

### Urban Development in the Kohalpur Region of Nepal: A Historical Study

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#### Abstract:

This research investigates the historical trajectory of urbanization in Kohalpur, Banke district, Lumbini province, Nepal. This study examines the determinants of urban development in Kohalpur, concentrating on market settlements and socio-political events that have played a significant role in the city's expansion. To conduct this analysis, a blend of primary and secondary data sources is utilized. The historical analysis method is employed to investigate urban development patterns, with an emphasis on key infrastructure developments, socio-political events, and the availability of essential amenities that have contributed to Kohalpur's growth. Before the Panchayat rule, Kohalpur exhibited minimal urban development. The establishment of the Mahendra and Ratna highways during the Panchayat period significantly facilitated settlement expansion by enhancing mobility and prompting migration. The availability of affordable land, education, and healthcare services from nearby Nepalgunj stimulated population growth. Business investments in education and healthcare further contributed to economic growth and community welfare. Socio-political events, such as the Maoist movement and the liberation of bonded laborers, along with infrastructure developments like a teaching hospital and an international cricket ground, accelerated urban growth. This study also highlights the correlation between the expansion of essential services and infrastructure and the acceleration of slum development. This research provides a comprehensive historical analysis of urban development in Kohalpur, highlighting the multifaceted factors contributing to its growth. The study provides a nuanced understanding of the urbanization process by concentrating on primary data and the effects of socio-political events. It offers insights into the dynamics of urban growth in emerging Nepali towns and documents past developments.

**Keywords:** Kohalpur Municipality, Lumbini Province, urban development, historical study, socio-political events, infrastructure development.

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# 尼泊尔科哈尔普尔地区城市发展的历史研究

## 摘要:

本研究调查了尼泊尔蓝毗尼省班克区科哈尔普尔的城市化历史轨迹。本研究考察了科哈尔普尔城市发展的决定因素，重点关注在城市扩张中发挥重要作用的市场定居点和社会政治事件。为了进行分析，我们使用了一手和二手数据源的混合。采用历史分析方法来研究城市发展模式，重点关注关键基础设施发展、社会政治事件和促进科哈尔普尔发展的基本便利设施的可用性。在村务委员会统治之前，科哈尔普尔的城市发展极少。在村务委员会时期，马亨德拉和拉特纳高速公路的建立大大促进了定居点的扩张，增强了流动性并促进了移民。附近尼泊尔根杰提供的廉价土地、教育和医疗服务刺激了人口增长。商业对教育和医疗保健的投资进一步促进了经济增长和社区福利。毛派运动和解放契约劳工等社会政治事件，以及教学医院和国际板球场等基础设施建设，加速了城市发展。本研究还强调了基本服务和基础设施的扩张与贫民窟发展加速之间的相关性。本研究对科哈尔普尔的城市发展进行了全面的历史分析，强调了促成其发展的多方面因素。本研究通过关注原始数据和社会政治事件的影响，提供了对城市化进程的细致入微的理解。它提供了对尼泊尔新兴城镇城市发展动态的洞察，并记录了过去的发展。

**关键词:** 蓝毗尼省科哈尔普尔市，城市发展，历史研究，社会政治事件，基础设施发展。

## 1. Introduction

Kohalpur municipality, nestled within Nepal's Lumbini province, holds a significant position within the country's administrative landscape. Lumbini province, comprising 12 districts, including Banke, is characterized by its diverse mix of urban and rural settlements. With four sub-metropolitan cities, 32 municipalities, and 73 rural villages, the province exemplifies Nepal's rich cultural and geographical diversity (Bahadur, 2021, p. 1). Among these administrative units, Kohalpur, which is situated in the Banke district, has emerged as a focal point for developmental discourse. The Banke district covers an area of 2337 square kilometers and primarily consists of flat plains interspersed with Chure hills. Within Banke, Kohalpur Municipality is strategically located, sharing borders with neighboring India. It is surrounded by Reactionary Village Municipality to the east, Baijnath Rural Municipality to the west, Kalimati's Chure hills in Salyan to the north, and Janki Rural Municipality and Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan Municipality to the south (Kohalpur Municipality, 2021, p. 1). Kohalpur falls under Provincial Constituency No. 1 of Banke District within the broader Lumbini Province, aligning with Representative Assembly Constituency No. 1. Its historical significance dates to the era of the Panchayat rule in Nepal, indicating its enduring importance in the region's socio-political landscape. Serving as the epicenter of Kohalpur Municipality, the city has undergone a steady evolution, marked by developmental milestones and infrastructural advancements. Strategically positioned at the crossroads of the Mahendra Highway, spanning east-west, and the Ratna Highway (Surkhet Road) in a north-south direction, Kohalpur epitomizes a pivotal junction facilitating regional connectivity. Serving as a critical

checkpoint within provinces No. 5, 6, and 7, Kohalpur has emerged as one of Nepal's burgeoning cities experiencing rapid growth and development. Geographically, Kohalpur is intricately linked to the chain of Chure hills, with its coordinates spanning from 28° 7 minutes 12 seconds to 18 minutes 54 seconds north latitude and from 81° 38 minutes 24 seconds to 81° 49 minutes 51.6 seconds east longitude. Located roughly 16 km north of Nepalgunj, the district capital, Kohalpur Municipality spans a territorial expanse of 184.26 km<sup>2</sup> (Kohalpur Municipality, 2021, p. 2). The establishment of Kohalpur Municipality was a decision of the Council of Ministers of the Government of Nepal on May 8, 2014. Established by amalgamating the Razhena and Kohalpur Village Development Committees, the municipality was officially inaugurated on May 7, 2014, comprising 13 wards. Subsequently, during the restructuring of local governance on March 11, 2017, the municipality's authority was expanded to include certain areas of Shamsheganj Village, incorporating Ward No. 1 into its administrative ambit. The study provided a comprehensive exploration of the historical evolution of Kohalpur City within the broader Kohalpur Municipality context. Through an in-depth analysis of historical records, geographical data, and socioeconomic trends, this research aims to elucidate the factors driving the city's growth trajectory and its implications for local governance and urban development strategies. By shedding light on Kohalpur's journey from its inception to its present status, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights into urbanization and local governance in Nepal.

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. Urbanization Trajectory in Kohalpur

The historical development of urbanization in Kohalpur, Nepal, has been inadequately explored despite its significant transformation into a rapidly growing urban center. Although anecdotal evidence suggests a notable expansion of settlements since the Panchayat rule, a comprehensive historical analysis of the factors driving urban growth and their implications for local governance is lacking. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a detailed examination of Kohalpur's urbanization trajectory, focusing on the period spanning from before the Panchayat rule to the present day. By elucidating the socio-economic, political, and infrastructural drivers of urbanization, this research aims to provide insights into the evolution of Kohalpur as a key urban hub in Nepal.

### 2.2. Impact of Development Initiatives on Urban Growth

The impact of various development initiatives, including infrastructure projects and socio-political reforms, on the urban growth of Kohalpur remains underexplored. Despite anecdotal evidence suggesting a correlation between infrastructure development and urban expansion, a systematic analysis of the causal mechanisms driving this relationship is lacking. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the influence of key development initiatives on the spatial, demographic, and socioeconomic dynamics of urban growth in Kohalpur. By analyzing primary data sources and historical records, this research aims to elucidate the role of infrastructure projects, socio-political reforms, and economic investments in shaping Kohalpur's urban landscape.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

- To conduct a comprehensive historical analysis of urbanization in Kohalpur, Nepal, spanning the pre-Panchayat era to the present day, with a focus on identifying the socioeconomic, political, and infrastructural drivers of urban growth.
- To investigate the impact of various development initiatives, including infrastructure projects and socio-political reforms, on the spatial, demographic, and socio-economic dynamics of urban growth in Kohalpur, aiming to elucidate the causal mechanisms driving the relationship between development initiatives and urban expansion.

## 4. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative and analytical approach infused with historical investigation to explore the developmental trajectory of Kohalpur, Nepal. Kohalpur was selected for this study due to its unique position as a rapidly developing urban center in western Nepal. Despite its strategic location and economic importance, Kohalpur has not been the subject of a

comprehensive historical examination. This gap in the historical record makes Kohalpur an ideal case study for exploring the broader themes of urban development and cultural transformation in the region. The town's dynamic growth, coupled with its diverse population and rich cultural heritage, provides a fertile ground for investigating the interplay between historical events and contemporary developments. Given the novelty and lack of comprehensive historical records on this subject, primary sources and secondary information form the foundation of this inquiry. Primary sources play a pivotal role in capturing the firsthand experiences and memories of Kohalpur's inhabitants, offering invaluable insights into the area's developmental journey. Through interviews and dialogs with residents, this study seeks to unearth untold stories and perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of Kohalpur's evolution. Reliance on primary sources is justified by their inherent reliability, which surpasses that of secondary accounts. As Kohalpur lacks a comprehensive historical examination to date, this research bridges this gap by providing the first written historical record of the city's environs. By leveraging firsthand accounts and local expertise, this study seeks to fill the historical documentation gap, thereby preserving Kohalpur's cultural heritage for future generations. Significant emphasis is placed on engaging with local experts in various domains, such as politics, education, religion, and healthcare. Their firsthand experiences and insights into Kohalpur's development from its inception contribute to a nuanced understanding of its historical narrative. By incorporating diverse perspectives, this research captures the multifaceted nature of Kohalpur's evolution.

This research adopts a meticulous data collection approach, employing both descriptive and analytical methodologies. Primary source materials were curated and analyzed to elucidate Kohalpur's origins, growth, and cultural significance. Through a comprehensive analysis of these materials, this study offers a nuanced portrayal of Kohalpur's historical trajectory. By delving into the collective memory of the community, this research aims to preserve and document the rich tapestry of Kohalpur's history. Through this endeavor, the legacy of Kohalpur's cultural heritage is ensured to endure for generations to come. This study serves as a testament to the enduring importance of firsthand accounts and historical inquiry in elucidating the past and informing the present. In essence, this research methodology is guided by a commitment to authenticity, thoroughness, and inclusivity. By engaging with primary sources and local expertise, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Kohalpur's historical evolution, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on urban development and cultural heritage preservation in Nepal.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

The Kohalpur area has long been plagued by the

presence of deadly creatures like Terai malaria, snakes, and scorpions, rendering human settlements largely insignificant. Throughout the Rana period and beyond, essential amenities such as education, healthcare, potable water, and irrigation were sorely lacking. Scattered amid the Kohalpur forest were only small settlements comprised of rudimentary mud houses. It was primarily the Tharu caste, known for their resilience in harsh conditions and disinterest in modern conveniences, who initially established settlements here, making them an indigenous tribe according to Tharu accounts and conversation with Praka Tharu. The history of settlement development in Kohalpur is relatively recent. From the waning days of Rana governance to the dawn of democracy and the onset of the Panchayat system, Kohalpur struggled to establish a distinct identity.

Around the years 1990-95, Kohalpur existed in a state of obscurity, characterized by sparse settlement and rudimentary infrastructure. According to Thakur Tharu, a resident interviewed for historical insights, the Kohalpur market hosted merely 4-5 houses, while neighboring areas such as Chatar had approximately 20-25 houses. The village revered a deity named Jaganathi, and worship was conducted in a modest, thatched temple contrasting sharply with the grandeur of contemporary religious structures. Notably, the elaborate fairs and festivals that now define the cultural landscape were absent.

Healthcare access was severely limited. A small hospital in Nepalgunj, comprising only 3-4 rooms, served as the primary medical facility for the region. In the absence of modern treatments, locals relied on traditional remedies such as wild jujube for common ailments. Security concerns were prevalent, with theft being a common occurrence. Thieves often met harsh consequences and sometimes resorted to crossing the border into India for illicit activities. Moreover, the presence of tigers roaming between houses instilled a pervasive fear of wildlife, making it challenging to safeguard livestock, particularly small calves and goats. The demographic structure of households was markedly different from contemporary norms. Families typically comprised large numbers, with households accommodating anywhere from 7-8 to as many as 15-16 individuals. Traditional familial roles were also observed, with married parents residing in the same household. Instances of marital discord, evidenced by divorce letters, were known within the community. Economically, the region relied heavily on agriculture and animal husbandry. Oxen were used for plowing fields, reflecting the reliance on manual labor rather than mechanized farming practices. The absence of local blacksmiths necessitated the seasonal migration of craftsmen from the mountains to meet the demand for ironwork. Additionally, trade revolved around livestock, with buffaloes commanding a price of approximately 7-8 rupees in the early 1990s (Based on an interview with Thakur Tharu). Social attitudes toward the neighboring hills were characterized by

prejudice and suspicion. The hills were negatively viewed, symbolizing unfamiliar and potentially threatening terrain. This regional bias likely influenced interactions and perceptions within the community.

The advent of the panchayat system coincided with a period of significant historical development in Kohalpur. As such, elderly residents who have borne witness to these transformative events are invaluable repositories of local history. Their first-hand accounts provide invaluable insights into the region's evolution and serve as a testament to its rich cultural heritage.

The etymology of the name "Kohalpur" remains shrouded in mystery, leaving us to rely on the recollections and interpretations of elderly residents to piece together its origins. Currently, Kohalpur Municipal Ward No. 10 encompasses Chatar, which is the former site of the Chatar Village Panchayat and plays a significant role in the historical development of Kohalpur Municipality (Kohalpur Nagar Bikas Samiti 2020, p. 14). However, there exist varying accounts regarding the nomenclature of Chatar village.

One interpretation, shared by Sagar Gayre, suggests a connection between the village's name and its topography. In previous times, Chatar was inhabited by Tharu tribal communities, who lived in close proximity to the Duduwa River in the northeastern region. During the rainy season, river flooding transformed the northwest area into a lake-like expanse. In the Tharu language, such a body of water is referred to as "Chatia," owing to its resemblance to a chat or basin. Initially known as Chatia, the village gradually adopted the name Chatter over time.

Another legend, recounted by Musuwa Tharus, links the village's name to its natural resources. Chatar was renowned for its expansive sal and khayer trees, which locals would cut and process into timber, known as "chatt" or "chang." Hence, Chatar earned its name from this lumbering activity.

Throughout history, Chatar village was one of nine neighboring villages that comprised the Chatter Village Panchayat. With the establishment of the village panchayat in 1961, Chatar became an entity. Subsequently, when the contemporary Kohalpur municipality was consolidated, the Chatar Village Panchayat was incorporated into it, which subsequently impacted the municipality's organization and growth (Musuwa Tharus).

Chattargaon and Chatter Townchayat serve as the foundational pillars of present-day Kohalpur city and municipality, representing a modified iteration of the original Kohalpur municipality. These origins hold significant historical and cultural importance, underscoring the special significance attributed to Kohalpur's evolution over time. While the exact origins of the name "Kohalpur" remain elusive, the narratives of local elders provide valuable insights into the historical development and naming conventions of the region. The incorporation of Chatar village into Kohalpur municipality underscores its integral role in shaping the municipality's identity, highlighting the

importance of preserving and honoring these historical legacies.

Initially, the Kohalpur city area consisted solely of a single settlement inhabited by the Tharu caste. The Tharus, guided by their caste, language, geography, and cultural norms, had distinctive methods for naming people and places. They meticulously considered the original characteristics of each location and individual when assigning names. For instance, villages were named based on the number of houses they contained, such as "three gharuvas" for a village with three houses and "sat gharuva" for one with seven houses. Additionally, the Tharus commonly appended words like "Pur" or "Hawa" to names to facilitate pronunciation, reflecting their linguistic practices (Jungali Tharu interviews). This naming tradition extends beyond Kohalpur to the majority of villages across Nepal, where the local caste and language impact the naming conventions. The identity of each community in the mountains, Himalayas, or Terai region is deeply intertwined with the place names, which showcases the prevalent cultural practice.

Kohalpur, formerly known as Bangaon, derived its name from its location amidst forests and settlements, which led to its designation as Bangaon. The tradition of erecting a Shiva temple has persisted through the ages, maintaining its relevance even in contemporary times. Likewise, the Kohalpur region, in its early days, was inhabited by the Tharu people and a Shiva temple was constructed in its eastern part, thus leading to the naming of the village as Shivshankarpur. This region was renowned for its abundant mustard production; however, the locals had not mastered the technique of efficiently processing mustard. Consequently, people from hilly districts would visit Shivshankarpur during winter to burn wooden coals and process the local mustard. Following summer's end, these hill dwellers would retreat to the mountains.

Simultaneously, the indigenous Tharu population began to engage in charcoal and mustard production. The Tharu community's shift towards charcoal and mustard production led to a decrease in the influx of hill folks to the area. As a result, residents from neighboring villages began to travel to Shivshankarpur to obtain mustard seeds. This transition resulted in the Tharus of Shivshankarpur becoming involved in the oil extraction industry, which had previously been dominated by hill dwellers. Consequently, the region gained the moniker "coal village," attracting individuals from various locations to collect charcoal, which is referred to as "Kol Pere Chali" in the Tharu language. This shift also increased visitors seeking mustard seeds, prompting curious inquiries about their destinations.

In response to such inquiries, those journeying to acquire mustard seeds would reply in Tharu, "Kol Pere Zaito," meaning "We are going to Kol Pere." Over time, this phrase evolved into "Kol Pere, Kol Pere," eventually morphing into "Kolpurwa" as pronounced in the Tharu dialect. This transformation reflects the organic evolution of language and nomenclature and

demonstrates the fusion of cultural influences and linguistic adaptations.

It is important to acknowledge the inherent truth in this narrative, despite possible distortions over the centuries. The evolution of Kohalpur's name from its humble origins as Shivshankarpur to its present-day iteration is emblematic of the complex interplay between history, culture, and language. While Kohalpur's etymology may have undergone alterations, its essence remains rooted in the rich tapestry of its cultural heritage.

In summary, the path from Bangaon to Kohalpur embodies the evolution of a location influenced by a multitude of factors and interwoven historical accounts. Kohalpur, with its changing moniker and cultural development, serves as an emblem of its historical endurance and the ongoing influences that mold its character.

Until approximately 50 or 60 years ago, the location of the current Kohalpur Municipality was largely covered by dense forests. At that time, only eight houses existed to mark the presence of settlements belonging to the Tharu caste people. Additionally, the area now known as Razhena village was home to around 25 to 30 households belonging to the Tharu caste. Furthermore, Chatar was home to one house belonging to the Bhats caste, three houses belonging to the Gwala Ahirs caste, and a single blacksmith's residence that specialized in crafting pots. In the past, Damai people journeyed from the mountains to Kohalpur to sew clothes, employing manual techniques in the absence of modern machinery. Before the advent of the Panchayat system, locals had to trek to Nepalgunj for official government matters because there were no administrative offices in Kohalpur.

Due to the region's remoteness and vulnerability, fears of robbery from across the border kept wealthy individuals away, resulting in modest dwellings for locals. This insecurity dissuaded migration from hill areas to Kohalpur. Moreover, during the Rana regime, widespread illiteracy stifled educational and artistic aspirations, leaving the notion of schools and the arts a distant dream.

The shift from the Rana regime to the Panchayat system marked a new era for Kohalpur, laying the groundwork for growth and progress. Subsequent political upheavals in the country provided impetus for Kohalpur's settlement and infrastructural growth, marking a pivotal turning point in its history. Gradually, outsiders began to trickle in, contributing to the burgeoning community and setting the stage for Kohalpur's evolution into the vibrant municipality it is today (Based on interviews with Dhikaram Tharu).

### **5.1. Settlement Expansion in Kohalpur**

In approximately 1958-1959, the villages of Bangaon, Chatar, and Razhena were inhabited by around 60-70 households of the Tharu caste. The landscape was primarily characterized by dense forests, with limited access to potable water, thereby

necessitating frequent visits to wells for water procurement. The advent of hand pumps, mirroring modern conveniences, did not emerge until 1918-1973. In those earlier years, glimpses of development, like a handful of bicycles, were rare sights along the newly opened East-West Highway. Nepalgunj, a city shaped by Indian government initiatives, came into being. The establishment of a post office, housed in a modest hut, marked Kohalpur's first governmental presence following land reform in 1965. This narration, shared by Chulu Tharu, illuminates Kohalpur's journey from its humble beginnings to its current semblance of development. Comparing the Kohalpur of 1958-1959 to its present-day iteration, one struggles to reconcile the transformation from Bangaon, Chatar, and Razhena's modest origins. Kohalpur's rapid development challenges the notion that progress requires years of incremental change.

In 1969, the central hub of Kohalpur's thriving market was limited to a mere 2-4 small houses, known as ghuntis. The price of arable land during this time was rather low, amounting to approximately 300 rupees per bigha. Locals traversed the stretch from Khajura near Nepalgunj to Havalدارपुर, embarking on hour-long treks to reach Kohalpur. Notably, the absence of hill dwellers in the area underscored its underdeveloped state, which is marked by deficient infrastructure in roads, healthcare, education, and security. The presence of wild animals and other hazards, including Chordankalgae, discouraged non-Tharu communities from establishing settlements. These anecdotes, gleaned from interviews with Indra Bahadur Shahi, shed light on the challenges and barriers that once hindered Kohalpur's growth. Yet, they also speak of the resilience and determination that have propelled Kohalpur toward its current trajectory of progress and development.

Prior to 1972-1973, the location currently occupied by the primary market in Kohalpur only consisted of 2-4 rudimentary thatched houses, which each accommodated a modest commercial enterprise. The progression toward more enduring and long-lasting residential structures commenced around 1980-1981, reflecting a change in the approach to housing. Prior to the establishment of the Panchayat system, governmental involvement in this particular region was negligible. Nevertheless, with the introduction of the Panchayat system, development projects began to progress, especially in the area that is currently known as Kohalpur.

The formation of the Kohalpur Village Panchayat in 1975 marked the consolidation of the Chatar and Shamsheganj Village Panchayats. Similarly, the amalgamation of Razhena and Nauvasta Village Panchayats resulted in the formation of the Vaniabhar Village Panchayat. Subsequently, Shamsheganj Village Panchayat splintered from Kohalpur in 1882 2039, while Kohalpur Village Panchayat retained its independence.

In light of the declaration of municipality status, the

Razhena Gauvikas Samiti was established in Ward No. 14, and as the Kohalpur municipality expanded, it encompassed 15 wards. This transformation, as recounted by Lut Bahadur Rawat, underscores Kohalpur's evolution from a modest origin to its current urbanization.

The current state of Kohalpur, with its dense population and modern infrastructure, might give the impression of a long history of growth and development, but the reality is quite different. The Kohalpur Municipality is actually the upgraded version of the former Chatar Village Panchayat, which has been enhanced through the integration of certain aspects of the former Rajna Village Panchayat and specific segments of the Shamsheganj Village Panchayat. This nuanced perspective offers insights into the organic growth and consolidation that have shaped Kohalpur's municipal identity.

The rapid development of Kohalpur is evident in various aspects, with the establishment of Nepalgunj Medical College Teaching Hospital in Kohalpur serving as a significant milestone in this progress. Spearheaded by founder president Mukundabhakta Shrestha and inaugurated under the stewardship of the inaugural managing director, Dr. Suresh Kumar Kanaudia, this institution symbolizes the city's accelerated growth trajectory (as per Shyam Dhital's interview).

Moreover, the formation of the Kohalpur Urban Development Committee, coupled with the integration of Mahendra Highway and Surkhet Road into Kohalpur's infrastructure, has catalyzed its transformation. The influx of migrants from hill regions during the Maoist movement further augmented Kohalpur's population, contributing to its burgeoning urban landscape. Additionally, initiatives such as the declaration of free labor and the construction of approximately 1,200-1,300 houses in Kohalpur forests and Loknagar for laborers underscore the concerted efforts toward urbanization and social welfare. The implementation of the Kohalpur City Development Plan and the Free Employment Program has played a pivotal role in fostering Kohalpur's rapid urbanization. These strategic initiatives have not only facilitated infrastructure development but have also provided avenues for employment and sustainable living arrangements, propelling Kohalpur toward becoming a dynamic urban center.

After the establishment of the Panchayat system in 1961, Kohalpur experienced a series of Pradhanpanchs, among them Yogambar J, Ra Ramsevak Rai, Netralal Wali, Lal Bahadur Malla, and again, Netralal Wali. Subsequently, from 2017 to 2018, Lut Bahadur Rawat held leadership roles within the village development committee and the municipality, as shared in an interview with Narsih Rana. Presently, with no written records available in Kohalpur Municipality, reliance on firsthand accounts becomes paramount. Fortunately, consistent narratives from individuals who have witnessed and participated in these events instill confidence in the accuracy of their testimonies. Hence,

there appears to be little skepticism regarding the veracity of their recollections.

Prior to approximately 1973, the region where Kohalpur's primary market is currently situated was largely covered by extensive forests, which resonated with the calls of jackals during the day and served as grazing grounds for various wildlife, including boars, deer, and nilgai. Within this wilderness, a small Tharu village was situated, positioned within the surrounding forest, an area that now comprises Kohalpur Medical College. Sitaram Tharu, who remembers this period, offers a detailed description of the dense woodland that was prevalent during that time.

Meanwhile, in 1960, Tribhuvan Secondary School emerged as a modest educational institution in Chattar village, coinciding with the construction of Ratnarajamarg. With only one well serving as the village's water source, life revolved around the Tharu settlement, where traditional attire and occupations prevailed. A local blacksmith, proficient in creating iron implements and equipment, contributed to the liveliness of the village. The arrival of individuals from the hills, including Sant Bahadur Channe, Hark Bahadur Budhathoki, and Karna Bahadur Thapa, heralded the establishment of small dwellings adjacent to the Tharu settlement, with room rentals averaging a mere 10 rupees per month.

Infrastructure began to take shape with the inception of Karna Medical in 1977, marking the area's first medical center. The emergence of concrete houses in Kohalpur's market area, pioneered by figures like Karna Bahadur Thapa, Narayan Shrestha, and Birkh Bahadur Shahi, underscored a shift toward modernization. However, communication barriers persisted, with few individuals proficient in Nepali. The establishment of the Urban Development Committee in 1985 marked a significant milestone in the integration of hill dwellers into the growing settlement, thereby initiating a new phase of development. Despite these achievements, life for the early settlers remained marked by a plethora of difficulties, including limited transportation, communication, access to water, security concerns, and cultural disparities. Yet, their resilience and perseverance laid the groundwork for Kohalpur's eventual transformation into the thriving urban center it is today.

## **5.2. Recent Development Situation in Kohalpur**

Kohalpur has been acknowledged as a prominent city in western Nepal, exhibiting remarkable development that sets it apart from the rest of the country's developmental landscape. Its transition from relative obscurity before 1973-1975 to its current status exemplifies an exceptional transformation. Under the guidance of late leaders like Ramsevak Rai and Yogambar Jabara, formal education gained a foothold on January 8, 1959, with the establishment of Nepal National Primary School in the expansive fields of Chatar village, under the jurisdiction of the then Chattar Village Panchayat.

By 2034, the school had attained approval for lower secondary education, a milestone followed by accreditation for secondary education in 1980. The honorable Minister of Education at the time, Marich Man Singh Shrestha, graced the inauguration ceremony (Bahadur, 2021, p. 59). Thus, within two decades, from its inception in 1959 to the approval of secondary education in 2037, formal education underwent significant expansion in Kohalpur.

Currently, the educational landscape in Kohalpur comprises 30 community schools catering to all levels, including Samudayi Vidyalaya. Additionally, within these schools, 81 child development centers operate, serving 15,178 students, ranging from the Child Development Center to Class 12 (Kohalpur Municipal Education Department). However, the educational workforce remains modest, with only 376 teachers, 11 accounting staff, and 24 office assistants employed in community schools.

Furthermore, the establishment of Ramazanki Awasiya Madhyamik Vidyalaya in 1985 by the private sector marked a significant milestone as the region's first private school, as per insights gleaned from an interview with Narayan Sigdel. The diversification of educational options underscores Kohalpur's commitment to providing quality education and fostering intellectual growth within the community.

Over the past three decades, the educational landscape in Kohalpur has undergone a remarkable transformation, witnessing a surge in private educational institutions. As of now, 52 institutional schools cater to 29,962 students, alongside one community school and one APF school operated by the armed police force, as reported by the Kohalpur Municipal Education Department.

In the domain of higher education, the Wageshwari Vahumukhi Campus was initially founded at Nepalgunj's Saraswati University in 2018. However, it relocated to Kohalpur on the 16th of Bhadra, 2019. Initially operating under Tribhuvan University's authority for two years, the campus eventually found a permanent location in Kohalpur. Under the leadership of Patih Bahadur Singh as the first campus head and Vedhanidhi Officer as the inaugural chairman of the board of trustees, the campus commenced its journey with a modest enrollment of six students in its first year, as revealed in an interview with Vedhanidhi Officer.

Since its inception, the campus has expanded its offerings, introducing Classes 11 and 12 in 2000, followed by B.Ed. in 2003, B.B.S. in 2004, and M.Ed. Currently, the campus boasts a diverse array of additional programs, as confirmed by Vedaraj Lamsal. Moreover, the private sector contributes to higher education through the operation of four campuses.

Moreover, technical education is a focal point of CTEVT's vocational training programs, which are offered over a period of 18 months to three years. These programs are conducted at an agricultural campus and two community secondary schools. Additionally, efforts toward inclusive education are evident, with Tribhuvan

Secondary School offering classes for visually impaired students as part of its curriculum, as reported by Kohalpur Municipality in 2022. This multifaceted approach to education underscores Kohalpur's commitment to providing diverse learning and skill development opportunities within the community.

According to the 2021 National Census, Kohalpur encompasses 24,183 households with a total population of 101,667. Originally inhabited solely by the Tharu caste, the demographic composition of the Kohalpur region has evolved, with the Chhetri caste now comprising only 24.2 percent of the population, while the Tharu caste constitutes 20.2% (National Statistics Department, 2021). This demographic shift highlights Kohalpur's growing appeal as a hub for hill community residents.

Presently, Kohalpur boasts a plethora of government and non-governmental offices and numerous banks. Although specific dates are unavailable, the telecommunications office was inaugurated on July 20, 1995, with a staff of 5-6 employees, as recounted by Tank Acharya.

The administrative landscape of Kohalpur includes offices such as the Area Administration Office, the Area Police Office, the Area Landlord Office, and the Area Surveyor Office. Additionally, facilities like Nepal Telecom, the Electricity Office, various regional offices of federal and regional governments, the Armed Police Force, the Nepal Army's Midwest Training Academy, and the National Examination Ward contribute to the area's infrastructure. Other amenities include the Inland Revenue Office, Banke National Park Office, Health Posts, Ayurvedic Dispensary, an under-construction Regional Office of the National Bank, Vocational Training Center, Regional Office of Nepal Television, Gorkhapatra Sasthan, drinking water projects, a modern bus park, medical college, and over five private hospitals (Kohalpur Municipality, 2022).

Despite animal husbandry and agriculture serving as the primary livelihoods in Kohalpur, the region witnessed the opening of its first private agrovet around 1985, initiated by Shushil Gyawali, as per Narayan Adhikari's interview. This diversification of economic activities underscores Kohalpur's transition into a multifaceted urban center, catering to the needs of its growing population and contributing to its socioeconomic development.

Until around 1973, transportation in the Kohalpur area posed significant challenges, surpassing even remote villages in difficulty. With no viable options besides walking, accessing the market necessitated a journey to Fultegra in Nepalgunj, which now constitutes the main market within Kohalpur. Sixty to sixty-five years ago, the area comprised merely 4.5 households, with no customary land transactions practiced. Encountering residents of the hills during the journey to the Nepalgunj market was not an uncommon occurrence, and it often instilled fear in the Tharus, who had a history of conflicts with the mountain dwellers. Serious occurrences, such as the discovery of deceased

individuals like Hat Ayaka, along mountain routes, exacerbated already tense situations, prompting the Tharus to dispose of the bodies by casting them into the river. The presence of the Forest Department in Kohalpur did little to alleviate these challenges. However, with the advent of highways, land transactions commenced, spurred by the influx of buyers from hill regions. Sixty to sixty-five years ago, land in the present-day Kohalpur Bazaar area could be acquired for as much as six bighas worth 500 rupees. The custom of arranging marriages was heavily influenced by the opinions of close relatives, with little input from the individuals themselves, as evidenced by the accounts of Tharu community members.

In the contemporary context, all wards and settlements in Kohalpur are seamlessly connected by road networks. The East-West Mahendra Highway intersects the heart of the current Kohalpur municipality, enhancing accessibility and connectivity throughout the region. This transformation reflects Kohalpur's evolution from a remote and isolated enclave into a vibrant urban center characterized by enhanced infrastructure and connectivity. Similarly, Surkhet Road (Ratna Highway) traverses north to south from the central part of Kohalpur, effectively connecting nearly 50% of the municipality's land to the national highway. The remaining settlements are linked to the highway via auxiliary paved and gravel roads. The municipality has made significant strides in the development of sports, boasting a small international-level cricket ground alongside numerous small and large playgrounds. Additionally, there are 10 youth and 28 sports clubs, indicative of the community's active engagement in sports activities.

In terms of communication infrastructure, 83% of households in the municipality have access to television, 31% have computers, and 13% have Internet facilities. Internet services are available in all 15 wards of the municipality, as reported by Kohalpur Nagarailka in 2022. This robust transportation and communication network positions the Kohalpur region at an advanced development stage. Looking ahead, Kohalpur Municipality has outlined ambitious plans to further enhance its infrastructure and amenities. These include continuing the green city program, constructing a state-of-the-art bus park, operationalizing the under-construction view tower, establishing the Sawdah home, and constructing a state-level motor road connecting Chapargaudi Salyan. Insights shared by Purna Prasad Acharya in an interview serve as the basis for these forward-looking initiatives. These plans reflect a promising future for the Kohalpur region, signaling continued growth and prosperity.

## 6. Conclusion

The odyssey of Kohalpur, transitioning from a desolate outpost to a vibrant urban nucleus in Nepal, epitomizes the indomitable spirit and forward-thinking ethos of its populace. Despite the harsh conditions of the Rana period, the emergence of the Panchayati

regime kindled the spark of progress, albeit at a slow pace. However, myriad apprehensions stemming from the encircling wilderness, the specter of endemic diseases like malaria, the oppressive heat of the Terai region, and the logistical quagmire of transportation and water accessibility posed formidable impediments, dissuading prospective settlers. Nevertheless, the establishment of a primary school in Khula Chaur in 1959, followed by the inauguration of a post office in 1965, served as seminal landmarks along Kohalpur's developmental trajectory. Concurrently, the integration of Jawa Mahendra Highway and Ratna Highway with the Kohalpur region catalyzed enhanced connectivity, thereby propelling Kohalpur into the spotlight as an alluring haven for potential inhabitants. A watershed moment occurred in 1978 with the inception of a rudimentary medical facility, initially ensconced within the confines of a modest mud hut. This marked a shift in fundamental assumptions about healthcare provision for the area, signaling the beginning of a period of growth that saw Kohalpur evolve from poverty and underdevelopment to become a thriving urban center, complete with institutional hospitals and a renowned medical college. Simultaneously, the educational landscape of Kohalpur underwent a metamorphosis, witnessing the emergence of a community school in 1980, followed by the establishment of a private educational institution in 1985. In the current era of 2024, the region boasts of over 30 community schools and more than 50 institutional buildings, each functioning as a stronghold of knowledge, addressing the diverse educational needs of its inhabitants. Moreover, an array of educational initiatives spearheaded by both official and private entities, in conjunction with an agricultural campus and a technical education and vocational training center, further enriches the educational tapestry of Kohalpur. The undeniable evidence of Kohalpur's transformation is evident in the proliferation of governmental and non-governmental organizations, financial institutions, and the provision of essential amenities such as roads, electricity, internet connectivity, and television coverage in all 15 wards of the municipality. Furthermore, the recent unveiling of a state-of-the-art bus terminal exemplifies the city's unwavering dedication to continuous improvement and advancement. In summation, while Kohalpur's historical narrative as a fledgling city in Nepal may be relatively nascent, its journey toward assuming the mantle of a competent and burgeoning urban nucleus stands as an achievement of monumental proportions. Through the crucibles of perseverance, innovation, and strategic planning, Kohalpur has triumphed over adversities and emerged as a beacon of progress within the region. As the city strides steadfastly toward the future, it serves as a luminous exemplar of the transformative potency inherent in community-driven development and concerted collective endeavor. This research makes a significant academic contribution by providing a comprehensive historical analysis of

Kohalpur's urbanization, emphasizing the multifaceted factors that have driven its growth. This study highlights the innovative integration of primary data with the impact of socio-political events, offering a nuanced understanding of the urbanization process in emerging Nepali towns. This approach documents past developments and provides valuable insights into the dynamics of urban growth, contributing original perspectives to existing literature on urban development.

## Authors' Contributions

*Tara Nath Ghimire:* data collection, draft writing, and final proofreading.

*Dol Raj Kafle:* data collection, draft writing, and proofreading.

*K. C. Tej Bahadur:* field reporting, draft writing, and proofreading.

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