Chapter – I

Ethnicity and Nation-Building: An Analytical Framework

A framework can be a model, a scaffold or a structure. An analytical framework, however, is essentially a scaffold to support the proposition under consideration. Nation-building is a fascinating and fertile field of political science. From the time of Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* and Plato’s *Republic* to Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Discovery of India* and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Community*, many learned expositions have been propounded on the needs, ways and means of building or justifying nations and states. In the mainstream discourse in the media, nation-building continues to be a desirable idea, as even in Afghanistan or Iraq, to take the two most controversial examples. However, the assertion of ethnicity and ethnic identity arouses suspicion. This has made the relationship between ethnicity and nation-building rather complex and it continues to challenge scholars in the field.

Nation-building is essentially a process of unification. It involves the creation or discovery of commonalities and imagining a shared destiny. From the perspective of the proponents of unification, the rise of ethnic and regional identity is a major challenge to the process of nation-building. It becomes even more acute in multi-ethnic societies. Since most ethnic and regional movements are linked with ethnicity, the causes of their rise are inherent in the society. Preservation and protection of its identity is a natural desire of any ethnic group. A common cause for the rise of ethnic strife has been discrimination—in the sense of unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice—and consequent resistance and retaliation.

In studying the process of nation-building in Nepal, understanding of some contested terms such as identity, minority group, ethnicity, nation-state and regionalism becomes important. The conceptual framework used for the study is constructed from existing knowledge about these ideas by relating them with the complexities and
contours of nation-building. It seeks to provide the theoretical underpinning of the present study of Nepal’s nation-building process.

I.1 Ethnic Group and Ethnicity

It is a truism that the meaning and the importance of words change with the times—as the context changes, so does the implication of the terms being used. The evolution of ethnicity is an example.

The Greek word *ethnikos*, from which the term ethnic is derived, refers to: (a) nations not converted to Christianity: heathens, pagans; (b) races or large groups of people having common traits and customs; or (c) groups of an exotic primitive culture (Oxford English Dictionary 2000: 427). Ethnicity, on the other hand, as a concept is derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means nation, people, caste, tribe and such others (Danda 1991: 51). Members of ethnic groups may distinguish themselves on the basis of certain common physical-cultural characteristics. According to Frederic Barth, ethnic groups are categories of ascription, the identification of which is made by the actors themselves (Barth 1969: 51). Hence, race, tribe, caste, class language, dialect, religion, sect, territoriality, nationality, degree of aristocracy, and at times level of techno-cultural efficiency have all been used, sometimes singularly or in various combinations, to delineate ethnicity (ibid.). Ethnicity transforms into ethnic identity in various ways. Whereas the conventional view is that language plays a key role in identity formation (Tagil 1995: 15), according to Anthony D. Smith (1986: 15) a quartet of myth, memories, values and symbols forms ethnic identity. Closely related to the idea of ethnic identity are the size, composition and nature of various ethnic groups.

According to Phadnis, there are three main approaches in defining the nomenclature and size of an ethnic group, namely, objective, subjective, and syncretic or composite (Phadnis 1990: 14). The objective-subjective proponents of ethnic identity attributes differ in their emphasis on structural vis-à-vis socio-psychological dimensions. An objective definition assumes that though no specific attribute is invariably associated with all ethnic categories, there must be some distinguishing cultural features that clearly separate one group of people from another, features such as language,
territory, religion, colour, diet, or dress (Brass 1991: 18). The objective definition claims that cultural markers are closely, if not inseparably, connected with ethnic identity. According to H. Issacs, “ethnicity” is made of what a person is born with or acquires at birth (Issacs 1975: 37). The problem with the objective definition is, however, that it is extremely difficult to determine the boundaries of ethnic categories in this way (Brass 1991: 18). A number of scholars have maintained that a cluster of markers becomes crucial in identity selection and persistence.

In contrast, the subjectivists maintain that while ethnic identity manifests itself through cultural markers, one’s feeling of identity as part of a group as well as the group’s feeling of being a distinct identity and its recognition by others defines ethnicity (Phadnis 1990: 14). The subjectivists place greater emphasis on the belief of ethnic groups in common descent or memories of colonization or migration. The difficulty with subjective definitions is, however, that they make it difficult to answer the basic question of how a group arrives at subjective self-consciousness in the first place (Brass 1991: 18). The main exponents of the subjectivist view are Max Weber, Nathan Glazer, Daniel P. Moynihan and Saundra Wallman.

Facilitating an understanding of the process of the evolution and growth of an ethnic group is the syncretic view, according to which an ethnic group can be defined as a historically formed aggregate of people having a real or imaginary association with a specified territory, a shared culture of beliefs and values connoting its distinctiveness in relation to similar groups and recognized as such by others (Phadnis 1990: 14). According to the syncretists, an ethnic group has five components: (a) a subjective belief in real or assured historical antecedents, (b) a symbolic or real geographic centre, (c) shared cultural emblems such as race, language, religion, dress and diet, (d) self-ascribed awareness of distinctiveness and belonging to the group, and (e) recognition by others of the group differentiation (ibid.).

Thus, an ethnic group encompasses the attributes of a presumed or fictive sense of relatedness and kindred-like feeling, which is perpetrated by myths and memories and reinforced by common understanding concerning the meaning of a set of symbols. Smith focuses on ethnicity as the precursor of nationalism, and gives an explanation of the transition from ethnic identities and loyalties to those relating to nations (Smith 1986: 98).
According to Cynthia H. Enloe, an ethnic group is “largely biologically self-perpetuating. Marriage, for instance, has significant implications for the survival of an ethnic group but not survival of an economic interest group” (Enloe 1973: 17). However, the social ramification of marriage, not its genetic consequences, affects an ethnic group. Ethnic groups characteristically share clusters of beliefs and values. One value held in common by a number of people is insufficient to sustain an ethnic community. Value clusters find expression through associational forms. Ethnic groups possess communal institutions that parallel those of the larger society: they care for individual welfare, train leaders, articulate interests and even provide police protection. Ethnic groups generate political organizations more readily than other sorts of groups do (ibid.).

Ethnic groups also have internal differentiation. The width of the gap between intra-communal statuses influences the community’s political capacity to deal with outside pressures. Status distinctions may be widened or narrowed by developments affecting the larger society or by changes emanating from the community members themselves. Class tensions within an ethnic group can frustrate its own political development and that of the nation as well (ibid.: 18).

In the political arena, ethnicity sometimes becomes a platform for the mobilization of minority social groups who want to enhance their bargaining position vis-à-vis the “dominant” group—the one exercising influence or control—in the given context. Thus, ethnicity may be viewed both as a device as well as a focus for group mobilization by its leadership through the select use of ethnic symbols of socio-cultural and politico-economic purposes.

I.2 Minority Group

The term “minority” has many connotations. According to Encyclopedia Britannica Online, a minority is

a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group. As the term is used in the social sciences, this subordinancy is the chief defining characteristic of a minority group. As such, minority status does not necessarily correlate to population. In some cases one or more so-called minority groups may have a population
many times the size of the dominating group, as was the case in South Africa under apartheid (c. 1950–91).

By this definition, minority is a political category rather than a numerical one. It acquires significance by getting recognized as “a group of people who differ racially or politically from a larger group of which it is a part” because it is only then that it can engage in bargaining for a better deal for itself.

Richard Schermerhorn identifies “dominant” group vis-à-vis “subordinate” groups. While the “dominant” group is composed of “majority group” and “elite”, the “subordinate group” includes “mass subjects” and “minority group”, according to their size and power. Those groups that have the maximum influence in state power and privilege to enjoy the state resources are called dominant groups (Schermerhorn 1996: 17; see Figure 1.1).

It is critical to distinguish between national minorities and ethnic minorities because their political striking powers vary vastly. Being territorially concentrated, the national minorities, whether anchored to religion, language or tribe, are likely to demand political autonomy within a federal framework. Refusal to concede their demand may propel secessionism, which poses the most severe threat to the process of consolidating the nation-state. Will Kymlicka writes in Federalism and Secession: East and West (Maiz 2005: 117) that “when national minorities form clear majorities in their historic homeland, and particularly when they have some prior history of self-government, it is not clear that there is any realistic alternative to TA (territorial autonomy) or multination federalism”. Based on this logic, conceding maximum possible autonomy to national minorities is a credible strategy in creating nation-states. Ethnic minorities, being territorially dispersed, lack the resources required to demand a share in political power. However, they are prone to demand an adequate share in governance as well as insist on the maintenance of their cultural identity. Whether conceding these demands would avoid their alienation from the polity and society remains to be conclusively proven.
Figure 1.1. Schermerhorn’s classification of dominant and subordinate groups

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Groups</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Power</th>
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<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Majority group</td>
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<td>Group B</td>
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<th>Subordinate Groups</th>
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<td>Group C</td>
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<td>Group D</td>
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I. 3 Nation-State vis-à-vis Ethno-Nationalism

Nation is one of those popular terms that are easy to understand but difficult to define, hence inherently susceptible to multiple interpretations. In common understanding, a nation is an ethnicity with a territory with or without political autonomy. But nation also stands for state in some uses. It is important to see how this term emerged as one of the most potent forces of political mobilization.

The term “nation” has been derived from the Latin word natio meaning birth or race (Phadnis 1990: 20). Later, the term expanded to describe the inhabitants of a country. The “one nation, one state” formula encompassed a rather liberal definition of the term nation. The term referred to a large number of peoples who could be distinguished by certain common characteristics, unified territory, common language, common ancestry, common culture, common history, common outlook of the world and society, and a sense of community through which it felt different from the world around it (ibid.: 21).

Stalin’s definition of a nation treats it as “a historically constituted stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (ibid.). Ernest Renan has defined nation as “a soul, spiritual principle”. According to Renan, a nation is a large scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifice that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past: it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. (Renan 1990: 19)
It is a cliché to say that nation is not the same as state, but the distinction is often lost when nation-states are being discussed. With emphasis on territory and authority, state is primarily a politico-legal concept, whereas nation carries psycho-cultural connotations. A nation may exist without a state. A nation-state refers to a situation in which a nation has its own state along with political sovereignty. In reality, most countries of the world have failed to blend nation and state into an inseparable whole because of their multi-ethnic character and can hardly be described as “nation state”. The ethnicist views nation as a large politicized ethnic group, defined by a common culture and alleged descent (ibid.). A multi-ethnic state is, therefore, viewed as a “multinational” state.

To look into the historical roots of the word, nation was once used to designate groups of students from the same geographic locations attending Europe’s medieval universities during the Middle Ages. Because students from the same regions often took sides as a group against students from different regions in scholastic debates, the word “nation” came to mean an elite community of scholars who shared an opinion or had a common purpose.

During the early sixteenth century, the word “nation” began to be applied to a whole population of people from a particular geographic locale rather than to student elite. Entire populations were elevated and made into the bearer of sovereignty, the basis of political solidarity, and the ultimate object of loyalty. One’s national identity hence came from being a member of a certain people, which was defined as homogeneously distinct in language, culture, race, and history from other peoples. Thus, “nation” came to have its contemporary meaning: “a uniquely sovereign people readily distinguishable from other uniquely defined sovereign people who are bound together by a sense of solidarity, common culture, language, religion, and geographical location.”

Previously, scholars thought that national identity was a natural human emotion and that the world was fundamentally divided into nations based on common primordial cultures, languages, religions and histories. They saw nationalism as the awakening of long-dormant feelings of national identity. Recent scholars, however (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990), view nations not as natural and primordial but as historically constructed; that is, imagined or created. They view nation as more or less
consciously invented in order to create the cultural, sociological, and psychological conditions necessary to increase the politico-military power of the sovereign territorial state. The development of a full-blown national identity that overrides regional, class, and religious loyalties requires systemic effort from the state. Creating a sense of nationhood requires breaking down the individual’s attachment to local languages and cultures in order to create a common national culture (language, values, and norms of behaviour) that inculcates in the state’s subject population a common national frame of reference across space (i.e. territory) and time (i.e. single national history). Therefore, initially, the creation of a nation was closely connected to the needs of the territorial state. By the middle of the nineteenth century, intellectuals across Europe were defining nationalism as the highest human value. Nationalism became an ideology in its own right. Its basic tenet was the idea that a state should share a common culture and be governed only by individuals of the same culture.

State-building as a theory was primarily designed to address the problem of establishing a “political community” from out of otherwise diverse and heterogeneous bodies of people through deliberate political action, that is to say, through the “development and expansion of its authority”. In a heterogeneous society, the prescribed modality of bringing such a territorially embedded “trans-ethnic” political community into existence was, as Deutsch put it, “assimilation”. Ironically, as history refuses to follow any linear and irreversible logic, it is often forced to follow the same logic, basing it on the aggressive advocacy for assimilation of smaller groups and communities by a few overzealous organizations claiming to represent the larger ones.

Unlike in the twentieth-century state-building exercise, ethnic and cultural minorities will be the critical determinant of such “conformity and obedience” in the twenty-first century. Therefore, the state-building agenda today remains as important as the state-reducing one (Fukuyama 2004: 7).

This transformation of religion into nationalist ideology is all the more convenient because nationalists can utilize the powerful and tenacious loyalties which a faith held in common for centuries creates (Kedourie 1990: 71). A multi-ethnic state to survive needs to balance the political aspiration with the national aspiration, be it language, culture, economic demand or politics. It is difficult for a state to cling on to the
primordial identity of a nation-state and sideline the political demands merely by swearing on national unity.

The invention of a nation required hard scholarly work: dictionaries of national languages had to be compiled, a body of national poetry, literature, theatre, music, opera, painting and popular festivals had to be created and, most significantly, a distinction was necessary from other national cultures as well as deviant cultures within the state that resisted identity with the nation as intellectuals had fashioned it. Although the task of inventing the nation rested with intellectuals, it was in good part through propaganda and systemic political education by the state that the local identities of the subject population were shifted to the newly imagined nation.

Ethnic nationalism bases its legitimacy on a common language, religion and shared historical experience and/or myth of shared kinship, which are used as criteria to include or exclude individuals from the nation. An important factor in these power struggles has been “ethnicity”. Ethnicity in the context of national aspiration becomes an identity that people adopt under the disruptive conditions created by the imposition of the colonial state, the most important being urbanization. Under these conditions, ethnicities based on language, race, and religion are constructed by nationalist leaders and compliant followers in order to organize political power within the context of the colonial state. After independence, ethnicity has continued to provide alternative identities around which political life is organized.

Given such tendency to equate nation with the people, the principle of popular sovereignty, as evoked by Locke and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), was lodged in the people or the nation. With such a view, nation and state merged. However, such definitions tended to be far general. Multi-ethnicity is a socio-political phenomenon in most civic societies and in the present century inter-ethnic cleavages, competition, and conflict appear to have acquired a marked intensity. In the process, ethnic mobilization has posed varied challenges to many “developed” or “developing” states. The patterns of ethnic group mobilization have been complex and the demands vary in an affirmative way.

The idea of nation-state was conceived in Europe, particularly in Western Europe after the First World War. The model soon was transplanted by the imperial powers
on their dependencies and colonies. The transplantation was speeded up at the time of
decolonization after the Second World War. The newly liberated countries of Asia
and Africa mainly underwent three phases, as follows:

a) The first phase in the actual decolonization process itself, when power was
   transferred to local elite groups.
b) The second phase, the period of nation-making, was strengthening national
   sovereignty, creating national culture and national identity and achieving
   national integration. In doing so, the euphoria generated, played down and
   wished away internal diversity and social cleavages in favour of the primacy
   of a nation-state.
c) The third phase was the eruption of ethnic conflicts around the issues of
   language, race, religion and territory. (Tambiah 1992: 17–18)

Ethno-nationalism is a familiar coinage in contemporary social science. According to
Worsely, “Nationalism is also a form of ethnicity ... it is the institutionalization of
one particular ethnic identity by attaching it to the state” (1984: 247). In the view of
Connor “… self-differentiating ethnic groups are … nations, loyalty to the ethnic
group, therefore should logically be called nationalism” (1994: 40). That is, if
ethnicity gets attached to state it becomes nationalism for Worsely and loyalty to
ethnic groups becomes nationalism for Connor. Neither of these conceptualizations is,
however, capable of providing observable differentiating indicators for nationalism
and ethnicity.

Eriksen recognizes the distinction between nationals and ethnies but he attests the
familiar position that a successful nation should have its own state and unsuccessful
nationalisms are designated as ethnies. “Many of the ethnies condemned to such a
fate eventually vanish through migration, extermination or cultural assimilation”
(Eriksen 1991: 265). Moynihan, too, distinguishes between ethnic groups and nations.
He writes:

[I]t is helpful to distinguish between ethnic group and nation, between
ethnicity and nationality. It is a distinction of a degree. The nation is the
highest form of the ethnic group, denoting a subjective state of mind as
regards ancestry, but also, almost always an objective claim to forms of
territorial autonomy ranging from a regional assembly to full blown
independence. (Moynihan 1993: 4–5).
That is, Moynihan too holds that the distinction between nationality and ethnicity is one of degree and not kind. All authors irrespective of the differences in their perspectives agree that territory is common to a nation in that a nation cannot be visualized without a shared common homeland—ancestral or adopted—and a shared culture. In contrast, all agree that an ethnie has shared culture but not a shared homeland. That is, a nation is a cultural community in its homeland and an ethnie is a cultural community outside its homeland. Ethnicity is a product of dissociation between territory and culture and nation emerges when the two are in unison.

This conceptual proposal is anchored to a vital distinction between multi-nation and poly-ethnic states (Kymlicka 1995). Multi-nation states contain national groups that have historically rooted territorial claims; they are “nations without states” (Guibernau 1999). Ethnic groups are products of what Papastergiadis (2000) calls the “turbulence of migration”. The South Asian states have both national and ethnic groups within their territories, which makes the task of “nation-building” particularly vexatious.

The theoretical implications of the conceptualization should be noted here. First, all homelands are national, be they ancestral or adopted. Second, the notion of ethnic homeland is a contradiction in terms, as ethnicity is a product of dissociation and/or attenuation between territory and culture. Third, a cultural community may be divided into a national group and an ethnic group. Fourth, the national homeland of a people could be divided between two states. Fifth, most states have both national groups (those who identify themselves with the national territory) and ethnic groups (those who do not identify with the national territory and/or those whose claims as nationals are contested). Sixth, a national group can be ethnified through colonization of its ancestral territory and an ethnic group can nationalize itself by adopting a territory as its homeland if the earlier occupants accept the claim. Finally, a national group can be subjected to a process of ethnification by the state and/or the cultural mainstream by defining them as outsiders to the polity and society.

The term nation-building implies conflation of state and nation; while a state has to be deliberately created, nation is a felt and not a built entity. An overwhelming majority of writers conflate state and nation (Deutsch 1969; Smith 1986) and assume that
nation-state naturally emerges out of their fusion. But as Nielsson has shown in numerous cases, they have not fused (1985: 27–56). While there are several authors who claim to distinguish between state and nation (Aron 1966; Barker 1948; Steton-Watson 1977) but do not adhere to this distinction consistently, there are some who do so.

Rejai and Enole observed succinctly:

“[S]tate” ... is primarily a political legal concept, whereas “nation” is primarily psycho-cultural. Nation and state may exist independently of one another, a nation may exist without a state, and a state may exist without a nation. When the two coincide, the result is a nation-state (1969: 43).

They also suggest that it is not necessary for ethnic groups to give up their identities and loyalties in order to be incorporated into the state-nations of developing countries. Similarly, Connor (1994) made the conceptual distinction between state and nation. He has rightly castigated those who have used these terms interchangeably.

The unstated assumption behind the conflation of state and nation, or the unintended consequence of it, is that the population of a state ought to be homogeneous, and its citizens should be nationals. The conflation attests the fusion of citizenship and nationality. If non-nationals exist, either they should abandon their cultural identity and assimilate themselves or they should leave the territory of the nation. As history has shown, this pathological obsession can develop into jingoism, leading to genocide and/or the systematic liquidation of the cultural identity of minorities (Oommen 1986: 53–74). Therefore, the plea for avoiding conflation of state and nation should not be dismissed as a fetish for conceptual purity; it has profound implications for collective life.

In current usage of the term, “A modern state is a nation state in the sense that the population shares the characteristics of citizenship and nationhood. A nation-state is not necessarily based on homogeneous ethno-national group of people. Very few modern states are nation-states in this more narrow sense” (Caramani 2008: 607). But the purist idea continues to have its adherents.

“Ethno-nationalism” originated as a regional reaction against the excessive centralizing and homogenizing policies of the nation-state. Johann Gottfried Herder
was against the aggressive nationalism of nation-state and denounced every form of centralization of political power and coercion and violence that accompanied it. Herder’s ethno-nationalism held that the whole cultural life of a people is shaped from within the particular stream of traditions that come from a common historical experience. As one scholar (Yinger 1994: 343) has correctly intuited, the question is no more of “assimilation versus ethnicity” but of “assimilation and ethnicity”.

1. 4 Regionalism

The idea of geographic regionalism as an alternative to ethno-nationalism allures nation-builders. But regional movements emerge in different contexts and for various reasons and have their own limitations. The concept of “regionalism” has come to denote differently according to the dynamics of a particular situation. The term “regionalism” has been defined as “the transfer of decision-making authority from central government to intermediate bodies which stand between the central and local governments and have territorial jurisdiction over a region or portion of a state” (Heywood 2000: 257).

Regionalism takes different forms such as devolution in administrative or legislative powers or it may involve federalism where regional or provincial bodies constitutionally exercise and share sovereignty. Regionalism has become a powerful political movement since the 1960s with the rise of ethnic and cultural nationalism and the decline of nation-state’s capacity to address diverse groups of people. Critics of regionalism point out that regionalism threatens the nation’s territorial integrity by strengthening regional loyalties and identities (ibid.: 258).

Regionalism is the favoured mode of devolution of power in “federalism by desegregation”, but its effectiveness remains to be tested in multi-ethnic societies. Regionalism also has a different meaning of bringing countries together on a “regional” forum such as ASEAN or SAARC, but that has little to do with the politics of ethnicity and nation-building and lies in the arena of geo-strategy and economics of trade.
I. 5 Perspectives of Identity

According to the dictionary meaning of the term, identity is “the state or fact of remaining the same one or ones, under varying aspects or conditions”. Such a definition puts identity under a fixed category. But in political meaning, identity is often constructed—built around the idea of ethnicity, nationalism, group, gender, etc. Since nationality is the notion of “self” versus the “other”—the question of identity formation, recognition and assertion becomes even more important while discussing nation-building.

Drawing from her experience of studying identity and violent conflict in Sri Lanka, Camila Otjuela posits that ethnic identity is more about consciousness and communication of difference than about difference as such, and she quotes Katherine Verdery to substantiate her point: “Identities are crucial tags by which state-makers keep track of their political subjects; one cannot keep track of people who are one thing at one point, and another thing at another” (Otjuela 2008: 66). Such an approach gives exclusivity and constancy to identity. But multiple identity of the same person based on his/her group affiliations, ethnicity, class, caste, gender, nationality and citizenship is as much a fact as the dynamism of identity formation. In the case of Sri Lanka, Otjuela proposes that exclusive identities may have been built through the census exercise by the British, a tool that Anderson recognizes in his seminal work (ibid.) on ways communities are imagined.

I.6 Nation-Building

Voices are raised against discrimination and demands are put forward for autonomy and secession when ethnic groups see them as issues for bargaining, negotiation, and contention with other groups and institutions of power and authority at various levels. Self-determination is the guiding proposition for autonomist as well as secessionist demands. In the case of the former, the unit concerned may stake its claim on an ethnic basis; in the latter, the demand for legitimacy is sought on the plea of the ethnic homogeneity of the contending units as already being a “nation”. In this sense, ethnicity and nation-building are closely intertwined, especially when an identifiable territory is attached with the idea of an ethnicity.
In multi-ethnic societies, one discerns two simultaneous and ongoing processes of nation-building: the formation of an inter-ethnic composite of a homogeneous national personality with a secular outlook through the state apparatus, and the transformation of an ethnic group into an ethnic community as part of a nation. The former can be described as the building of a state-centric nation; the latter as an ethnic nation. The experiences of nation-building through these processes have much in common. However, while state-centred nation is a territory-bound concept, this need not be so with an ethnic nation as it may include diaspora as well.

The biggest hurdle to nation-building in South Asia is the obsolete notion of nation-state of West European vintage. Three problems are inherent in the institution of nation-state, all of which militate against cultural diversity within its territory. First is the manner in which the principle of national self-determination is practised. The principle is utterly problematic "because the people cannot decide until somebody decides who are the people", to recall Jennings' (1956: 56) astute observation. Nation-state implies mono-culturism, which denies people-hood to the weak and the minorities; in fact, only the hegemonic majority enjoys people-hood in nation-states. Second, nation-state ineluctably links citizenship and nationality; citizenship is conferred based on membership in the nation. Cultural diversity within the state territory requires decoupling of citizenship and nationality, facilitating the notion of multicultural citizenship to crystallize (Kymlicka 1995). Third, nation-states relentlessly pursue the ideal of creating culturally homogeneous societies, but generally fail. "[O]nly a tiny proportion of the world's distinctive religious, linguistic and cultural groupings have formed their own states, while precious few of the world's existing states have approximated the homogeneity and commitment conjured up by the label 'nation-state' " (Tilly 1994: 137). Fourth, as Habermas famously observed, "Citizenship was never conceptually tied to national identity" (1992: 4).

Admittedly, there is a vast gap between the ideal implied in the notion of nation-state and the reality; there is no isomorphism between concept and reality. Tilly suggests the concept of national state in place of nation-state because it can contain cultural diversity within its territory. He defines national states as "... relatively centralized, differentiated and autonomous organizations successfully claiming priority in the use of force within large, contiguous and clearly bounded territories" (Tilly 1990: 34).
This conceptualization, while it accounts for the structure of the state, misses the sentiment of the nation. Therefore, Oommen (1997) suggests that the designation national state should refer to such states which consciously nurture cultural diversity within their territory and endorse cultural pluralism, which is dignified coexistence of cultural communities, as a value. The distinction between nation-state and national state is not cosmetic but substantive in that the first pursues cultural homogeneity as its ideal but the second is committed to cultural pluralism as its goal. It is Oommen's view that there is a need for and it is possible to build national states in South Asia because South Asian states are not only culturally diverse but most are state-renouncing nations. Further, in pursuance of the distinction between nation and ethnie, it is also necessary to recognize the distinction between national and ethnic minorities; while the former are territorially anchored, the latter are spatially dispersed. This distinction has profound implications for building national states.

There are five basic issues to be tackled in building democratic national states. They are income disparity, gender discrimination, social hierarchy, cultural heterogeneity and externalization of minorities. The first two are universal problems. The third, namely, social hierarchy, is specific to South Asia, particularly to Nepal. But since the present focus is on ethnic and national issues it is equally important to focus on cultural heterogeneity occasioned by religious and linguistic communities. The tribal communities too fall within the scope of this discussion as they are invariably national minorities, that is, territorially anchored linguistic communities.

As regards language, while the one officially recognized language in all those cases where it is applicable is the numerically strongest one, in Pakistan it is a numerically weak language, the mother tongue of a mere 7.6 per cent of the state's population. The official recognition accorded to Urdu is based on the perceived association between that language and Islam in the Indian subcontinent.

The tendency to anchor state formation to religion in South Asia is reinforced through the differing cut-off points of history they invoke in spite of their common civilizational history. Thus "nation-building" is neither a New Revolution nor even a New Beginning but the rediscovery of an appropriate past depending upon who constitutes the national mainstream, that is, the religious majority (Oommen 1990b: 17–33). The differing layers of history invoked by different states for their "nation-
building” influence their policies towards religious collectivities. These policies in turn legitimize the cognitions about nationals and ethnies, that is, insiders and outsiders.

State policies often proffer identity assertions by particular religious-linguistic collectivities staking their claim on specific territory as their exclusive homeland, often ignoring the equally legitimate claims of other collectivities, that is co-nationals. Thus, the conflicts are not only between nationals and ethnies but also between national collectivities, one of them being subjected to ethnification. These claims are invariably designated as “anti-national” by the state and the cultural mainstream whereas in the perception of the deprived these are utterly national claims.

But the fundamental flaw with the very idea of nation-building is what Hobsbawm identifies as the concept of resistance built into it.

For state nationalism, real or (as in the case of monarchs) invented for convenience, was a double-edged strategy. As it mobilized some inhabitants, it alienated others—those who did not belong, or wish to belong, to the nation identified with the state. In short, it helped to define the nationalities excluded from the official nationality by separating out those communities which, for whatever reason, resisted the official public language and ideology. (Hobsbawm 1992: 150)

This creates challenges for nation-building that may even negate the entire exercise and lead to fragmentation.

I. 7 Challenges to Nation-Building

Nation-building is considered desirable for the stability of state-nation, but its challenges are multifarious. Different countries face different kinds of challenges, but some are common to most such enterprises. One such is cultural pluralism seen as a threat.

Cultural pluralism emanates from factors such as language, religion, societal ethos and historical heritage. The insistence on a national language, national anthem, and national flower or animal is very much a part of the nation-building project of countries in South Asia. The diversity of the South Asian states is accepted as a reality but the nation-building projects adopted by different states have largely overlooked
such obvious pluralities within their midst and sought to emphasize a majoritarian framework, favouring some particular culture over others. In all these states "nationalism" wears majoritarian garbs and masquerades as a natural and historical construct; an overarching idea that encompasses plural cultures and ethnicities. Nepal, for example, downplayed its cultural pluralism, and the Hindu national ethos was projected as Nepali nationalism, since Nepal's cultural ethos had a dimension of Hill Brahmin-dominant socio-religious factors. The end result in such situations is that apprehensions about the national identity of the ethnic groups become an inherent problem where there is a resemblance between the cultural identities of the former with those of the neighbouring states.

1.8 Nation-Building and Security

The nation-building method has essentially rested with the security of the nation-state. States believe that nation-building approaches should essentially compress disparate identities to a singular whole and that such forced oneness would automatically ensure their unity and integrity and guarantee against fissiparous tendencies. Some states emphasize a mono-national culture or a dominant culture that projects the uniqueness of the nation-state. However, emphasis on a single culture, language and religion as national has inevitably met with further challenges. States, viewing autonomy and provincialism as essential challenges to their security, welcome devolution on the basis of administrative units more than devolution or provincial demarcation based on ethnicity.

The national security dimension also makes states hesitant to give autonomy or self-governance to areas bordering international boundaries. Resettlement of population, especially those who are considered as loyal to the nation-state, has been one of the methods apart from centralized administration and use of the coercive mechanism of the state to deal with areas seen as troublesome. Nepal as a case has been distrustful of the Tarai people, and has settled hill people in Tarai by generous grant of land. Another dimension to state security has arisen out of the issue of minorities, some of them considered to be opposed to the creation of the nation-state.

The military recruitment process in these countries also manifests the concept of the "other". In Nepal again, the people from hill areas dominate the armed forces. Though
the concept of martial race is often cited by military historians for recruitment from particular areas, other ethnic groups do feel discriminated against in the matter. The whole process, very subtly, invents the “other”, which is a derivative of the nation-building process in these states.

I. 9 The “Enemy Within” Discourse and Nation-Building: Construction of the “Other”

Nation-building approaches in South Asia, as elsewhere in the world, are influenced by historical developments. Such dimensions of history, where the “other” is portrayed as “invader” and therefore not as son of the soil as such—lead to the phenomenon where the culture and heritage of the “other” is treated as being not part of the national ethos or as being indigenous. In Nepal, religion and the Nepali language are central to nation formation. But in this conception, the Tarai people are portrayed more as alien and it is the Hindu culture of the hills that forms the core. Since such nationalism is “constructed”, the circumstances of the creation of the constructed history of the nation-state become important.

Nation-states need a national history glorifying the freedom struggle and sacrifices to emphasize the trouble faced during state formation and the need to preserve the state through unity. In this kind of history, the contribution of some ethnic groups receives greater attention and emphasis than that of all others. In the process it legitimizes the selection of particular symbols as “national symbols”, which have an essentially majoritarian character. The post-colonial states of South Asia reflect this strand in the method they have adopted as a part of their approach to nation-building. Though the states of South Asia adopted multi-culturism as an “ipso facto” factor in nation-building, having a nation that seeks to draw its sustenance from majoritarian symbols was sure to alienate and antagonize the plural ethnic groups. Similar styles of nation-building by the elite make the states vulnerable to minority assertion and weaken the fabric of national unity.

I. 10 The Ideal Approach to Nation-Building

States have adopted various approaches in their nation-building efforts, but two methods stand out—integrationist and assimilative—or a mix of the two. There is a
substantial debate regarding the approaches to nation-building in South Asia, and the way various states have dealt with their nation-building process. The states of South Asia have adopted the model of language and religion in their nation-building approaches. Posing a challenge to this process are economic disparity, marginalization of ethno-linguistic groups and their political alienation. In the process of nation-building, the state marginalized the majority in defining what constituted “national” and “peripheral”. In the dysfunctional state structure in Nepal the Janjatis and the Tarai people are marginalized, prompting them to take up arms against the centrist state (Hari Prasad Bhattarai 2004: 293). The political and economic grievances have further sharpened the divergence between the elite and the state. Nation-states in South Asia, especially the smaller ones, have been reluctant to grant political autonomy to the peripheral groups. The integrative model of adopting language and religion as approaches to nation-building does not in itself have the potential to challenge the nation-state; it is political grievances accompanied by economic marginalization which have challenged the multi-ethnic states of South Asia, giving the conflict the colour of ethnic strife.

Devolution of power could be a model to deal with ethnic grievances that pose a serious challenge to nation-building. Considering that the boundaries of South Asia crisscross ethnic groups, a federal structure is an uncomfortable one for the smaller states to live with. At the same time, the Indian model of a federal structure with a strong and unitary centre could be a healthy model to adopt. A multi-ethnic federating unit would make the states of South Asia less suspicious of their ethnic minorities. Constitutional recognition of languages is also important; instead of having a single national language, other competing languages need to be made a part of the constitution.

Uneven economic development across different ethnicities has impinged on the nation-building process. The creation of smaller provinces also had the dimension of economic development.

There is also a need to make a constitutional arrangement for provincial development. Where exploitation of one group by another is perceived, the state can make special arrangements to ensure an egalitarian outcome. For the administration of tribal-
dominated areas within the state in India, for example, the constitution makes it mandatory for the states to give priority to the local people.

Advancement of multiculturism and state patronage to relatively less evolved languages is a supplementary condition for building a multi-ethnic nation. In Oommen’s view, which deserves close attention, the state needs to accept the multilingualistic aspect of the nation-state before a framework of solution can be arrived at. The multi-religious character of the nation-state also needs to be recognized as a fundamental reality, in the light of which a model of secularism with a federal structure would be important. Most South Asian states have adopted state religion as a symbol of nationalism. The underlying parameter has been that it is important to keep the majority community intact and the minorities due to their numerical disadvantage cannot pose a threat to the state structure. Among the majority communities the fault lines are also based on caste, community and sectarian differences. An equal citizenship would bind the citizen to the state. To deal with possible issues of dispute between the centre and the states adequate constitutional mechanisms need to be evolved. The states in South Asia need to take their multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-religious dimensions as their inherent strength rather than considering them as weaknesses. This becomes particularly important in the context of the trends of globalization (Oommen 1997: 27–35).

I. 11 Globalization and National Identity: Impact on Nation-Building

“Globalization” being the operative word of the current trade, economic and diplomatic trends, it is difficult to discuss nation-building without exploring the impact of the phenomenon upon national politics. Globalization is associated with a certain degree of discomfort. The state had unwittingly wanted to insulate its people from the influence of other cultures while constructing the nation. Whereas the states have exhibited some unease and have talked of cultural intrusion by foreign satellite channels, the revolution in communication network has also revolutionized the conceptualization of nation as being exclusive. In South Asia, the satellite beams have brought people closer to the extent of educating people about the similarity between people belonging to disparate cultures and different nations. The frequent interactions through internet or meeting at multilateral forums have exposed people to the diverse
yet similar cultural heritage. Atomized or insulated conceptions are no longer accepted as sacrosanct. For states, the perceived threat from this development is not to their territorial integrity per se but to the conception of nation or communal representation of history. The exposure to and interaction with the globalized world has led to the spread of liberal values at one level and reassertion of religious-cultural identity at another. Within state structures the indigenous people and the marginalized class are demanding more rights and recognition of their cultural attributes. Politics, which were hitherto monopolized by a few elite groups, are gradually becoming the domain of the marginalized communities, and a new class of politicians is emerging from these communities. In South Asia, however, this trend is tempered by the entrenched feudalism, centrist state structures and authoritarian political systems.

I. 12 Does Democratization Challenge the Nation-State or Encourage the Assertion of Ethnic Identity?

Democracy encourages the practice of equal citizenship. The emphasis is on voting, participation and election. In the process, this popular participation to a large extent develops a kind of stake in the system. The idea of equality also encourages a citizen to assert his identity at par with others. Democracy provides the space for ethnic assertion and demand formation. The demand for equitable say and other political and economic rights may be formed on the basis of ethnicity, and there is a mode for the articulation of demand and negotiation. Democratization and devolution of power to the periphery would remain significant in the process of nation-building. Rather than making constitutional provisions for the marginalized groups the state needs to take affirmative action for uplift of the marginalized class. Employment, equitable distribution of wealth and developing a stake in the political system could be important components of the nation-building process in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and culturally diverse states of South Asia. Young rightly asserts, “Although identity is subjective, multiple and situationally fluid, it is not infinitely fluid. Cultural properties of the individual do constrain the possible range of choice of social identities” (Young 1976: 43). But the challenge is in striking a balance. With the borders softening, various countries need to focus on the economic aspect and the political dimension rather than on establishing cultural hegemony. The various insecurities felt by nation-states have inhibited arriving at such a balance.
I. 13 Strategies of Nation-Building

The problems of minority rights, ethnic rights, fundamental rights and human rights have been the concerns of nations across the world. Some nations have approached these concerns first by military might and then by constitutional reform and sometimes with a combination of the two running parallel. Military solutions have often been short-lived, and several years later ethnic conflicts returned to the bargaining table to work out a constitutional arrangement (Marasinghe 1998: 137). However, strategies of nation-building have to be situation-specific; as experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan show, there is no reliable template that can be scientifically replicated.

Lawoti suggests that federalism “reduces the level of ethnic conflicts”. Federalism is defined as “a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions”. Federalism provides autonomy to different groups by dividing power between them. Most plural democracies such as the United States, Germany, India, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Italy, Brazil, South Africa, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Argentina have a federal system of government, though the degree of federalism or “decentralization” of power differs from country to country. Power distribution varies from “centralized federalism”, “decentralized federalism” to “semi- or quasi-federalism”.

Nepal, despite its huge diversity in terms of language, culture, religion, geography, etc., has remained unitary and centralized. In the past few years, political parties such as Nepal Sadbhavana Party, Rastriya Janmukti Party, etc. and some scholars have argued for federalism in Nepal (Neupane 2000; Adhikari 2001; Bohora 2002; Lawoti 2003). Autonomy and equality have been the major basis of their argumentation.

In considering the different models of federalism, the Swiss model has been recommended by some civil society activists in Kathmandu to be the most suitable for Nepal because Swiss federalism is based on “a territorial form of separation of powers”. The Swiss approach to possible internal conflict is based on the principle of “federalist power sharing”. The principle “tries to guard the rights of minorities as far as possible and to grant them as large a degree of autonomy as possible”. The
referendum provision of the Swiss Constitution provides individuals and groups of all kinds opportunities for participation in the political process. The strength of the model in dealing with potential conflicts is characterized “not by confrontation between potential conflict groups but by the search for common interests and common viewpoints”. Again, the legislature is elected “according to the principle of proportional representation which ensures adequate political representation of all minorities”. Another important feature of the Swiss model is the existence of the “principle of concordancy”, i.e., “a competition in which all are conscious of striving for the same goals, have made it possible to pursue a common policy despite the existence of widely different views and a great number of different political parties”.

I. 14 Conclusion

In this chapter a framework of analysis has been constructed. These deliberations are based on a review of literature, personal communications and interactions with stakeholders. But the key question still remains: why and how do ethnic and regional movements emerge? The patterns of ethnic group mobilization have been complex and the demands are varied, ranging from protest against discrimination, and struggle for autonomy and secession. Self-determination is the guiding proposition for the “autonomist” as well as secessionist demands.

Ethnic conflict is often an integral part or a product of the process of modernization. Exponents of modernization theory argue that all ethnic groups of society do not equally enjoy the benefits of modernization, and inequality causes antagonism between groups. If one group exploits all others in the name of “nationalism”, the so-called nationalism may degenerate into a kind of internal colonialism. Such a state of affairs generates disruptions and creates discrepancies between the advanced and “retarded” groups and regions.

In a society where some ethnic groups are a minority, the chances of their being discriminated against by the ethnic majority dominating the state institutions are generally greater. Where the ethnic minorities are concentrated in particular regions the state faces both advantages and disadvantages in dealing with them. Spatially concentrated ethnic groups are easier to mobilize for an ethnicity-oriented movement but the state has got the upper hand in containing such ethnic unrest since it is
localized; unrest among scattered ethnic minorities pose a greater difficulty for the state to control.

Most countries of the world have failed to blend nation and state into an inseparable whole because of their multi-ethnic character. In Nepal, ethnic and regional movements originated as a regional reaction against the excessive centralization of power and resources of the state and accompanied violence. Regionalism is developing among the various ethnic groups with the rise of ethnic and cultural nationalism and is threatening the nation’s territorial integrity by strengthening regional loyalties and identities.

With this understanding it is now possible to examine the case of Madheshis of Nepal, an ethnic group concentrated in a particular region. Their ethnicity coupled with geographic location has been the main reason for discrimination against them by the Nepali state. It is argued in the following chapters, which discuss the relationship between the state of Nepal and Madheshis, that the tendency of the state to discriminate against minority groups in the nation-building process in Nepal, in this case the Madheshis, has resulted in the Madheshis’ ethnic and regional movement.