year-old participant and a member of the commune expresses, dissatisfaction:

In the past, senior leaders such as Prachanda, Baburam, and Barshaman used to visit us, share meals, and stay with us. However, after the restoration of the peace, the party adopted a new principle. Initially, staying together was enjoyable and brought a

sense of camaraderie. However, things took a turn for the worse after they left. Presently, the leaders no longer come, and they seem indifferent to our well-being. They travel by vehicle and do not make an effort to interact with us even when they visit Thabang. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

The prominent leaders no longer reside in Rolpa or their original village. Instead, they have relocated to the capital city, where they rely on vehicles for transportation and have secured comfortable accommodations. As they assumed political positions at the state level, such as Maoist leaders actively participating in the interim House of Representatives and holding positions within the interim government in 2007⁵¹, their social standing experienced an ascent. Consequently, their visits to Thabang and interactions with commune members diminished in frequency. Santosh Budha Magar acknowledged that he had been occupied with numerous party-related responsibilities, which required him to live in various locations across the country as assigned by the party. Thus, the dissolution of the commune was a class matter, rather than other minor causes.

In addition to the social advancement of the party leaders and the negative influence of the commune leaders, another class division emerged within the commune following the Comprehensive Peace Accord. The Nepal government allocated 10 lakhs rupees as compensation, which was given to former armed combatants who were not eligible for integration into the Nepal army. The commune consisted of members from both categories, those who received government compensation and those who did not. There were five combatants and five households of martyrs who received money from the government, and the commune did not claim their funds. Once they obtained the money, they left the commune and embarked on personal business ventures. Consequently, three distinct groups formed within the Ajambari commune. The first group comprised the leaders, the second group consisted of members who received government compensation, and the third group comprised general members or supporters of the Maoist party. As the contradictions between these classes intensified, the commune gradually disintegrated.

⁵¹ The Maoist party was included in the Interim Parliament with 83 members among 329 members for the first time after the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2007 and also the Maoists participated in the government for the first time under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. Under the leadership of Communications Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara, five Maoist leaders became ministers.

6.2.3 Economic Crisis in the Commune

The breakdown of the commune was significantly driven by an economic crisis resulting from both the inadequacies in modernizing agriculture and the shortcomings in seeking alternative resources. The Ajambari commune faced significant economic difficulties primarily after 2010. The main issue arose when the children reached a higher grade, such as completing class 10. The commune expressed its inability to provide education to its children, resulting in the children having to educate themselves. To handle the expenses related to education, commune members resorted to living outside the commune. Ram Kirini Rokka Magar, aged 48, a participant and leader of the commune, as well as former vice-chairperson of Thabang Rural Municipality, offers additional information:

The commune derived a monthly income of approximately 20,000 rupees from its hotel and shop operations. This amount was distributed among the members at a rate of 200 rupees per person. With this limited allocation, it became challenging to fulfill basic needs such as clothing, soap, and slippers for the children. A portion of the funds, around 50 rupees, was allocated to support younger students. Additionally, students relied on the commune for essential supplies like paper and pens. However, in times of sickness, those with young children had to utilize their share of the money for medical expenses. The financial strain within the commune was evident. On one occasion, I retrieved a pair of slippers from the garbage and utilized them as a replacement for my worn-out ones. Numerous difficulties and hardships persisted within the commune. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

As the children within the commune were maturing, the commune faced challenges in providing them with education. The financial burden associated with this became significant. Consequently, we advised the members to take up the responsibility of teaching their children, bearing the costs themselves. Although this was considered a last resort, it was not the sole reason for the subsequent separation of members. While there was no deliberate decision to initiate a separation, it eventually became one of the factors that led to members gradually separating from the commune, one by one.

Over time, the earnings from the shop and hotel began to decline. The increasing number of shops and hotels in Thabang, following the peace accord between the Maoist Party and the Nepalese government, resulted in the inability of commune members to generate profits from these ventures. Nevertheless, the hotel and shop continued to operate until 2017. The losses incurred from the vehicle were also overwhelming. Kitab Jhakri mentioned that the commune

had a loan of 14 lakh rupees in the end. He and his family took it upon themselves to repay the loan through their endeavors. Kitab Jhakri, a 63-year-old participant and a member of the commune, elaborates:

We also incurred significant financial losses due to the vehicle we owned. It required frequent repairs, resulting in additional expenses. Eventually, the vehicle was sold at a loss of 5 lakh rupees after it overturned. Along with losses in shops and vehicles in Sulichour, these setbacks led us to accumulate a debt of 14 lakhs rupees. The commune was left without any funds, and there was no means to make any payments. We managed to repay the debt by utilizing the earnings from various sources such as the pottery shop, chicken farming, and pooling resources from our family. This helped us solely to clear the debt. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

This statement indicates that the Ajambari commune encountered difficulties in improving its income. Initially, the commune received assistance from the Maoist party, but this support eventually ceased. The commune's attempts at sustaining its expenses through activities such as vegetable and herb farming and operating a vehicle, shops, and a hotel proved unsuccessful. The agricultural practices remained traditional and were unable to transition into modernized agriculture. Prabesh Rokka, a 46-year-old participant and the leader of the Ajambari commune admits:

Everyday life continued its normal course in Thabang. Household farming activities were also ongoing, but they were unable to expand on a significant scale. Modernization and commercialization efforts were hindered. Despite attempts to secure financial resources, proper management and stability of the commune proved challenging. The acquisition of long-term resources remained unattainable. Discussions and debates regarding financial resources took place within various committees, yet no tangible progress was made. The situation took a turn for the worse when ejaculation became a focal point within the party's ideology. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

This statement indicates that the aspirations for modernizing and commercializing agriculture in the commune turned out to be futile. The pursuit of new economic avenues also proved unsuccessful. Consequently, solely relying on meeting daily needs fell short of facilitating the progress of commune members. This struggle became evident in their inability to afford educational expenses for their children, which ultimately contributed to the decline of the

commune. As a result, individualistic thinking began to prevail among commune members, leading to a loss of hope in the concept of collectivization.

6.2.4 Loss of Future Prospects

The commune members and the new generations of the commune did not see any prospects, which led them to search for employment outside the commune and which made the collectivization aspiration of the commune weak. The prospect of the future is one of the most important parts of social sustainability (Brundtland, 1987; Sachs, 1999; Chiu, 2003; Ross, 2015). The Brundtland concept of addressing current needs while not jeopardizing future requirements highlights the importance of future generations in achieving societal sustainability. The settings in which people choose to live and act now are crucial for society's survival in the future, and varying demands for current and future inhabitants, inclusion and security, equality of opportunity, and equality of products and services for everyone contribute to social sustainability. Through social sustainability, the structure, existing system, methods, processes, and relationships assist future generations in developing productive and thriving communities (Ross, 2015). New social values, qualities, and interpersonal interactions are required for long-term social sustainability that benefits future generations. Thus, social sustainability compromises not only with the present generation but also with future generations to improve their well-being and opportunities. It is critical for social sustainability for the present generation to have control over the fate of future generations.

During my field visit to Thabang, I found a noticeable disinterest among the younger generation towards the Ajambari commune. Students who studied in Thabang and pursued higher education in places like Dang chose not to return to the commune. Instead, the children of commune members ventured into various sectors, including government jobs, foreign employment, business, and farming. Many of them were particularly drawn to opportunities for employment in foreign countries. Some individuals opted to establish businesses such as hardware stores, medical shops, and grocery stores. A limited few individuals decided to pursue a path in farming. Interestingly, these individuals were not the eldest children within the commune but rather the second or third children. It appears that the older children likely opted for employment opportunities in foreign countries instead. This indicates that the commune was unable to alter the perception of prospects regarding the commune's core principles of collective living and collective activities.

I interviewed Purnakala Rokka Magar, the daughter of Surya Rokka Magar, who resided in the Ajambari commune since she was in the fifth grade. Purnakala shared that the commune faced numerous difficulties, causing her father and sister-in-law to endure significant hardships. They had to search for food during times of scarcity. However, the situation was relatively less challenging for the students. The commune emphasized teaching the students about labor, and as part of their education, the students were required to work in the commune during mornings, evenings, and Saturdays. Purnakala eventually married Bhakta Bahadur Jhakri within the commune, and they continued living there until the commune's dissolution. To sustain themselves, they opened a shop as they felt the need to take the initiative and engage in additional efforts outside of the commune. Purnakala's spouse is Bhakta Bahadur Gharti Magar, the son of Kitab Jhakri, who was once a member of the Ajambari commune. Currently, Bhakta Bahadur operates a hardware shop, while his elder brother has relocated to Japan for employment purposes. Bhakta Bahadur explains that the commune did not offer sufficient job opportunities, which led him to establish the hardware shop as a means of securing his employment.

Table 6.2

Occupation of sons and daughters of the Commune members

Types of Occupation	Number of Households	Percentage (%)
Government Jobs	4	13.79
Gone to Foreign countries	7	24.14
Business	6	20.69
Private Jobs	3	10.35
Farming	4	13.79
Studying	5	17.24
Total	29*	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

* Within the Ajambari commune, there were a total of four households that consisted of single individuals. Consequently, out of the 33 households present, 29 households had at least one son or daughter who had secured an occupation. It's important to note that only the elder sons or daughters were taken into consideration for this count.

Subsequently, I interviewed Nabin Rokka Magar, the son of Tara Prakash Rokka Magar, who has accomplished the acquisition of a pharmacy degree after he graduated from twelfth grade.

Both his family and wife made investments to support his educational journey. Furthermore, Nabin's family received a compensation of 10 lakhs rupees after the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Accord, as his father had sadly lost his life as a martyr in 2004. Nabin mentioned that he selected a job that aligned with his field of study and currently works at the Thabang Health Research Centre. Similarly, his wife is employed there as a nurse. Nabin's elder brother has departed to a foreign nation for employment, while his sister-in-law is currently residing in Dang. Both of Tara Prasad Rokka's sons have chosen not to rejoin the commune and have sought employment outside its boundary.

During my fieldwork, I made an intriguing discovery. It appeared that members of the higher social class, most likely the leaders within the Ajambari commune, took it upon themselves to provide their children with technical and higher-level education through their investments. As a result, their children obtained jobs in various fields. Notably, one member of the commune even became a constituent assembly member, while his daughter received a scholarship from Rolpa municipality to pursue an MBBS degree. Additionally, the son of another leader became a civil engineer and is currently employed in Libang, Rolpa. Similarly, the sons and daughters of these leaders pursued pharmacy studies and ventured into business. This observation highlights the disparities between the opportunities available to the children of the higher social class compared to the general members of the commune. The higher-class individuals could invest privately in their children's education, thus providing them with more avenues for success. Furthermore, it is worth noting that these children did not have expectations of returning to the Ajambari commune. On the other hand, the lower social class within the commune faced challenges in providing their children with higher-level and technical education. Consequently, they sought opportunities outside of the commune and eventually left.

6.2.5 Contradictions in the Commune

Contradictions within the Ajambari commune emerged from its inception, steadily escalating among members and climaxing with the Comprehensive Peace Accord. This eventually led to the dissolution of the commune. Contradictions were discovered within the Ajambari commune at three levels: macro, meso, and micro. Macro-level contradictions arise from historical development and societal progress, representing the central issues of a given period (Zhongmin, 2021, p. 1). These contradictions encompass various significant problems in the economic, political, and cultural aspects of society, differentiating them from conflicts among

interest-based groups. Macro-level contradictions involve driving forces for social development, such as productivity, relations of production, and the economic foundation versus the superstructure. Meso-level contradictions occur among distinct groups and classes within a specific community due to their conflicting interests and coexistence (Zhongmin,2021, p. 4). Examples of meso-level contradictions include conflicts between the government and the people, workers and peasants, the rich and poor, and different ethnic groups. These contradictions have a direct impact on social life. Micro-level contradictions emerge within specific social units, such as families, neighbors, community residents, managers and employees, students and teachers, and shopkeepers and customers (Zhongmin, 2021, p. 3). Unlike macro- and meso-level contradictions, micro-level contradictions do not affect society as a whole or overall class structures. They are unrelated to each other and lack a specific pattern or set of rules.

Contradictions emerged within the Ajambari commune right from its inception. After the Maoist Party's Central Committee decided in 2003⁵² to speed up the proletarianization process of the leaders, the Middle West Bureau concluded that leaders, including those at the district level, should become part of the commune. However, this directive could not be fully implemented. Some leaders held the view that the state system had not yet been fully transformed, and not everyone had reached the desired theoretical and ideological level. They anticipated that this transformation would occur shortly. Hence, it becomes evident that there were differences of opinion among the leadership from the beginning. Tej Bahadur Gharti, a prominent leader from Thabang who later sacrificed his life, also did not relocate to the commune. During my visit to South Duldanda in the Ajambari Commune, I encountered Suryalal Budha, a 71-year-old participant from Duldanda, Thabang, and a central committee advisor of the CPN. He explained to me his reasons for not joining the commune:

As a farmer by profession, my primary occupation revolves around agriculture. I have been a member of the party since 1970. During the conflict period, I actively contributed to the industry department, participating in the production of paper and dry food chips. While my brothers Gaj Bahadur and Lekh Bahadur decided to join the commune, I made a different decision and decided not to join them. I preferred to work independently and provide for my own livelihood rather than relying on a

⁵² In 2003, the Maoist Party's central committee approved a resolution titled 'Regarding the Development of Democracy in the 21st Century'. This resolution acknowledged the presence of political competition within the socialist state and also endorsed the resolution for the purification of cadres (Historical Documents of Maoist, 2007, p. 242).

collective group. I had the intention to join the commune at a later time when its ideology and practices aligned with my own principles and when its practical implementation demonstrated success. Unfortunately, this plan did not yield the desired outcome. (Interview, September 21, 2022)

Surya Lal's statement indicates the presence of contradictions at both the macro and meso levels within the Maoist party. The central committee decided to establish communes in their base areas. However, the leaders at the central committee level themselves had a lack of clarity and were unable to enforce mandatory participation in the commune for all leaders. This had an impact on local leaders at the meso level, as many of them chose not to join the commune. They believed that the timing for establishing the commune was not appropriate, considering that the Maoists had not fully gained control over the state through their armed struggle. In addition to the existence of macro- and meso-level contradictions during its formation, the commune itself faced some internal contradictions at the individual level. Although they embraced the concept of collectivization, their mindset as individuals remained unaltered. Even when residing in separate rooms, they engaged in discussions about personal matters and expressed their dissatisfaction with the day's activities. Sharam Rokka Magar, a 43-year-old participant and a member of the commune:

There was no such big conflict within the commune; there was no quarrel. It was said that it would not work like this, but it worked. There used to be a small conflict. There were three delivery women. When relatives brought food and clothes, and even when they themselves bought these things, others would not like it. Though it was just a small thing. (Interview, March 24, 2023)

This statement illustrates that there were initially no major conflicts among the individuals residing in the commune. However, it highlights the emergence of class conflicts within the commune on a smaller scale. In the Ajambari commune, there are some micro contradictions among member levels, as Sharam Rokka has mentioned. Some other micro-level contradictions were in transparency in income from the commune shop and hotel. These micro-level contradictions did not impact the overall class structure of the commune (Zhongmin, 2021, p. 4). These contradictions did not leave a mark in the commune, and these individual contradictions were not connected and did not follow set patterns or rules. However, dissatisfaction started to arise among the members, leading to disagreements at the leadership level. Ultimately, the commune became isolated and eventually disbanded. In the

subsequent sections of this chapter, I have further examined more about class contradictions. Ram Kirini Rokka, a 48-year-old participant and a leader of the commune, elaborates:

Following a period of political stability, I assumed the responsibility of leading the commune. However, the existing leaders demonstrated a lack of attentiveness towards the commune. They were rarely present and spent prolonged periods living outside its premises. Some dedicated members worked diligently within the commune, while a few clever individuals pursued opportunities outside. Despite these challenges, the commune managed to function in unity until 2017. When it was time to educate the leader's daughter in higher classes, they left the commune and never returned. Moreover, one of the commune leaders even obtained a position in the Constituent Assembly but failed to provide any form of assistance to the commune. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

The statement made by Ram Kirini Rokka reveals that the Ajambari commune experienced isolation due to the actions of its leaders. The leaders were more focused on their family members and spent time working outside to provide education for their children. While some members remained dedicated to the commune, others started to leave as a result. The ideology and narratives that were originally established during the formation of the commune transformed, shifting from a collective focus to a more individualistic and private orientation. As a result, the original intent of establishing a socialist unit was ultimately abandoned. The Ajambari commune experienced contradictions at the macro, meso, and micro levels, which led to leadership problems and hindered the ability of ordinary members to sustain the commune's activities in the long run.

6.2.6 Loss of Belongingness of the Commune

Although the dissolution of the commune was attributed by its members to the Maoist party, higher leaders, and the peaceful political transition, it was ultimately discovered that the loss of sense of belongingness within the commune played a significant role. Those who joined the commune had hoped for collective initiation and the sharing of everything, relinquishing their individual affairs, only to find that these ideals were not realized in the commune. The members of the commune had cultivated a strong sense of belonging, which bound individuals to the community or group. This sense of belonging was influenced by various factors, such as meeting basic needs, ensuring security, promoting fairness, fostering identity, encouraging self-actualization, and fostering conformity (Maslow, 1968; De Cremer &

Blader, 2006; Cornelis et al., 2013). The commune members perceived the commune as a manifestation of belonging through collective unity, where everyone would eat and work equally, without individual possessions, fostering new social relationships. Gaj Bahadur Rokka, a 63-year-old participant and a member of the commune, elucidates:

The idea behind establishing a commune was to foster a sense of collective unity. We believed that by advocating for equal distribution of food, work, and resources, the commune would thrive well. It was anticipated that once the revolution succeeded, everyone would willingly join the commune. Our shared objective was to ensure the commune's success in line with our original vision. There was a prevailing sense of togetherness, like that of a close-knit family. Initially, things seemed promising. However, as the Maoist party shifted toward peaceful politics, our hopes for progress within the commune began to fade. Leaders stopped actively participating, and discussions came to a standstill. The absence of information regarding the commune's future further contributed to the erosion of our collective spirit. I recognized that the implementation of our vision was not being effectively carried out. Over time, members gradually left the commune due to the loss of their belongings. (Interview, April 3, 2023)

For social transformation to be socially sustainable, it is necessary to achieve social equality in the distribution of resources, property, income, and opportunities (UNDESA, 2001; Chiu, 2003; Bostrom, 2012; Ketschau, 2017). Unfortunately, among the members of the Ajambari commune, I discovered during my fieldwork that social equality was lacking. The members of the commune faced a scarcity of income and opportunities, as they were only provided with a meager monthly sum of 200 rupees, which proved inadequate to fulfill their major requirements. Residing in the commune posed significant difficulties, as the members had to toil tirelessly throughout the day. Consequently, the living standards within the commune remained stagnant due to the restricted income and absence of fresh resources. The changes in class dynamics within the commune exemplified the prevailing inequality. The higher social class individuals held leadership positions but mainly focused on activities outside the commune. The decision-making process lacked transparency, leaving the commune members uninformed about the prospects of the commune. The Ajambari commune lacked collective objectives and active participation from its members, which are vital for fostering a sense of belongingness and contributing to the sustainability of the community or group (Whooley, 2007; Zaalon-Peter et al., 2015). After the peace accord, the commune experienced a

weakening of social interaction and cohesion. The commune members lost their sense of belongingness and eventually returned to their original places. Members of the commune were departing individually, one after another, to engage in personal endeavors beyond the community.

6.3 Trajectories of the Commune Members

After the Ajambari commune experienced dysfunction, its members opted for individual pursuits instead of collective activities. Its members turned to private employment, confronting challenges in securing their livelihoods. Upon departing the commune, they did not receive any returns, resulting in a loss of their invested assets and the time spent there. Some commune members shifted their focus to agriculture, while others sought employment opportunities in foreign countries. Thabang changed from its previous state of isolation, now connected to a road. Despite these transformations, some commune members expressed interest in the possibility of replicating the commune. In the ensuing paragraphs, I have explored the current status of commune members, the evolving state of Thabang, and the prospects for replicating the commune.

6.3.1 What did Members Receive after Departing the Commune?

The commune members contributed funds, acquired household items and baggage, and shared their land with the commune. They made a sincere pledge not to possess personal belongings; hence, they brought along everything they had. Their dedication to the commune was remarkable. However, they were dissatisfied with the ideas of communal living and collective farming. As a result, they decided to leave the commune and most likely returned empty-handed. Due to limited resources, the commune could not offer any hopes or belongings to its members upon their departure. The commune did not possess additional property or possessions to distribute among those who left. They only brought their luggage back and returned the land they had previously shared. They did not receive any reimbursement for their invested money. Moreover, they had no plans or arrangements outside the commune. Pharka Bahadur Budha, a 63-year-old and a member of the commune, narrates his story:

In 2011, I departed from the commune, following the departure of numerous individuals who had left earlier. Those who were leaving had chosen to pursue personal endeavors outside the commune, and I, too, rebelled against the communal lifestyle, desiring to forge my path. Many individuals had joined the commune by

simply registering their names and declaring their ownership of the land, which had not been sold but remained under their control when they departed. On the other hand, I decided to sell all my house and land before arriving at the commune. Consequently, when I left, I possessed nothing, not even a single glass. I departed with absolutely nothing, starting from scratch. (Interview, September 19, 2022)

Most of the individuals in the Ajambari commune contributed their belongings and a certain amount of money, excluding their land and houses. This enabled them to reclaim ownership of their land upon leaving the commune, except Pharka Bahadur. Those who didn't own houses resorted to renting rooms elsewhere. Among the individuals in this situation were Nadiram BK's family, Pharka Bahadur Budha, Dhan Lal Budha, and Jaya Prakash Rokka. Nadiram gave his land and house to his brother in Telkhola, Rolpa, and joined the commune. Dhan Lal Budha also left his land and house to his relatives. Unfortunately, Jaya Prakash's house was destroyed by the Nepal army, leaving him without a place to live after leaving the commune. They had to find alternative housing arrangements. Jayaprakash received support from his wife's brother to construct a new house. Nadiram's family rented a room in Thabang and later built a house in Uwa, Rolpa, with the effort of their son. Dhanlal purchased some land five years after leaving the commune. Consequently, the commune left them in a state of proletarian, without any property and with an absence of stable income or earnings. This compelled them to initiate a fresh beginning, enduring considerable determination and confronting further adversities.

6.3.2 Present Status of the Commune Members

After departing from the commune, the individuals engaged in diverse endeavors to improve their financial situation and enhance their living standards. Initially, they departed the commune feeling disheartened because they had faced challenges while attempting to pursue alternative ways of living within the commune. It is obvious that they had also been involved in supporting the Maoist armed struggle. Once they left the commune, their aspirations for collectivization and the establishment of a socialist unit were shattered, prompting them to pursue individual initiatives to secure private arrangements. A portion of the individuals opted for overseas employment, while others decided to relocate to different areas away from their original place. Some individuals engaged in politics, while others pursued business ventures or became farmers.

Table 6.3*Employment after Leaving the Commune*

Employment	No. of members	Percentage (%)
Foreign Employment	2	6.06
Relocation	5	15.15
Business	5	15.15
Politics	5	15.15
Farming	14	42.43
Labour	2	6.06
Total	33	100

Note. Data collected from fieldwork, 2022

Most of the children of the commune members have pursued foreign employment opportunities. Interestingly, a few members themselves also decided to seek employment abroad. For instance, Pharka Bahadur spent three years working as a laborer in Saudi Arabia. Upon his return, he invested the earnings to purchase land and even opened a hotel for his wife. Presently, he has managed to construct a house for himself. He explained that he had no other choice but to leave because he had contributed all of his property to the commune by selling his land and house. Now, he is thriving and content, having successfully resettled through his own personal efforts.

Some members of the commune decided to migrate from Thabang. They received funds as compensation for the families of martyrs and combatants who did not integrate into the Nepal Army⁵³. I had the opportunity to meet Sumanti Rokka, one of the commune members, in Kathmandu. While living in the Ajambari commune, she encountered numerous challenges. Unfortunately, her husband was killed during the people's war shortly after their marriage, prompting her to choose the commune as her place of residence. During her time there, she acquired the necessary skills to manage a hotel. Presently, she has successfully established her own hotel in Samakhusi, Kathmandu. Some members chose to settle in Dang, while another individual was discovered living in Chitwan. They explained that their decision to

⁵³ The UNMIN classified the Maoist combatants into two groups after the peace accord between Maoists and the Nepal government. The first group consisted of combatants who were deemed eligible for integration into the Nepal army. The second group comprised combatants who were disqualified from integration due to factors such as age, health, and physical conditions. These individuals were referred to as "disqualified combatants" and received a compensation of 5 lakh rupees (UNMIN, 2008).

leave Thabang stemmed from the need to provide education for their children and the limited employment opportunities available in their hometown.

Some members continued the business they did in the commune. Lap Bahadur Rokka got a commune shop after the dissolution of the commune. As he was impaired, the commune provided him the shop. It is now small and located in the middle of the Thabang main village. He said that the commune handed over to him a shop because he could not do any work due to losing his hand in the people's war. Kitab Jhakri of Uwa, Rolpa, is continuing his business by opening a tea shop and some groceries. But it is very small compared to the commune store in Shulichaur. Sharam Rokka Magar has started a small tea shop with some sweets and tiffin. She continues to make Samosas and Jeri, which she learnt in the commune. Bar Prasad Gharti became a contractor and did some construction works with the collaboration of the Nepal government.

Prabesh Rokka Magar, who was once a leader of the commune, has taken the initiative to establish a wine factory in Thabang. He imported a machine from India and successfully created a sample of apple wine. During the time of war, the Maoists destroyed the liquor that was produced and sold in their base area. It is now intriguing that the commune leader is involved in wine production in Thabang. Prabesh admitted that the Maoists had banned liquor for the sake of security during the people's war. Thabang is abundant in the production of apples, pears, and plums, but due to limited accessibility, these products often go to waste. Prabesh intends to promote the distinct flavors of the local products in the market by utilizing indigenous knowledge. Consequently, he believes that producing wine and selling it in the market will not only create more job opportunities for the local population but also make better use of the region's resources.

Most of the commune members actively participate in political activities. Santosh Budha Magar holds a prominent position within the Nepal Communist Party, led by Netra Bikram Chand, serving as a member of the political bureau. This particular party boycotts general elections for the House of Representatives and seeks to establish scientific socialism. Many other members of the commune align themselves as cadres and supporters of this political party. Notably, individuals like Jaya Prakash Rokka, Prabesh Rokka, and Kitab Jhakri remain deeply involved in politics, reflecting a tendency among the people of Thabang to affiliate themselves with various factions of the Maoist party. As the party experienced divisions, the post-commune affiliations of its members became divided as well. Nevertheless, even those

who choose to pursue business or farming endeavors still maintain some level of connection to the political sphere. However, some individuals opt to step away from politics and instead focus on farming activities. Gaj Bahadur Budha, a 56-year-old participant and a member of the commune, shares grief:

I am not affiliated with any political party. I have lost interest in party politics and revolutions. My entire life has been consumed by war, parties, and revolution. Now, I believe that joining such a party would only ruin my life. Therefore, I decided not to align myself with any political parties, be it Congress, UML, or Maoists. I had numerous reservations about many aspects of the party politics. If it hadn't been fragmented, it might have had more strength. It was not appropriate for me to remain associated with such a party. That is why I chose to disassociate myself from it. (Interview, April 3, 2023)

After leaving the commune, the majority of its members have chosen to pursue farming as their primary occupation. They are exploring new approaches to agriculture. For instance, Kashiman Budha has taken up the cultivation of five hundred cedar plants, which have medicinal uses. This type of farming requires a long time for production, and he has planted them intending to benefit future generations. Kashiman Budha owns a spacious three-hectare plot of land where he practices various forms of farming. He had previously cultivated three hundred apple trees, but unfortunately, they were afflicted by diseases during the people's war. On the other hand, Jaya Prakash Rokka is personally involved in organic farming, emphasizing natural methods of cultivation. Additionally, many other members of the commune continue to engage in traditional farming methods. The former members of the commune enjoy doing private activities more than the collective. Sharam Rokka Magar, a 43-year-old participant and a member of the commune, elaborates:

The separation was not an intentional decision. We temporarily parted ways over a minor issue, intending to reunite in the future. The explanation given for the separation was due to external circumstances that forced us to do so. Currently, it appears that individuals find greater happiness and contentment in their personal endeavors rather than working within a group. We are free to pursue our own happiness, live according to our own desires, and act as we please. However, this level of autonomy and independence was not possible within the commune. Collective action and working together were mandatory requirements in that setting. (Interview, March 24, 2023)

Numerous individuals from the Ajambari commune expressed their satisfaction with the communal lifestyle. However, when questioned about the possibility of re-establishing the commune, they acknowledged that it is currently unfeasible. This suggests that they are content with their current pursuits outside the commune, such as engaging in private endeavors like business, farming, or seeking employment abroad. Having experienced communal living, shared goals, and the absence of private property in the commune, they have now transitioned their attention from collective pursuits to individual arrangements. They have successfully adapted to this new mindset and are satisfied with pursuing their own paths, facing challenges without harboring any grievances toward others.

6.3.4 Collective Re-Initiation in Thabang

Following the dissolution of the Ajambari commune, several collective endeavors have been undertaken in Thabang, including the establishment of cooperatives, cooperative health services, collective homestays, and the implementation of collective farming practices. The members of the commune searched for alternatives to do economic activities and collaborations with the government, and the Ajambari People Agricultural Co-operative was established in 2008 with the involvement of the commune. The commune allocated a sum of 5 thousand rupees to support individuals who wished to join the cooperative. Dhaplal Pun, a 48-year-old participant and the chairperson of the Ajambari Co-operative, explains:

This cooperative has been established as an extension and continuation of the commune, serving as one of its organs. Initially, 15 members from the commune joined the cooperative. Its primary focus is on agricultural objectives, distinguishing it from other cooperatives. Instead of relying on savings and finance cooperatives for loans like traditional cooperatives, this particular cooperative received a substantial grant of 45 lakhs rupees from the government's self-employment program after the peace accord. The loans were exclusively provided to cooperative members, enabling them to engage in local production activities such as cultivating herbs, fruits, and vegetables, as well as rearing animals such as pigs and goats. (Interview, April 7, 2023)

During discussions with Dhaplal, it was revealed that the cooperative had successfully repaid the government funds it had borrowed. Currently, the cooperative comprises 89 members, but no additional programs are being implemented at the moment. Unfortunately, the Ajambari cooperative is encountering challenges and is not operating effectively, only providing small

loans to meet daily needs. It is important to note that several members have already sought employment opportunities abroad on various occasions.

Apart from the cooperative ventures, the community members have taken proactive measures to establish the Thabangi Magar Community Homestay as a joint initiative. This homestay project encompasses a total of 14 houses, and a rotational system has been implemented to accommodate guests, with each member hosting them in turn. As part of their commitment, the homestay members are obligated to allocate two or three rooms exclusively for the guests and provide locally sourced meals. During my three visits to Thabang, I had the opportunity to stay at one of these homestays, which offered a warm and welcoming atmosphere. I had the pleasure of meeting Sharam Rokka Magar, who kindly referred me to the homestay of Rammaya Rokka. Rammaya Rokka informed me about the guest rotation system they follow. This exemplifies the collective spirit of the Thabangi people and demonstrates how they have continued their collaborative efforts both during their time in the commune and after its dissolution.

The success of collective initiatives is exemplified by the cooperative health service. During the People's War, the Maoist Party established a medical cooperative. The existing small Health post located on the school grounds in Jakibang was insufficient to address Thabang's healthcare needs. Consequently, the people of Thabang established their health cooperative in 2011, with each household investing a minimum of 1 thousand to 5 thousand rupees. This cooperative, known as the Jalajala Health Cooperative, received support from Japanese doctor Ryukichi Ishida. In 2013, a new clinic building with four beds was constructed, equipped with medical equipment such as ultrasound machines, oxygen concentrators, and high-performance microscopes. This allowed for the treatment of more severe cases.

Subsequently, in 2019, the Jaljala cooperative was upgraded to the Jalajala Community Hospital and Research Centre. Later on, the Jaljala Community Hospital merged with the Thabang Health Post and transformed into the government-run Jaljala Hospital and Research Centre. The health post was relocated to the main village of Thabang, and an additional temporary structure was erected to ensure the hospital's continued operation. Currently, a construction project is underway to build a 15-bed hospital on the school's land, with the majority of the construction budget being supported by Japanese doctor Ryukichi Ishida. During my visit to the Jaljala Hospital and Research Centre, I met Dr. Ryukichi Ishida, a 75-

year-old participant and the founder of Jaljala Community Hospital and Research center, who mentioned:

Upon my arrival in Thabang in 2009, I discovered a village that was both geographically isolated and facing economic challenges, compounded by health issues. Despite the residents' economic poverty, they displayed remarkable purity, honesty, and spiritual richness. Recognizing the potential for Thabang to serve as a foundation for transforming rural healthcare, I chose this area as a focal point. Thabang has a longstanding history and tradition of resistance movements led by marginalized and oppressed farmers. Inspired by this spirit, the community supported the establishment of a medical cooperative and the construction of a hospital. Determined to make Thabang my permanent residence and last homeland, I intend to devote the remainder of my life to this cause. My commitment is sustained by the support and contributions of my family, relatives, and old friends, enabling me to continue volunteering and providing assistance to patients. However, my current visa status is a working visa, which poses significant challenges to sustaining my efforts. Therefore, I have applied for citizenship in the hopes of securing a more stable status. Regrettably, the citizenship request is still pending and has not yet been granted. (Interview, March 25, 2022)

Dr. Ryukichi Ishida was deeply impressed by the collaborative efforts of the people of Thabang and decided to dedicate himself to serving that community. Unfortunately, his request for Nepalese citizenship has not yet been addressed by the government of Nepal. He eagerly anticipates the completion of the construction of a 15-bed hospital in Thabang. At present, the Jaljala Hospital and Research Centre is under government ownership, and the shares of the people have been returned to them. This remarkable accomplishment showcases the exemplary collectivization demonstrated by the people of Thabang in establishing the health cooperative.

I researched the continuation of collective farming following the dissolution of the Ajambari commune. In Kojjabang, Tirth Narayan Mizar and 17 other individuals initiated collective farming by leasing 1 hectare of land. They have cultivated crops such as potatoes, maize, and beans. Although this initiative has recently commenced and only covers its own expenses, they have also acquired a tractor to assist in farming activities. No other instances of collective farming were discovered in Thabang. This observation suggests that the commune did not adequately educate or promote collective farming among the people, as evidenced by

its absence in Thabang. It can be inferred that during the existence of the commune, collective farming did not yield significant benefits, which provided little encouragement for its continuation. The commune's failure to effectively promote collective farming has even discouraged its practice in Thabang.

6.3.5 Changing Thabang

When I entered Thabang for the first time in April 2022, I found that it had undergone significant transformations compared to the Maoist people's war era and the time of the Ajambari commune. It has been over two decades since the Comprehensive Peace Accord with the Maoist Party, and the Ajambari commune ceased to operate in 2017. Over time, Thabang has experienced considerable changes. The introduction of roads and regular bus services connecting Thabang to Rukum, Dang, and Libang has greatly improved accessibility. Thabang is now linked to Sulichaur, Libang, and the middle hill highway. Initially, motor vehicles could not operate during the rainy season, but the construction of concrete bridges has alleviated this issue. Moreover, traditional buildings in Thabang are being replaced by emerging concrete structures. The Nepal government's Model Village project in 2008 resulted in the paving of village paths with stones. Additionally, a private school called Jaljala Boarding School has been established in Thabang. In terms of its infrastructure, Thabang has undergone significant changes compared to its earlier stages. Numerous upscale and liquor shops have opened, and vegetables are now directly transported from Kalimati, Kathmandu, to Thabang. Consequently, the reliance on local produce has diminished compared to the previous period.

The unity of Thabang has been disrupted as people have divided into various groups due to political divisions within parties. Puspakamal Dahal (also known as Prachanda), who leads one faction of the established Maoist party, has been actively involved in constitution building and participating in general elections since 2007. However, another faction, led by Netra Bikram Chand (aka Biplav), criticizes the constitution for its failure to address the goals of the Maoist People's War and chooses to boycott elections, arguing that the movement is still ongoing. These factions engage in mutual criticism, further eroding the unity of Thabang. As a result, people feel dissatisfied but feel compelled to support a single political party. It's noteworthy that many individuals who were once active in the Maoist People's War now pursue personal farming endeavors, resulting in a decline in previous political activities within Thabang. Nonetheless, each person has their own narrative of participation in the people's war. During my conversations with the people of Thabang, they

shared their feelings of discontentment and a sense of lost hope regarding certain developments. Primarily they blamed the Maoist party and its leaders for deviating from their original ideology and relocating to the capital city.

Significantly, a large number of young people and individuals are opting to migrate to different destinations, primarily abroad, in search of employment opportunities. Additionally, they are also relocating to other regions within the country, such as Dang, Chitwan, and Kathmandu. It has become increasingly uncommon to find a household where at least one person has not pursued employment opportunities overseas. Gaj Bahadur Budha, a 56-year-old participant and a member of the commune, informs:

Relying solely on agriculture for sustenance is insufficient. Some individuals resort to producing hashish from hemp as an alternative income source, which is prohibited by the police. There is also some income generated from hemp fruits. Rice can serve as a substitute crop. Due to the lack of employment opportunities, a big number of young people from Thabang have migrated abroad. Almost every household has someone who has left the village to seek work elsewhere. The younger generation shows little interest in politics. As a result, the village appears empty and has undergone a noticeable change. Thabang no longer retains the same sense of unity and cohesion it once had due to the prevailing fragmentation. (Interview, April 3, 2023).

During my conversations with the residents of Thabang, it became evident that significant changes have occurred in the village. Almost everyone I spoke to informed me that a large portion of the younger generation from Thabang has migrated abroad in search of employment opportunities. Even the son of Rammaya Rokka, with whom I stayed during my visits, has ventured to Korea for work. The Magar youth also opt for countries such as Korea, Japan, and various European nations as their preferred employment destinations. Conversely, Dalits tend to select Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Malaysia, and some even travel to India for labor-related jobs. When I spoke to the Dalit community in Thabang, they shared that they too have returned home for a vacation but are required to go back. Many Dalits have chosen to pursue opportunities overseas as they find limited alternatives in Thabang. Furthermore, their possession of only a small amount of land is insufficient for sustenance, prompting them to seek opportunities elsewhere.

During my investigation into the condition of Dalits in Thabang, I encountered Sher Bahadur BK, a 56-year-old individual who did not participate in the people's war. He faced challenges

during the emergency period, with both the Maoists and the police altering circumstances intermittently. Sher Bahadur managed to elude capture during those times. Later, he chose to seek employment in a foreign country amid the people's war. Another individual I met was Sampurna BK, a young Dalit who had been involved in a cultural group affiliated with the Maoists. However, he currently finds himself unemployed and aims to go abroad, following in the footsteps of many former Maoist combatants. Sampurna expressed that his limited land ownership leaves him with only labor as a viable option. He mentioned having taken out loans and even ventured to Mustang for manual labor. While exploring Thabang, I observed Dalits either working as laborers in house construction or returning home idle after returning from abroad. Furthermore, I met Deu Prasad Kami, also known as Maalpani, a 60-year-old resident of Kojjabang who participated in the Maoist people's war in a skin-refining and shoe-making factory. Deu Prasad informed me that the Dalits of Kojjabang settled in the area later than those in the main village of Thabang. As a result, they possess some land that is sufficient for their livelihoods. This suggests the presence of two distinct classes of Dalits in Thabang. In politics, Dalits hold few high-ranking positions, with only a small number actively involved. The majority of Dalits continue to face challenges in meeting their livelihood needs.

6.3.6 Possibilities of Replication of the Commune

Some members of the Ajamabri commune aspire to recreate the commune. Jaya Prakash Rokka indicates that the 14 households of the Ajamabri commune are currently in discussions regarding the possible revival of the commune. These discussions involve periodic meetings where they reflect on past mistakes and contemplate the possibility of rejoining, as was promised during the time of their departure, if deemed necessary in the future. However, due to the existing circumstances, duplicating the Ajamabri commune in the same manner is currently impractical. The majority of members reject the idea of resurrecting the commune, expressing doubts about the practicality of such an undertaking. This suggests their current disillusionment with the activities previously carried out by the commune. Jaya Prakash Rokka, a 54-year-old participant and a leader of the commune, shares:

At present, it is not feasible to sustain a commune through a simplistic approach. A commune cannot exist without the most basic possessions of its residents. If we desire to establish a commune, we must adopt a novel approach. Our efforts should involve a combination of private and shared ownership, ensuring that we generate a substantial income source. Additionally, we must prioritize providing a suitable education for the

children residing in the commune by establishing a convenient school. Let the commune focus on developing its industry, enabling members to participate in shared economic activities. Moreover, it is important to recognize that a traditional commune model alone is insufficient to ensure long-term sustainability. (Interview, March 23, 2022)

Jaya Prakash's statement indicates that the commune members were not interested in replicating the same type of commune as the Ajambari commune. The original objectives of establishing a socialist unit have been undermined. I agree with Jaya Prakash's statement that establishing a commune requires careful planning and fulfilling the attributes of social sustainability. Without a well-thought-out plan, it leads to frustration among the people and discourages the exploration of alternative economic activities.

In addition to the Ajambari commune, another commune called Juni was formed in Jajarkot in March 2000, comprising 18 households. Similarly, the Jaljala commune was established in Jelbang, Rolpa district, in September 2001, accommodating 25 households. Lastly, the Balidan commune was set up in Chhipkhola in September 2004, where 12 families were residing as a collective group. These communes practiced collective living and farming, established cooperatives similar to the Ajambari commune, and operated shops and hotels to generate income for the commune. Initially comprising 14 houses, the membership of the Juni commune gradually expanded over time, eventually accommodating about 120 individuals. However, Jay Bahadur Gharti highlights that the commune faced closure in April 2010 due to a combination of leadership issues, a diminishing collective spirit, and severe financial difficulties. As circumstances evolved, the commune encountered challenges stemming from the increasing number of members, inadequate management, and overwhelming financial crises, leading to its closure. Furthermore, the children within the commune grew older, and not all of them wished to continue their education within the commune. Consequently, the commune's school encountered troubles as well. According to Gharti, as the commune's membership grew, individualistic thoughts and desires for personal freedom superseded the commitment to collective living, disintegrating the commune. The lack of external support further compounded the problems faced by the commune. Additionally, the absence of leadership at the village level contributed to the stagnation of Juni, rendering it obsolete. While those who had once been part of Juni returned to their original homes following the peace process, the commune remained unchanged. The lack of

leadership capable of comprehending and resolving the issues faced by Juni resulted in a stagnant existence for the commune.

The Balidan commune in Rukum experienced similar challenges to those encountered by the Juni and Ajambari communes, ultimately leading to its dissolution. According to Bin Kumari Budha, the decision to leave the commune was driven by the inability to cope with the difficulties faced when other members began returning to their homes. The members of the Balidan commune opted for an end to collective living due to a lack of coordination among themselves in terms of meeting their needs and distributing the workload. Additionally, the Jaljala Commune in Jelbang was established before the Ajambari Commune in Thabang. The Jaljala commune played a significant role in urging Thabang to set up their own commune. However, the members of the Jaljala Commune lacked the same level of political and ideological awareness as the members of the Ajambari Commune. Following a period of peace, both the Jaljala Commune and the Ajambari Commune collaborated in operating shops in Plabang and Shulichaur. Despite Indra Bahadur Budha's family residing in the Ajambari Commune, he assumed leadership of the Jaljala Commune. According to him, the commune was gradually influenced by individual ambitions, resulting in the diminishing collective sentiment and collective planning, the sense of working together as a group. The overall level of consciousness was inadequate, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the commune. After the peace accord between the Maoists and other political parties, the communes, established by the Maoists, encountered similar challenges in terms of their social sustainability.

Table 6.4*Details of Four Maoist Communes*

S.n.	Name of Commune	Place of Establishment	Date of Establishment	Number of Households	Date of dissolution	Duration of Operation
1.	Juni Commune	Daha, Jajarkot	March, 2000	18	April, 2010	11 Years
2.	Jaljala Commune	Jelbang, Rolpa	September, 2001	25	March, 2012	11 years
3.	Ajambari Commune	Thabang, Rolpa	June, 2003	33	April, 2017	14 years
4.	Balidan Commune	Chhipkhola, Rukum	September, 2004	12	April, 2014	10 Years

Source: Shapkota, 2010; Gautam, 2014; Sharma, 2017

However, several replicas of the Maoist commune have emerged in various locations like Bardibas, Kapilbastu, Nawalparasi, and Chitwan. However, these communes have distinct objectives and contexts. The previous practice of the commune in Nawalparasi and Madi by CPN (United Centre) no longer existed. However, the Adharshila commune established in Bardibas is still running. Initially, this commune was established in February 2003 at Golbazar, Siraha, with 18 full-time cadres and the children of martyrs. Later, in 2010, they relocated to Bardibas and acquired half a hectare of land, where they constructed a house for the commune. Currently, the commune remains in operation, consisting of 15 families and a total of 43 members. It should be noted that this commune differs from the Maoist commune, which was established during the war and viewed as a unit of socialism. In the Adharshila commune, members are recruited from various parts of the country and different ethnic backgrounds. They are allowed to work outside the commune and contribute a certain amount towards its functioning. Additionally, they have the freedom to spend on their personal needs. The commune engages in activities like rice cultivation and livestock rearing, and previously it operated a spice industry. They also ran a radio station, which closed down after a few years. Indra Lama, aged 47, a participant who is both a teacher and a member of the Adharshila commune, provided information:

Our guiding principle is that life is a personal matter, but its purpose is collective. As a result, we are progressing towards establishing a commune. We did so collectively

when we laid the foundation stone with our shared resources. Due to political engagements and other responsibilities, our members are occasionally required to venture outside. Consequently, we have approximately 15 individuals who dine together daily. The students are encouraged to pursue their education in government schools. Aadharshila, on the other hand, provides education up to the graduation level. After that, individuals expected to pursue further studies independently and may seek employment elsewhere. (Interview, March 25, 2023)

While examining the commune, I also investigated whether the Nepal Communist Party, led by Netra Bikram Chand Biplav, practiced collective living and collective farming akin to a commune. The party's central committee has decided to promote self-reliance from the headquarters down to the lower committees, and they are currently engaged in large-scale production by acquiring or leasing land in various regions of the country. As an initial step, they purchased 15 hectares of land in Shivagadhi, Kapilvastu, at a reduced price, where they cultivated crops such as paddy, mustard, potatoes, and various vegetables. Additionally, they have initiated fish farming and are in the process of constructing a people's war museum, a people's health center, and the party's central committee building. While this involves collectivization, it does not constitute a commune. Currently, certain leaders and members are living and working together, but the general public is not invited to participate in the collectivization as part of a commune or socialist practice. Similarly, in Harsiddhi, Lalitpur, located in the Kathmandu Valley, they have leased half a hectare of *Guthi* land for 20 years, constructed a house and some small *Taharas*, and are engaged in collective farming activities there as well. Bipin C, a 46-year-old participant and the central committee member of the Nepal Communist party, clarifies:

As per the central plan outlined during the party's tenth meeting, each committee is expected to partake in productive endeavors and strive for self-sufficiency. Similar plans are being formulated nationwide, particularly in numerous locations in the western region of the country. The same blueprint will be implemented in this specific area as well. Efforts are underway to identify suitable land in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur through land search activities. (Interview, April 16, 2023)

The Communist Party of Nepal is initiating collective production projects in various districts like Kapilvastu, Chitwan, and Dang, among others, in line with their policy of relying on independent production. In Madi, Chitwan, the Central Production Department of CPN is currently implementing plans for collective farming, vegetable cultivation, fish farming, and

other related activities, alongside the construction of a commune. The party envisions developing these collective endeavors into communes in the future. Similarly, Aahuti, the chairman of the Scientific Socialist Party, holds the belief that socialism can be established through collective actions within a capitalist system. Consequently, the party has commenced collective initiatives, including soap production. Observing these efforts, it appears that fostering a collective spirit and establishing a commune will continue to be an ongoing endeavor. However, these endeavors must meet the prerequisites of social sustainability; otherwise, they may encounter dysfunction similar to that experienced by the Ajambari commune. Consequently, there is a crucial need to draw lessons from the experiences of the Ajambari commune.

6.4 Conclusion

The Ajambari commune faced various challenges leading to its decline. These challenges included conflicts during its formation, economic struggles, the impact of the peace accord, the dissolution of the people's government, shifts in social classes, reduced sense of belongingness, and limited prospects. Initially, the commune had difficulties due to disagreements among its members about property contribution. In 2004, the party proposed property sharing to establish the commune, but not all leaders were willing to participate. Only a few local leaders and individuals joined, with one person selling his house and land to support the commune.

The commune had diverse social backgrounds, causing internal contradictions, exacerbated when government compensation led to dissatisfaction among common members. Leaders focused on outside work, undermining the socialist unit's objective. After the peace accord in 2006, the Maoist party transformed, dissolving its structures and relocating to the capital city. This caused a shift in class dynamics, distancing leaders from the original villages and frustrating commune members. A party split in 2010 worsened the divisions.

Economically, the commune had to struggle to modernize agriculture and generate income from their shop and hotel, resulting in a diminishing sense of belongingness. When children reached the secondary level of education, they had to arrange their education, leading to departures from the commune. Today, former commune members lead private lives, and the commune lost its prospects for growth. Thabang's youth interest in politics declined, and the Maoist party's division affected the unity negatively. Many household members, particularly Dalits, who have limited local opportunities, are working abroad.

Thabang has undergone significant changes that have led to a decline in youths' interest in political involvement. The unity of Thabang has also been affected and fragmented due to the division within the Maoist party. Currently, every household in Thabang has at least one member engaged in foreign employment. The youths from higher social classes prefer destinations like Japan, Korea, or other developed countries. On the other hand, Dalits are often compelled to seek manual labor opportunities in places like Malaysia, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, Dalits in Thabang continue to face hardships as they have limited opportunities available in the area.

Replicating the commune in other locations has proven to be challenging. In Thabang, members have acknowledged the difficulty of reproducing the commune. Since leaving the commune, the members have enjoyed freedom and engaged in private activities. However, certain collectivization practices continue to exist in Thabang, such as the Ajambari People's Agricultural Cooperative, Health Cooperative Hospital, collective homestays, and collective farming.

Furthermore, there are some instances of commune replication found in the Adharshila commune of Bardibas and the collective farming initiatives of the Nepal Communist Party in various parts of the country. However, they are still in the process of development and have yet to achieve the level of success seen in the Ajambari commune and other communes established by the Maoist party. Therefore, the Ajambari commune represented a unique experiment in collectivization aimed at establishing a socialist unit. Nevertheless, it was unable to sustain itself in the long term.

Chapter Seven

Summary, Conclusions, and Knowledge Contributions

This chapter includes findings, conclusions, and knowledge/theoretical reflection. The dissertation began with an introduction, research questions, and objectives, which are to explore the social sustainability of the Ajambari commune. Then, it included the foundational narrative, local vernaculars in the Ajambari community of Thabang, conscientization, its formative stage, and envisioned social transformation. Additionally, it explored the concepts of communal living, cooperative farming, and co-operatives revolve around the idea of a commune. Furthermore, it examined the social sustainability and continuation of the commune, as well as the potential for its replication. This chapter draws on empirics in short and the conclusion connecting the theories of conscientization, social transformation, and social sustainability.

7.1 Key Findings and Discussions

In 1996, the Maoists initiated an armed struggle in Nepal, and the decision at the fourth National Extended Maoist Congress led to the establishment of a base area in Thabang, forming the Ajambari commune as a local unit of socialism. The People's government in 2001 at local and central levels aided in managing the commune, focused on building a socialist economy, eliminating private production, and altering social structures. Before joining the commune, members' background and class analysis considered land ownership, occupation, income, education, and ethnicity. Most members had medium to high landownership, engaging in agriculture and wage labor as primary occupations. Limited job options in Thabang included building houses and farming, with some practicing seasonal migration. Income relied heavily on agriculture, supplemented by earnings from *Bhango*. One-third of commune members only held higher social status, influencing leadership and enjoying privileges. Most members were illiterate and owned lower classes due to lower land ownership and income.

The Maoist party aimed to establish communes through voluntary persuasion, emphasizing collective living and property submission in their base area. Initially, educated upper-class individuals joined, later followed by common households. However, some households declined due to lack of invitation, partners' disinterest, perceived premature establishment, or negative outlook. Challenges in recruiting teachers and the exclusion of the Dalit community

further categorized Thabang into privileged, lower-class Kham Magar and excluded Dalit groups.

During field research, it was discovered that the Maoist party and the local people had different narratives and vernaculars about the commune. The Maoist party viewed it as a political and ideological matter, aiming to establish collectivization practices similar to those in Soviet Russia, China, and Eastern Europe with some modifications as the unit of socialism. However, the local people were primarily concerned with their daily needs and livelihoods and hoped that joining the commune would provide an easier way to meet these needs, improve their standard of living, and provide safety within the community.

Initial challenges included shared accommodations, but members believed in the benefits of cohabitation and organized tasks. Regular meetings addressed issues, assigned tasks, and made decisions. Departments within the commune coordinated specific tasks, fostering a highly organized system within the commune.

The Ajambari commune in Thabang, Rolpa, had matrimonial relationships through the combination of progressive and traditional customs. Financial assistance for wedding expenses was provided by the commune. Children in the commune had separate housing, learnt the value of labor, and assisted older members with tasks. A school established by the Maoists in Gobang provided primary education up to grade three, with the curriculum designed by the Maoists.

Collective farming was a significant focus, with the commune owning five hectares of land and integrating additional land from members. However, agricultural modernization did not occur as expected, because they relied on traditional methods and faced a lack of technology and fertilizers. The commune cultivated vegetables and medicinal plants for internal use, experimented with truffle cultivation, and engaged in *Bhango* and hashish production for additional income. The commune operated a communal hotel and shop, generating income. Cooperatives, including production, consumption, and financing, played a crucial role, aiming to transform society and enhance production.

The Ajambari commune represented a collectivization practice with communal living, collective farming, and cooperative practices, aspiring for equality, self-sufficiency, and societal transformation. Despite facing challenges and not achieving all goals, the commune provided insights into the potential and limitations of such communal experiments. The

Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 led to the end of the People's War and the dismantling of the People's Government and the commune. The changed ideology caused divisions within the Maoist party and among commune members. Class divisions, government compensation, and contradictions at the macro, meso, and micro levels contributed to the gradual disintegration of the commune. Contradictions arose from the acceleration of the proletarianization process, differing beliefs on joining the commune, reservations about the state system, and individualistic mindsets among members, affecting income transparency in the commune's shop and hotel.

Following the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, the Maoist Party shifted its political strategy from armed struggle to peaceful politics. However, the party's inadvertence post-2010 led to economic challenges for the Ajambari commune in Thabang. The limited income posed obstacles to meeting basic needs and placed a burden on individual members, particularly in terms of education expenses. Efforts to sustain the commune through farming, shops, and a hotel were thwarted by increasing competition, leading to financial strain. The commune struggled to improve income, modernize agriculture, and secure long-term resources, further weakened by leadership's absence and class divisions. The dissolution of the commune primarily stemmed from class issues, negligence by higher-class leaders, and the party's prioritization of political roles.

Individual members left the commune for various reasons, including dissatisfaction with the environment, lack of harmony among leaders, and unfavorable political conditions. Some believed the commune was established prematurely, lacking unity and consciousness for success. Repetitive work, lack of progress, and leaders residing outside drove members to explore opportunities elsewhere. Social equality was lacking, with members facing income scarcity, limited opportunities, and a meager monthly sum of 200 rupees. The decision-making process lacked transparency, leading to a decline in social interaction and cohesion after the peace accord. Younger generations showed disinterest in pursuing opportunities outside, resulting in education and opportunity disparities.

The dissolution of the commune occurred gradually, with members agreeing not to speak negatively about it. Currently, three families reside in the commune premises, pursuing individual pursuits, and reviving the commune seems unlikely. Former members contributed belongings and money upon leaving but received nothing in return. Many sought employments abroad, engaged in farming, or established cooperatives. Despite collective

initiatives like the Thabangi Magar Community Homestay and Jaljala Health Cooperative, re-establishing the commune is deemed unfeasible. Former members have adapted to individual arrangements, content with current pursuits. Thabang has transformed over time, facing political divisions, migration, and a decline in political activities. While challenges persisted since the Maoist People's War, other communes like the Adharshila commune and the Central Production Department of CPN continue promoting collective initiatives and socialist practices in different locations.

7.2 Conclusions

The Maoists propagated a new socialist ideology in the base area, which aimed to eliminate private property and could be expanded through armed struggle after achieving success. This was a social transformation envisioned by Maoists and discussed by Marx, which called for a classless society with a socialist economy (Marx & Engels, 1848) and a fundamental change in society (Sztompka, 1992; Portes, 2010; Haas et al., 2020), rather than gradual change. However, the local vernaculars of the people in the commune were different from the narrative put forward by the Maoist Party. They did not perceive it as an ideology, but rather as a means to solve their daily livelihood problems. The establishment of a commune was seen as a solution to the problem of labor shortage and a way to increase agricultural production.

Initially, the Maoist leaders, supporters, and families of martyrs and combatants were willing to become part of the commune. Through regular meetings, the general people were made aware that the root cause of their troubles was the previous system of exploitation and private property. They were convinced that the alternative way of living was through collective solutions and were inspired by Freire's process of raising consciousness (Freire, 1972). Freire contends that individuals, upon achieving critical awareness, start to scrutinize the values, norms, and beliefs that exert control and dominance over them. The commune's members had reached a state of critical consciousness and were united in establishing a new collectivized society.

The Ajambari Commune intended to eliminate private property, thus establishing collected property from members for collective consumption. Members of the commune made a significant contribution by voluntarily submitting their private property for collective consumption. This act plays a crucial role in initiating collectivization within the commune, highlighting the dedication and commitment of its members. As Marx stated private property

is a form of expropriation instrument of inequality and the problem created by capitalism (Marx & Engels, 1848). The Ajambari commune followed the perspective of Marx to abolish private property, which essentially turns the work of the many into the assets of very few, and started to live collectively. It also envisioned abolishing class conflict and social inequality stemming from the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and power among different social groups (Coser, 1956; Dohrendorf, 1959). The Ajambari commune was intentional and ideological, as Giffin discussed (Giffin, 2003). It is the process of group actions being taken in social and economic endeavors like production, distribution, and consumption. As Soviet Russia implemented it as a means of increasing the productivity of agriculture and as a tool designed to bring socialism to the countryside (Simic, 2018, p. 1024), Maoists aimed to implement a unit of socialism and envision spreading all over the country when they would complete the people's war by capturing the state.

The Ajambari commune started a different lifestyle of living collectively than private living separately and tried to create group emotions. It is an alternative institution as argued by Diamond, which gives way to a more significant and completely inherent social structure built on individual people and their ties to one another; the place must always come second to people, or else the enchantment would end (Diamond, 1971, p. 98). The Ajambari commune was not a self-actualizing commune or quasi-commune, it was intentionally made. That's why it was purposive to achieve the goal of socialism at the end as discussed by Abrams and McCulloch (1976, p. 33). Whenever economic, social, or political goals are created to support the group, they are in essence secondary to the collective's existence. In terms of stability, collective performance, and group members' well-being, the benefit of making purposes is more essential than persons. Thus, when members of the Ajambari commune joined the commune, they thought that Collectivization was not only ideology; it was a practice of searching for alternative processes to sustain the everyday life of people.

The Ajambari commune established by the Maoist party in Rolpa was different from the commune established in France, Russia, China, and other communist countries. In France, Russia, and China, collectivization and the commune were established after the whole control of the state by the rebellion, after the completion of the revolution (Crook, 1983; Gould, 1991; Kochin, 1996). However, the Maoist party started an armed struggle to topple the state system in 1996 and still was in the war while establishing the commune. They just established a base area where the established government control was absent. In France, China, and Russia, the winning government had the motive of both the control of rural areas

and peasants to form the commune as well as economic modernization. In Thabang, Maoists also had similar intentions to control local people and transform the local economy in their base area.

In general, the Maoists aimed to create a commune as a means of showcasing their economic vision, as an alternative to the previous mode of production, and as an example of what their regime could potentially look like once their armed struggle had concluded. However, while many leaders and supporters of the party joined the commune, there were only a few common people who did so. Additionally, there were varying opinions on the establishment of the commune, with some leaders believing it was too early to do so. The fact that Dalits were not invited to join the commune indicates that there was still discrimination between higher and lower castes in Thabang during the Maoist armed struggle. Consequently, from the beginning of the commune in Thabang, there were disagreements and controversies. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the commune had faith in it, viewing it as a solution to their daily necessities and feelings of insecurity.

The Ajambari commune faced challenges that led to its inability to sustain itself for diverse reasons. After the comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006, the Maoist Party underwent significant transformations. They chose to participate in the interim parliament and interim government, leading to the decision to dissolve their people's government structures, people's courts, and the previously established communes during the People's Par. The transfer of political power has moved from the Maoist party to the state, and there has been collaboration with other political parties. The change in political power affected the state policies, distribution of resources, and control mechanism (Weber, 1922; Foucault, 1975), which ultimately led to the dysfunction of the commune. Many party leaders relocated to the capital city and began receiving government allowances, which allowed them to rent comfortable accommodations. Consequently, there was a shift in the class dynamics among the leaders, causing them to distance themselves from their original base areas in the villages. This situation led to frustration among the commune members who felt disconnected from both the leaders and the party. Furthermore, the Maoist Party experienced a split in 2010, exacerbating the divisions among the commune members. A specific group within the commune realized that the party had abandoned its ideology and strayed from the original mission of establishing socialism. The Ajambari commune shifted back to private activities, abandoning the practice of collectivization, just as the Maoist Party transitioned from armed struggle to a peaceful political path, engaging in parliamentary democracy.

The Ajambari commune could not overcome the influence of the rural dominant group as discussed by Sokolovsky (2019). Sokolovsky asserts that the sustainability of collectivization becomes unattainable when issues of class inequality persist, with only the higher and middle classes benefiting while support from poor peasants remains isolated. The Ajambari commune faced a parallel situation where insufficient attention was given to class struggle, resulting in poor local support for the commune movement in Thabang. Consequently, the commune primarily benefitted the higher and middle-class members, leading to its dissolution. Wesson argues that production and economic activities alone are insufficient for the commune to survive, but state support and ideology are necessary to sustain the commune (Wesson, 1963). The Ajambari commune struggled with organizational weaknesses, ideological uncertainties, and the ineffective management of economic resources, which hindered its ability to yield economic returns and bring about changes in the agrarian system.

Drawing lessons from the failure of the Paris Commune, Marx suggested that the working class should seize control of the existing state apparatus for its purposes (Marx & Engels, 1972). However, the Ajambari commune did not receive acknowledgement as part of the state and consequently did not assume any responsibilities. It failed to garner support from both the Maoist Party and the state, contrasting with the more ideological approach advocated by the Maoist Party. As the Maoist Party shifted its political strategy from armed struggle to peaceful transition, the Ajambari Commune found itself lacking ideological support from the party. Unlike the voluntaristic approach proposed by Katz and Golomb (1983), the collectivization in Ajambari was undertaken as an experiment by the Maoist party, without the necessary safeguards and recognition as part of the state. Katz and Golomb (1983) argue that the commune cannot sustain itself when there is a lack of integration within the larger structure. The Ajambari commune found itself isolated from the Maoist party and state authorities, with no official responsibility for its operations. This lack of integration into the broader state system hindered its ability to become part of the larger societal framework. The weakening of the Maoist Party and its ideology following the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 eventually led to the dismantling of the commune.

The dissolution of the Ajamabri commune was significantly influenced by the shifts in class relationships within the group. The unequal class positions among the commune members played a pivotal role in this outcome. The communal ideology and socialist economic principles advocated for a society without class distinctions (Marx & Engels, 1848). The Ajambari commune could not address or alleviate the varying social classes present within

the commune. Subsequently, the commune comprised individuals from diverse social backgrounds and levels, leading to internal contradictions among its members. These contradictions became more pronounced when families of martyrs and former combatants within the commune received compensation from the government. Dissatisfaction among common members regarding the commune's activities grew, resulting in a gradual exodus of members. Moreover, the leaders did not dedicate sufficient time to the commune and instead focused on outside work, undermining the objective of establishing a socialist unit.

The commune faced challenges with the economic resources as they struggled to modernize and commercialize their agricultural practices. The income generated from their shop and hotel was minimal, and members received a meager monthly allowance of only 200 rupees for personal expenses, which proved insufficient to meet their needs. Furthermore, they suffered losses from the vehicle they had purchased, and their overall income continued to decline over time. These financial difficulties led to a diminishing sense of belongingness among the commune members. The situation observed in the Ajambari commune bears similarities to the instances of diminished production seen in the collective farming practices of Russia and China. This comparison aligns with the analysis presented by Unger, who attributed the process of de-collectivization to factors such as ongoing stagnation in production, inadequate resource allocation, lack of motivation among laborers, and a growing sense of dissatisfaction among the members (Unger, 1985, p. 589). The living standards of commune members remained stagnant, compelling them to engage in lengthy labor hours merely to sustain themselves. Consequently, these circumstances forced them to depart from the commune in search of alternative non-agricultural opportunities, a phenomenon that Unger (1985) has elaborated upon.

The envisioned social transformation that the Ajambari commune aspired to achieve did not come to accomplishment. Marx argued that genuine social transformation requires a complete overhaul of production relations and the eradication of private property and class distinctions (Marx & Engels, 1848). Despite the Ajambari commune's efforts to eliminate class distinctions and institute new production relations through collectivization, this objective remained unfulfilled, as land ownership persisted as private, even though the commune collectively utilized it. Despite the commune's efforts to promote collectivization among its members, it encountered challenges in eradicating private activities. Firstly, the land owned by the commune continued to be registered under individual members' names, allowing for its private use when members were outside the commune. Secondly, the arrangement of

members residing in separate rooms with their spouses within the commune contributed to the persistence of private affairs. Consequently, fostering a sense of collective unity among commune members became challenging. This, in turn, weakened social cohesion and a sense of belongingness- critical attributes for social sustainability within the commune (Dempsey et al., 2009; Cuthill, 2010).

Sztompka highlights that social transformation encompasses alterations in social structure, relationships, and interactions, and changes in norms, values, and social order (Sztompka, 1993). This process necessitates transformations in organizational structures across political, economic, and social domains. Internally, the Ajambari commune endeavored to establish a new social order through practices like collective living, collective farming, and the creation of cooperatives. However, the anticipated social transformation envisioned by the commune was not realized following the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006. The economic, social, and political structures external to the commune reverted to their previous configurations, and the commune faced challenges in aligning with the broader societal context.

Additionally, when the children reached the secondary level of education, they no longer received support from the commune for their education. This compelled the members to make necessary arrangements for their children's further education by themselves. While affluent members could provide private education for their children, those from more modest backgrounds did not see a promising future within the commune. Thus, the Ajambari commune did not satisfy both the needs of the present generation and also did not engender the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs as focused by the Brundtland Report (1987). Consequently, they gradually began to leave the commune. At present, the commune members are leading private lives and do not regret the time they spent in the commune. The children of commune members are increasingly engaging in activities outside the commune, including seeking employment abroad, pursuing government jobs, and venturing into business areas. Consequently, the commune had also lost its prospects, further diminishing its potential for growth and sustainability.

As Elias (1994) discussed, social transformation occurs when there are interdependencies and interconnections among society's members, weaving processes and structures into the social system. However, the Ajambari commune, being an isolated and autonomous social institution, struggled to integrate with the broader social structure, capitalism, and the market outside its boundaries. Economic crises further exacerbated this reversal in social transformation, and shifts in political power undermined established social changes. New

policies in Nepal's evolving political environment created additional inequalities within the commune, intensifying this regression. As a result, the social transformation envisioned by the Ajambari commune was not sustainable and failed to change collective norms, values, and modes of production. The necessary interdependencies and dynamic relationships between the commune and the external world could not be established.

Overall, political changes have resulted in the negligence of collectivization efforts within the commune. The state has not prioritized the collective activities of the commune, leading to a shift towards private pursuits such as seeking employment outside the commune and even in foreign countries. Social changes have further exacerbated this trend, contributing to a decline in youth interest in political involvement and communal efforts. Several factors hinder the enduring social sustainability of the Ajambari commune. These include the adverse impact of shifts in political power and social classes within the community, conflicts during its establishment, economic hardships within the commune, a weakened sense of belongingness among its members, and diminishing prospects (Brundtland, 1987; Sachs, 1999; Dempsey et al., 2009; Cuthill, 2010).

Based on the experiences of the Ajambari commune members and other participants collected during my research, I have clarified my position on the commune. The Ajambari commune was a significant attempt at large-scale social transformation, driven by a heightened sense of awareness and commitment. However, it was initiated hastily and without a long-term vision for its social sustainability. Serious attention to social sustainability was lacking. People joined the commune before the objective conditions were ready, and external circumstances were unfavorable. Consequently, the commune did not receive necessary political, social, and financial support. When the national situation changed, the commune struggled to sustain itself. Leadership became careless, and commune members could not cope with the changing environment. They became increasingly vulnerable to external influences and lacked the necessary conscientization and commitment to collective behavior. Instead, individualistic behavior prevailed, weakening the sense of collectivity.

The commune failed to bring about the social transformation and economic changes it had envisioned, and it did not attract the new generation. Establishing a commune requires a significant national effort and must compete with the external world of individualism, which the Ajambari commune could not do. Decisions were limited in the hands of a few leaders who focused on small-scale businesses rather than modernizing agricultural production. Consequently, the Ajambari commune could not function effectively. My position is that the

commune faced problems from its inception due to its collectivization practices. It could not adapt to the political and social changes in the country after 2006. My research concluded that the dissolution of the Ajambari commune was due to changes in political power at national and local levels, class disparities within the commune, unequal distribution of resources and benefits, economic hardships, a diminished sense of belongingness, weakened cohesiveness and collective values, and diminishing prospects. The failure of the commune impeded social sustainability, thereby obstructing the process of social transformation. If the commune had been socially sustained, it would have fostered a social transformation characterized by the empowerment of individuals to take control of their lives and influence social change. This transformation would have created new opportunities, ensured participation and inclusion, established collective beliefs and practices, and built strong relationships and networks that promote cooperation and collaboration.

7.3 Knowledge Contributions

The dissertation contributes significantly by disseminating knowledge about the distinctive practice of collectivization and communal life in rural Nepal. Its theoretical significance is rooted in the assertion that individuals actively seek alternatives for their social, political, and economic activities. It emphasizes that any form of social transformation requires fundamental attributes of social sustainability, fostering enduring bonds within society over time. This study expands existing theoretical frameworks by introducing the notion of social sustainability, providing a fresh perspective for analyzing enduring social transformations. The thesis questions traditional models that solely explain social transformation by integrating social, economic, and political elements into a cohesive theoretical framework of social sustainability.

The practical implications of the findings are immediate for researchers analyzing social activities through a new framework, particularly in the context of alternative practices observed in rural Nepal. A noteworthy aspect is the examination of the establishment of collectivization and the challenges faced by the Ajambari Commune in Rolpa amidst the private mode of production. The dissertation delves into the intentional and ideological foundation of the Ajambari Commune, emphasizing its members' commitment to eradicating class property through collective resource consumption, aligning with Marx's perspective on private property as a tool of inequality and capitalism (Marx, 1848). The Maoist party's objective extended beyond gaining control of rural areas to transforming the local economy through collectivization.

This research highlights the distinct socialist nature of Ajambari, which opposes private modes of production and is a result of an intentional design rather than voluntary participation. The exploration of communal living, collective farming, and cooperatives practiced by the Ajambari commune adds valuable knowledge to activities conducted by local communities. It underscores the importance of on-the-ground research in understanding grassroots dynamics and demonstrates how local people actively seek alternative practices for their everyday activities.

The central focus of the dissertation on Thabang, Rolpa, a Maoist Party stronghold during the People's War, provides comprehensive knowledge of history, politics, economics, and everyday life. It captures the changing dynamics in Thabang, marked by a decline in youth interest in political involvement and a shift towards foreign employment. The dissertation contributes in-depth information to understand Thabang and its role in the Maoist armed struggle, shedding light on the connection between Maoist ideology and residents who viewed the commune as a practical solution to daily livelihood problems rather than merely an ideological pursuit. This connection between ideology and local perception constitutes a noteworthy knowledge construction.

Furthermore, the dissertation explores the challenges faced by the Ajambari Commune, including the impact of political changes, shifts in the Maoist party's political strategy, class dynamics, internal contradictions, economic hardships, and prospects. This detailed exploration, not conducted in earlier research, sheds light on the commune's struggle with organizational weaknesses, ideological uncertainties, and ineffective economic resource management. The lack of integration within broader state and societal structures and insufficient support from both the Maoist Party and the state influenced the commune's sustainability. The connection between the dissolution of the commune and social sustainability is a novel contribution to research.

In conclusion, this dissertation significantly contributes to both theoretical knowledge and practical applications, advancing current research in social transformation. The insights gained have the potential to shape the future of social activities, addressing the community's challenges in terms of social sustainability. The developed framework encompasses political impact, class disparities, economic inequalities, a sense of belongingness, cohesiveness, and prospects, offering a valuable resource for future research in social transformation.

Annex- 1

Research Questions, Break down and Questionnaires

Research Question- 1.a.

1.a.	What were the foundational narratives and local vernaculars of the Commune that emerged and evolved in response to the local political, economic, and social context of Thabang?	1. How did ideas about the establishment of commune evolve overtime?	1. At what point of time, did Maoists decide to establish a commune?	Methodological tools	
				Documentary/Archival	
			2. What were the plans and goals of the Maoists in establishing the commune?	Documentary/Archival /Key Informants Interview	
				3. What narratives were created originally for the establishment of the commune?	Key Informants Interview
		2. What were the social, political, and economic dynamics of Thabang, Rolpa before the establishment of the commune?	1. What strategies did the Maoists employ in creating their base areas, particularly about establishing commune?	Key Informant Interview/Semi-structured Interview	
			2. What were the socio-economic problems faced by the people of Thabang, Rolpa prior to the establishment of the commune?	Key Informant Interview/Semi-structured Interview	
			3. What cultural and social values of the Kham Magar community in Thabang, Rolpa influenced their participation in the establishment of the commune?	Key Informant Interview/Semi-structured Interview	
		3. What were the prevailing local ideas and vernaculars in Thabang, and Rolpa regarding the commune?	1. In what ways did local people interpret the idea of a commune?	Semi-structured Interview	
			2. What were the key motivations and beliefs of the people that led them to participate in the commune?	Semi-structured Interview	
			3. What were the expectations of the local people regarding the commune, and how did these expectations evolve?	Semi-structured Interview	

Research Question- 1.b.

1.b.	How was the Commune system initiated in Thabang, Rolpa during its formative stage?	1. How did the initiation of the commune system reflect broader social, cultural, and historical trends and movements, and what were the key factors that contributed to these reflections?	1. What were the political and economic conditions which led the people of Thabang to the initiation of the commune system, and how did these conditions influence the design and implementation of the commune?	Methodological tools	
				Semi-structured Interview	
			2. What were the goals and objectives of the people who initiated the commune, and how did these goals and objectives shape the early stages of the system?	Semi-structured Interview	
				3. How were the resources and infrastructure of the commune system established and developed during its formative stage?	Semi-structured Interview
		2. What were the socio-economic backgrounds of the people when they joined the commune?	1. Were there any specific criteria or requirements for people to become members of the commune? If yes, what were these criteria?	Semi-structured Interview	
			2. What differences did the Magar and Dalit communities experience when they joined the commune?	Semi-structured Interview	
			3. Why did they decide not to join the commune?	Semi-structured Interview	
		3. What factors shaped the perceptions of people toward the commune and how did these perceptions change over time?	1. What were the common perceptions and attitudes of the people towards the commune during its formative stage among its members?	Semi-structured Interview	
			2. How did these perceptions and attitudes change overtime, and what factors contributed to these changes?	Semi-structured Interview	
			3. What benefits did people experience once they joined the commune?	Semi-structured Interview	

Research Question- 2

2.	How do collective living, collective farming, and co-operatives revolve around the idea of the commune? How do these practices reinforce each other?	1. What were the key principles of collective living in the commune, and how were they implemented in practice?	1. What were the practices around sharing, including food, housing, and personal possession, and how were these practices enforced?	Methodological tools	
				Semi-structured Interview/Observation	
			2. How did commune organize their work and daily activities, and how were responsibilities shared among members?	Semi-structured Interview/Observation	
				3. How were marriage, parenthood, and educational opportunities organized within the commune? How were they unique from other groups of people?	Semi-structured Interview
		2. What were the specific methods and techniques used in collective farming within the commune?	1. What were the key principles, objectives, and motivations for adopting collective farming in the commune?	Semi-structured Interview	
			2. How were land, equipment, and other resources allocated within collective farming systems, and how did this allocation impact agricultural production and standard of living for commune members?	Semi-structured Interview	
			3. What were the key challenges faced by collective farming in terms of land use, crop diversification, labor allocation, and resource allocation?	Semi-structured Interview	
		3. What were the operational practices and strategies used by cooperatives within the communes?	1. What were the different types of co-operatives that were implemented in the commune, and how did these cooperatives operate in terms of their specific structures and functions?	Semi-structured Interview//Observation	
			2. In what ways did individuals become members of cooperatives and what advantages did they gain as members?	Semi-structured Interview	
3. In what ways do collective living arrangements within communes contribute to the success and sustainability of collective farming practices and cooperatives?	Semi-structured Interview/Observation				

Research Question- 3

3.	How has the practice of commune continued in Thabang, Rolpa? What are the key factors that have enabled its social sustainability in the specific social setting of Thabang?	1. What were the specific methods and strategies used to implement collectivization within the commune system?	1. What were the decision-making processes used within the commune, including the role of collective decision-making, leadership influence, and state policies?	Methodological tools
			Semi-structured Interview	
			2. How were the finance, distribution of resources and goods, and consumption, and daily requirements managed in the commune?	Semi-structured Interview
		2. What are the challenges and opportunities facing the commune's sustainability, and how does it adapt to changing circumstances?	3. What were the major challenges or issues that the commune faced during its existence?	Semi-structured Interview
			1. How did Comprehensive Peace Accord- 2006 affect the commune?	Semi-structured Interview /Key Informant Interview
			2. Who are the individuals that leave communes in between and at the end, and what are the reasons behind their departure?	Semi-structured Interview /Key Informant Interview
		3. To what extent could the commune system be replicated in other contexts?	3. What are the changes in social class dynamics, sense of belonging, prospects, and opportunities for commune members over time, and what are the factors that drive these changes?	Semi-structured Interview
			1. What are the types of collective farming practices being employed in Thabang outside of the commune, who are the key actors involved, and how do they organize and manage their farming activities to achieve their social and economic objectives?	Semi-structured Interview
			2. What are the roles and experiences of commune members in the legal registration and operation of Ajambari cooperatives, and how do they perceive the benefits and challenges of collective ownership and management of the co-operatives?	Semi-structured Interview
				3. How does a Health Cooperative function within a communal context, what are the key factors that enable its successful operation?

Annex-2

Observation Checklist

1. Demographic and Environmental Assessment:
 - a) What is the observable demographic makeup of the study area?
 - b) What types of housing structures can be observed in the selected region?
 - c) What are the visible natural settings and environmental features of the chosen location?
2. Characterization of Communal Residences:
 - a) What observable architectural styles and structures define the communal residences?
 - b) How does the surrounding environment of the communal living spaces appear?
3. Cultural Practices and Attire:
 - a) What can be observed regarding the traditional attire worn by men in the community?
 - b) What can be observed regarding the traditional attire worn by women in the community?
4. Occupational and Workplace Assessment:
 - a) What specific activities can be observed among men and women in both their workplace and home environments?
 - b) Where can observable information be gathered about where members of the selected commune are employed?
 - c) What observable aspects define the working conditions of individuals within the commune?
5. Non-Verbal Communication during Interviews:
 - a) What facial expressions are visibly exhibited by members of the commune during interviews?
 - b) Can any notable non-verbal cues or body language be observed during interactions?
6. Daily Activities and Routines:
 - a) What specific activities can be observed that are regularly undertaken by members of the commune?
 - b) What observable daily routines or rituals characterize the communal lifestyle?

Annex-3

Observation Protocol

Setting/Individual Observed: The Ajambari Commune House

Observer: Keshab Raj Silwal

Role of the observer: Interview with remaining members

Time:

Place:

Length of Observation:

S.n.	Description Notes	Reflection Notes
1.	Natural Settings of Thabang	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Thabang is surrounded by hills named Jaljala, Mirul, and Uwa.2. Most of the population of Thabang are from Kham Magars.3. Women were found wearing Lungi and Blause and Men were found wearing Bhoto, Khado, and Khachhad.4. Women were found working in the field or weaving string from Bhango.5. Some Youths are playing in the playground.6. Markets are found growing for various goods. Everything can be found in Thabang.7. Dalits are living separately upper part of Thabang.8. Dalits have a lower quantity of land.
2.	The physical setting of the Ajambari Commune House	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Three parts of the house are separated2. Use of stone and mud, local resources3. Main part has 18 rooms.4. The other two parts have 12 rooms.5. All rooms are locked except those used by three households.6. Two women are cooking Aato.
3.	Members of the commune	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Some of them were found working on land.2. They are residing in traditional houses made up of stone and mud.3. They wear Magar attire.

Annex-4

List of Commune Members

1. First joined to commune- 28 May, 2003

S.n.	Household heads	Total	Gents	Ladies	Children
1.	Santosh Budha	4	2	2	2
2.	Jaya Prakash Rokka	7	2	5	2
3.	Tara Prakash Rokka	4	3	1	2
4.	Ram Kirini Rokka	10	5	5	4
5.	Sumanti Rokka	2	-	2	-
6.	Darshana Budha	3	1	2	1
-	Total	30	13	17	11

2. List of Commune Members who joined the second time

S.n.	Household heads	Total	Gents	Ladies	Children
7.	Kitab Jhakri	6	4	2	4
8.	Suntaki Jhakri	6	2	4	1
9.	Tula Pun	5	2	3	3
10.	Dhanaraj Rawat	3	1	2	1
11.	Tikasari Rokka	2	-	2	1
-	Total	22	9	13	10

3. List of Commune Members who joined the third time

S.n.	Household head	Total	Gents	Ladies	Children
12.	Hit Prasad Rokka	5	2	3	2
13.	Bal Prasad Gharti	7	3	4	4
14.	Raj Kumar Rokka	6	3	3	4
15.	Bimochan Rokka	2	2	-	2
16.	Lap Bahadur Rokka	1	1	-	-
17.	Prabesh Rokka 'Chhiring'	3	2	1	-
18.	Indra Bahadur Budha 'Karun'	6	3	3	2
19.	Hiralal Rokka 'Jhari'	2	1	1	-
20.	Gaj Bahadur Budha	7	4	3	2
21.	Tej Maya Rokka	1	-	1	-
22.	Pharke Bahadur Rokka	6	4	2	4
23.	Raj Bahadur Budha	7	4	3	2
24.	Lal Kiran Pun	3	1	2	1
25.	Dhan Lal Budha	6	4	2	4
26.	Nadi Ram Pariyar	5	3	2	3
27.	Lekhnath Budha	4	2	2	2
28.	Srijana Rokka ' Pampha'	2	-	2	1
29.	Jivan Budha	5	3	2	-
30.	Bar Prasad Gharti	5	2	3	2
31.	Mul Bahadur Budha	4	3	1	2
32.	Tanka Raj Pun	1	1	-	-
33.	Keshab Pun	1	1	-	-
-	Total	89	48	41	37

4. List of Commune Members who left in different stages

S.n.	Household heads	Total	Gents	Ladies	Children
1.	Indra Bahadur Budha 'Karun'	6	3	3	2
2.	Suntaki Jhakri	6	2	4	1
3.	Tula Pun	5	2	3	3
4.	Dhanaraj Rawat	3	1	2	1
5.	Tikasari Rokka	2	-	2	1
6.	Bal Prasad Gharti	7	3	4	4
7.	Hiralal Rokka 'Jhari'	2	1	1	-
8.	Gaj Bahadur Budha	7	4	3	2
9.	Tej Maya Rokka	1	-	1	-
10.	Pharke Bahadur Rokka	6	4	2	4
11.	Raj Bahadur Budha	7	4	3	2
12.	Lal Kiran Pun	3	1	2	1
13.	Nadi Pariyar	5	3	2	3
14.	Lekhnath Budha	4	2	2	2
15.	Srijana Rokka ' Pampha'	2	-	2	1
16.	Jivan Budha	5	3	2	-
17.	Bar Prasad Gharti	5	2	3	2
18.	Mul Bahadur Budha	4	3	1	2
19.	Tanka Raj Pun	1	1	-	-
20.	Keshab Pun	1	1	-	-
Total		82	40	42	31

5. List of Commune Members who stayed till the last

S.n.	Household head	Total	Gents	Ladies	Children
1.	Santosh Budha	4	2	2	2
2.	Jaya Prakash Rokka 'Pratap'	5	2	3	3
3.	Tara Prakash Rokka ' Sang'	8	5	3	3
4.	Ram Kirini Rokka 'Yojana'	11	6	5	5
5.	Sumanti Rokka	2	-	2	-
6.	Darshana Rokka	2	1	1	-
7.	Lab Bahadur Rokka 'Syaula'	1	1	-	-
8.	Kitab Jhakri 'Sahas'	10	6	5	3
9.	Hit Prasad Rokka 'Biplab'	6	3	3	3
10.	Raj Kumar Rokka ' Hang'	7	3	4	2
11.	Bimochan Rokka	4	2	2	1
12.	Prabesh Rokka 'Chhiring'	1	1	-	-
13.	Dhan Lal Budha 'Lal Sing'	7	4	3	3
Total		67	36	33	25

6. List of Commune Members who are still living

S.n.	Household heads	Total	Gents	Ladies	Children
1.	Ram Kirini Rokka 'Yojana'	4	2	2	-
2.	Tara Prakash Rokka ' Sang'	1	-	1	-
3.	Raj Kumar Rokka ' Hang'	3	2	1	-
-	Total	8	4	4	

Annex-5

Participants Outside the Ajambari Commune

S.n.	Household heads	Place/Strata
1.	Tapi Sunar	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 2
2.	Mel Bahadur Rokka 'Hunan'	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 1
3.	Samrat Rokka	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 1
4.	Surya Lal Budha	Duldada
5.	Ram Maya Rokka	Thabang, Thalgaun, ward no. 1
6.	Jeet Jhankri	Duldada
7.	Ram Bahadur Budha	Chalabang
8.	Dal Bahadur Pun	Chalabang
9.	Mul Prasad Pun	Rachibang
10.	Balman Budha Magar	Palbang
11.	Bhima Rokka	Therbang
12.	Jamani Budha Magar	Palbang
13.	Tirtha Narayan Mijar	Koijabang
14.	Deu Prasad Kami 'Maalpani'	Koijabang
15.	Jit Prasad BK	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 2
16.	Ganesh Budha	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 1
17.	Juna Pura BK	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 2
18.	Hikamat BK	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 2
19.	Sita Rokka	Jurbang
20.	Sampurna BK	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 2
21.	Bhima Rokka Magar	Palbang
22.	Birman BK	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 2
23.	Rajesh Sunar	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 1
24.	Jyoti Budha	Chhorlebang
25.	Nirmal Pariyar	Jakibang
26.	Dipendra Budha	Maranthan
27.	Roki Rokka	Maranthan
28.	Hira Bahadur Pariyar	Thabang, Thulagaun, ward no. 2
29.	Gomati Rokka	Gobang
30.	Ram Dhan Gharti	Gobang
31.	Nur Prasad Rokka	Phuntibang
32.	Dal Bahadur Budha	Jurbang
33.	Jit Bahadur Rokka	Maghekharka

Annex-6

List of Key- Informants

S.n.	Name	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1.	Netra Bikram Chanda	Lalitpur	April 22, 2023
2.	Nabin Bibhas	Kathmandu	August 13, 2021
3.	Mausham Rokka Magar	Thabang	March 23, 2022
4.	Ajaya Gharti	Thabang	March 24, 2022
5.	Ryukichi Ishida	Thabang	March 25, 2022
6.	Lal Chandra Rokka	Thabang	March 25, 2022
7.	Indra Lama	Bardibas	March 25, 2023
8.	Dhaplal Pun	Thabang	March 26, 2022
9.	Bipin C	Lalitpur	April 16, 2023
10.	Matrika Pokharel	Kathmandu	March 13, 2023

Annex- 7

Questions for Key Informants

1. Can you provide a comprehensive overview of the Ajambari Commune, including its founding principles, organizational structure, and objectives?
2. What historical, social, and economic factors contributed to the establishment of the Ajambari commune in the specific context of Thabang, Rolpa?
3. How were the initial steps taken to establish the Ajambari commune, and what were the primary challenges encountered during this process?
4. What specific functions, programs, or initiatives were initiated within the Ajambari commune to address the needs and aspirations of the local community?
5. In your opinion, what tangible changes or developments have occurred in the Thabang region since the inception of the Ajambari commune, and how have these changes impacted the lives of residents?
6. Could you provide insights into the various collectivization processes practiced in Nepal, highlighting their objectives, methodologies, and outcomes?
7. How does the Ajambari commune compare to other communal initiatives in Nepal in terms of governance structures, resource management, and community participation?
8. What are some of the key successes and challenges experienced by the Ajambari commune since its establishment, and how have these experiences informed its ongoing operations?
9. From your perspective, what are the broader implications of communal initiatives like the Ajambari commune on local governance, social cohesion, and economic development within Nepal?
10. What lessons can be learned from the experiences of the Ajambari commune that may apply to other communities or development projects within Nepal or beyond?

Annex- 8

Meaning/Definition of Local Words (Non-English)

Bheja – It was a collective tradition of the Magar community found in the eastern part of Palpa district in Nepal, as described in the literature review of this dissertation (Dhakal, 1996).

Khado, Kacchad and Shawls - The traditional attire of the Kham Magar people are called *Khado and Kachhad*. It features a distinctive design with a large pocket at the back and does not include any sleeves.

Bhume Puja – Festival of Kham Magars celebrating the worship of nature and dances in May or June.

Jhara, Beth & Begari - These were mandated unpaid labor enforced by the government and were historically extracted from the population by officials and elites for agricultural work.

Gwala - It is the term used by Kham Magar for grazing and herding cattle out of the village in the high hills.

Parima - It is the voluntary type of farm labour and exchange each other by the households in the time of farming.

Hal- The term *Hal* in the Thabangi language refers to a unit of land measurement, which is approximately 0.05 hectares.

Bhango - It is the term used by the Kham Magar community to refer to marijuana, signifying their specific language for this particular substance.

Aato - It is a type of traditional Nepalese food that is cooked by mixing corn or millet flour with hot water. This food is very popular in Nepalese villages.

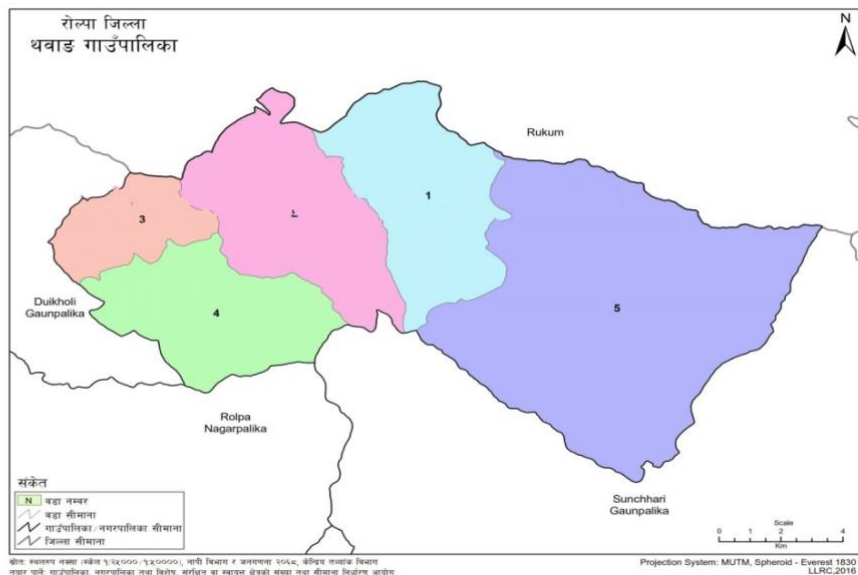
Katus, Padamchal, Tite, and Banaalo – These are the Nepali names for *Castanopsis*, *Rhem Australe*, *Mugwort*, and *wild potatoes*, respectively. These herbs hold significant value in the field of medicine and are utilized for various medicinal purposes.

Pathi- It is a measurement unit for grains stored in bushel-like vessels in Nepal, equivalent to approximately 4.54609 liters or 3.2 kilograms.

Sahid Marga- It is Nepali term for the Martyr's Road used by Maoists and the road named from Dang to Thabang.

Annex- 9

Fig 1: Map of Thabang



Note. Map provided by Thaban Rural Municipality

Figure 2: Thabang, Main Village, Thulagaun



Note. The photograph taken during the fieldwork, 2022

Figure 3: *The Ajamabri Commune Members in 2013*



Note. Photo provided by Mr. Nabin Bivas

Figure 4: *Janabadi School of Maoist in Thabang*



Note. Photo provided by Mr. Nabin Bivas

Figure 5: *Ajambari Commune House- 1*



Note. During the fieldwork, 2022

Figure 6: *Ajambari Commune House- 2*



Note. During the fieldwork, 2022

Some Members of the Ajambari Commune- 1

Figure 7: *Jaya Prakash Rokka*



Figure 8: *Kashiman Budha*



Figure 9: *Interviewing with Kashiman Budha*



Figure 10: *Sharam Rokka Magar*



Figure 11: *Dhan Lal Budha*



Figure 12: *Surya Bahadur Rokka*



Note. All photographs are taken during the fieldwork, 2022

Some Members of the Ajambari Commune- 2

Figure 13: *Ram Kirini Rokka*



Figure 14: *Prabesh Rokka*



Figure 15: *Family of Nadiram Pariyar*



Figure 16: *Kitab Jhakri*



Figure 17: *Mausham Rokka Magar*



Figure 18: *Jun Pura Budha Magar*



Note. All photographs are taken during the fieldwork, 2022

Members still Living in the Commune House

Figure 19: *Ram Maya Rokka is cooking the food in the commune house*



Figure 20: *Sarjita Rokka Magar is cooking the food in the commune house*



Note. Photographs are taken during the fieldwork, 2022

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