Chapter III
The Nation-building Process in Nepal

The historical process of state formation, social order and nation-building has taken a new turn in Nepal in the last two decades. The fundamental bases of the Nepali state and the new ethnic assertions are challenging the basic contours of Nepali society, and this poses new challenges to the process of nation-building. Have the religious-cultural bases of Nepali state become irrelevant? Where and how is the Hindu identity of the state being confronted? What are the new paradigms added to the socio-political process by politicization of ethnic groups and their mobility? What are the emerging issues of nation-building in the new situation? These are significant aspects of the political dynamics of Nepal. This chapter examines Nepal’s nation-building process from a historical perspective and attempts to answer a few questions such as: What is “nation” in the context of Nepal? How was Nepal as a nation constructed? What strategies were adopted and challenges faced? Finally, what are the consequences of the nation-building project on Nepal’s multi-ethnic society?

III. 1 Evolution of Nation

In Nepal, the state identity and nation-building have heavily relied upon the king, who was considered as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, and the Nepali language and culture as symbols of nation-building. New challenges to the concept of state have arisen recently from the process of democratization, which has sharpened ethnic identities. Janjatis and Madheshis, who not only saw themselves as located in the periphery but were alienated by the state that did not recognize their existence, have questioned the whole national identity and its religious symbolism. There are invariable linkages between democratization, economic development and ethnic assertion. Among Madheshis, the emerging sense of ethno-nationalism has caused a regional reaction against the centralization of power and resources with the hill ruling elite. Various Madhesi movements have been demanding structural change and proportional representation within the state power. With the rise of the Maoist movement, these movements have become more assertive in their demands.

Cultural pluralism emanates from factors such as language, religion, societal ethos and historical heritage. Cultural pluralism was downplayed in Nepal and the
Hindu national ethos was projected as Nepali nationalism. Such an approach results from a deep-rooted concept of dharma: the belief that there is no conflict if the king and the subjects were to uphold their respective dharmas (Ghai 2008) makes it unnecessary to hold the rulers accountable for their behaviour towards ordinary folks. Nepal’s cultural ethos had a dimension of hill Brahmin-dominant socio-religious factors. The rulers also adopted the nation-building method essentially in the belief that the nation-building process compresses disparate identities into a singular whole and that such forced oneness would automatically ensure the unity and integrity of the state, neutralizing any fissiparous tendencies. Nepal’s nation-building, like many other states, was essentially linked to the security and survival of the nation-state as a unique and separate political entity. In the process, the rulers emphasized a mononational 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 see demands for autonomy and provincialism as essential challenge to their security. They welcome devolution on the basis of administrative units in preference to devolution or provincial demarcation based on ethnicity.

For the state of Nepal, dealing with this dimension has involved resettlement of population, especially those who are considered as loyal to the nation-state, apart from centralized administration and use of the coercive mechanism of the state. Nepal has settled the hill people in Tarai by generous grant of land. The people from hill areas also dominate the armed forces.

Hindu religion and Nepali language being central to nation formation in Nepal, the Tarai people are portrayed more as alien. Nation-states need a national history glorifying the freedom struggle and sacrifices to emphasize the troubles 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 others. In the process it legitimizes the selection of particular symbols as “national symbols”, which have an essentially majoritarian character. The postcolonial states of South Asia reflect this strand in the method they have adopted as a part of their approach to nation-building. Though a few of these states adopted multiculturalism 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.

The founders of the kingdom of Nepal gave a strong religious-cultural foundation to the state. They tried to bring various communities and groups together under one socio-political order through a process of Hinduization. This process naturally produced dominant and marginalized groups. However, the marginalized and dissatisfied groups were contained within the framework of the Hindu state so long as an authoritarian rule prevailed and the political system did not provide scope for their mobilization. But after 1990 with the dawn of democracy, the marginalized sections started asserting themselves on the basis of ethnicity, which has now become a major instrument of group mobilization and politics. As a result, new challenges have emerged and the process of nation building has become hazardous.

III. 2 Historical Context

The modern state system came into existence in Nepal in 1769. Before the advent of the Gorkhas, Nepal was divided into several rival principalities representing different groups and communities. Prithvi Narayan Shah, who brought these principalities together through a military expedition, was well aware that it was not possible to sustain such a kingdom on the basis of military power alone. It required a unified socio-cultural milieu and strong political structures. Prithvi Narayan Shah tried to define the state in religious-cultural terms. All the land was in the possession of the king, who was identified with Lord Vishnu. He had proprietary authority over Desa. The King was projected as the sovereign lord, protector of his subjects and territory and the source of all aspirations and traditions.

III. 3 Role of the Shah Rulers

Prithvi Narayan Shah adopted a multi-dimensional approach in building a strong and unified state of Nepal. He followed a stratified hierarchical model for society based on the Chaturvarna Hindu caste system. As a result, the Brahmins along with Chhetris acquired social prestige and also supremacy in the political, economic and administrative fields. Interestingly, the Brahmins and Chhetris of the hill region—rather than the original inhabitants—became the repository of the hill culture and acquired significance in the power structure. Henceforth, identification with the hill
culture and caste hierarchy became important in determining the power and prestige of social groups. Such a “cultural-nationalist articulation” sets forth the nation as an ideological-cultural construct (Aloysius 2006) and it created strong grounds for inclusion in Nepal. The people of Tarai were encouraged to follow the hill cultural traits. The non-Hindu tribal communities were categorized under the Hindu hierarchical caste order and were motivated to follow the Hindus religion. All the tribal people were placed in the lowest caste categories. Though the Shah rulers recognized plurality, they did not accord the various population groups their due rights and status.

The Shah and the Rana rulers secured support for their authoritarian rule from the high-caste hill people. These people sought royal patronage and, in return, helped the monarchy in perpetuating the growth of Nepal as a monolithic state based on the invented concept of “Nepali nation”. The various tribal groups naturally remained at the periphery. The state thus emerged in Nepal as a predatory Hindu state. The monarchy tried to assert its political authority on the basis of the Hindu identity of state. After 1960, when King Mahendra gave an alternative model to the country in the form of the Panchayat system, he defended it on the basis of its traditional linkages. The monarchy always used Hinduism as a tool to establish its political prominence. The promotion of Hindu nationalism and the Hindu identity of the state have been used in consolidating diverse communities. The Hindu state survived in Nepal. And the Hindu identity of the state has been entrenched in the constitutional apparatus in the post-1950 period.

The plight of the Madhesis in the formation of the “Nepali nation” has not got enough attention in academic studies about Nepal. In fact, the Madhesis have been discriminated against both by the establishment and their own elite. The Madhesi elite like Gaya Prasad Shah, Anirudh Prasad Singh, Digambar Jha, Bhadrakali Mishra, Ramanand Prasad Singh, Parsu Narayan Chowdhary accepted secondary leadership under the Pahari elites both under the monarchical system or constitutional Monarchical system since 1990. This unholy alliance between the Pahari ruling class and Madhesi elite has continued since the Rana period. This kind of self-serving politics has denied the common Madhesis the right and opportunity to participate in the country’s political process even in the democratic set-up. Another adverse outcome of this Pahari-Madheshi elite nexus has been the hindrance created
in the way of amalgamation of the Paharis and the Madheshis for short-term political gains.

The East-West highway funded by India adversely impacted the Madheshis. Further, large-scale deforestation was undertaken to make thousands of acres of free agricultural land available to the hill people. The government-sponsored massive resettlement of the hill people all along the highway diluted the Madheshi population strength in Tarai, weakening their economic, political and cultural position in the region. As a result, there is large-scale migration of the weaker sections of Madheshi people—particularly the tribal groups of Rajbanshi, Gangai, Satar, Meche, Koche, Tharu and Dhimal—to India. These trends can be seen in Sunsari, Morang and Jhapa in eastern Tarai and Kanchanpur, Kailali, Banke and Bardia in western Tarai.

III. 4 PANCHAYAT SYSTEM

The Panchayat government, in order to achieve its objective of marginalization of the Madheshis, acted tactically through various ways such as land reform programme, “Back to Village” programme and imposition of new revenue policies in the Tarai. In the name of land reforms and rehabilitation of landless people, large parts of agrarian land were taken away from the Madheshis and distributed among the hill people. But not a single acre of land was given to the Madheshi landless people. For external consumption, King Mahendra’s government projected itself as a regime of “cultural assimilation”. But internally, it was marginalization of Madheshis in their own land (Upendra Yadav 2003: 21). The Indian government endorsed this policy.

Restructuring of district zones and regions was another major setback for the Madheshis, which strengthened the number of representatives of the hill people at various levels of the Panchayat system, which enabled them to utilize development programmes and budget in areas dominated by the hill people. Policymakers in India have a tendency to perceive that the Madheshis are their own people and do not see the need to focus on the Madheshis’ problems as particularly important.

As a result of these, in the 1970s there was a resurgence of pan-tribal sentiments, especially among people of Mongoloid origin. Later, after the establishment of democracy in 1990, other ethnic identities started surfacing in the political arena of Nepal. This has given a new dimension of ethno-politics in the country.
III. 5 THE MOVEMENT FOR RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY IN 1990

Sometimes nation-building intensifies during anti-colonial struggles (Bose and Jalal ___), when the participants develop a sense of solidarity. Whether this process holds for long depends upon the policies of the state. In South Asia, India “managed” its linguistic diversity relatively well after the partition but in Pakistan, East Pakistan seceded, forming Bangladesh. These experiences demonstrate that a nuanced understanding of political struggles is necessary to devise nation-building processes. Nepal’s democratic movements are analogous to the independence movements of several developing countries and offer similar lessons for nation-building efforts.

Nepal in the late 1980s was affected not only by internal struggles but was also greatly influenced by the democratic wave surging all over the world. In 1989, when India did not agree to renew the treaties of trade and transit between the two countries, leading to the closure of trade and transit points with Nepal, many common Nepali people were severely affected due to restriction on supply of consumer goods and petroleum products. Taking advantage of the unease and widespread resentment among the people against the Nepali regime and the strained India-Nepal relations, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the left parties blamed the regime for aggravating the crisis without taking any serious measures to resolve it. In December 1989, on the occasion of B.P. Koirala anniversary, the NC launched a people’s awareness programme. The left alliance known as the United Left Front (ULF) extended its support to Nepali Congress in its campaign for democracy. On 18 January 1990, the NC held a conference in which leaders of various countries and members of the foreign press were invited. Leaders from India and other countries extended their support to the movement. Inspired by the international moral support and the democratic movement occurring throughout the world, the NC and ULF launched a mass movement on 18 February 1990, in order to secure the downfall of the Panchayat regime and to install an interim government represented by the various parties and people.

Subsequently on 16 April 1990, the Panchayat government was dismissed and a royal proclamation was issued the next day, which dissolved National Panchayat, Panchayat policy, evolution committee and class organizations. K.P. Bhattarai became Prime Minister of the interim government consisting of the NC, United Marxist Leninist party (UML) and some independent members. The major achievement of the interim government was drafting and adoption of the constitution.
of 1990, which considered the people as the source of the sovereign authority and declared the king as a constitutional monarch. It also provided multiparty democracy with the executive power vested in the elected government headed by the Prime Minister and the legislative functions with parliament. In accordance with the new constitution, the elections were held in 1991.

The constitution of 1990 of Nepal does provide a breakthrough from the traditional model of state in some respects. It acknowledges the cultural pluralism of the nation, by recognizing Nepal as a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic state. The people have been accorded the right to conserve their language and culture and promote it. It gives the status of national language to all the languages that are spoken in the nation as the mother-tongue of various communities. The constitution has also adopted the principles of equality, liberalism and fundamental rights as core values. It does not, however, recognize Nepal as a multi-religious state.

The Maoist rebels were opposed both to the institution of monarchy and the Hindu identity of the state, and the ethnic groups and Maoists seemed to be on a common platform on these issues. At the same time, various ethnic groups and minorities also demanded recognition of their linguistic and cultural identity and a share in power and economic resources. Some scholars are of the view that making Nepali the national language under the Panchayat regime was intended to entrench the interests of minority Khas Brahmins and was a “tool of cultural domination” (Kamal P. Mall 1989: 461). The Janjatis call this Bahunbad (brahminical order).

III. 6 Challenges to Nation-building
The Tarai region has been the thrust area in the state-initiated nation-building project in Nepal. The elite of Kathmandu have always perceived a threat from the south to their nation-building process. The Gurung Committee, which was mandated to look into the problem of internal and international migration, stated in its report that migration of hill population to Tarai had enhanced the pan-Nepalese values in Tarai (HMG 1984: 33). This suggestion reflects that the culture of Tarai is not associated with the Nepali culture, as defined by its elites. The creation of cultural boundary is one way of securing the boundary of the nation-state. The Nepalese have historically treated the people of Tarai as culturally inferior second-class citizens. Madhesi literally means a Tarai (plains) inhabitant. But colloquially it has a demeaning
connotation – as alien or an uncivilized migrant from northern India (Nanda R. Shrestha 1990: 167). The dress code like Nepali topi became a new cultural symbol of Nepaliness. Attire like Dhoti and Kurta (which is associated with Indians) was banned at official functions. The open border with India has created numerous cultural apprehensions for the Nepali elite, who see the ethno-cultural linkages of Madheshis with India as a threat to Nepali uniqueness.

III. 7 Constitutional Discriminations

Many critics have been pointing out “discriminatory provisions” in the constitution of 1990. The Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN) identified 27 articles and sub-articles in the constitution and 9 sections in the New National Code and more than three dozen Special Acts as having provisions that discriminate against indigenous peoples/nationalities.

III. 8 Religious Discrimination

Although the Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007 has declared Nepal as a secular state, religious discrimination still exists in the country. According to the 2001 census, over 20 per cent of the population practises faiths other than Hinduism, such as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and other “indigenous” religions. In the past, Hindu religion used to get almost 90 per cent of the time allocated for religion in the state-owned Radio Nepal while some religions did not get any time at all. Though the 1963 legal code had given religious freedom, nobody was allowed to preach Islam and Christianity. If anybody attempted to convert any person to any religion other than Hinduism, he could be imprisoned for three years. Thus, the constitution had virtually become a protector of one religion at the cost of other religions in the country.

III. 9 Linguistic Discrimination

Article 6 of the constitution declared Nepali “in Devnagari script” as “the official language” and “all the languages of the nation” as “national languages”. The constitution was “ambiguous in its treatment of language”. “By categorizing Nepali differently, it bestowed special importance to it.” The constitution also “differentiated between Nation’s Language and National Language”. The Supreme Court judgement on 1 June 1999 that annulled the declaration of Nepal Bhasa in Kathmandu
Metropolis and Maithili in Dhanusa District Development Committee and Rajbiraj Municipality as additional languages was a clear case of linguistic discriminatory status of ethnic languages.

Article 18(2) of the constitution stipulated: “Each community shall have the right to establish schools for imparting education to children in their mother tongue”. However, the constitution was “inexplicit as to how these national languages would be promoted and protected”. The constitution also provided no “guarantee of support from the state for their development”. The article did not sanction for imparting education in schools in the native languages beyond primary level. It did not even recognize education imparted at Madrasas and Buddhist monasteries. On the other hand, the government spends millions of rupees for the Sanskrit Pathsalas and the Sanskrit University whose beneficiaries are chiefly the male Brahmins. In addition, by imposing compulsory Sanskrit all over the country, the state is systematically imposing Hindu values and ways on non-Hindu communities.

III. 10 Citizenship issue

Citizenship provides one’s identity with a nation and grants access to services and power. “It is a symbol of legitimacy for people living within their national boundaries. Citizenship is a bond between the individuals and the government of a nation and, therefore, important in the process of national integration” (Gaige 1975: 87). A very large section of Madhesi population is without citizenship certificate. Citizenship legislation framed by representatives of the nationally dominant hill culture during the 1960s makes the acquisition of citizenship more difficult for people of plains origin living in Tarai. The citizenship legislation framed in the 1990 constitution is not much different. Article 8 of the 1990 constitution, devoted to citizenship, stated:

Following persons, who have their permanent residence in Nepal, shall be deemed to be the citizens of Nepal:

(a) A person who is a citizen of Nepal, pursuant to the provision of either Article 7 of the Constitution of Nepal, 1962 or Section 3 of Nepal Citizenship Act, 1964.

(b) A person who is a naturalized citizen of Nepal, pursuant to the provisions of Section 6 of Nepal Citizenship Act, 1964.

Thus, as birthright citizenship was limited to the year 1962. Because of this article, those who were born before that period but had not taken citizenship at that time are denied citizenship. As a result of this provision, many Madheshis were denied citizenship certificates because their parents did not hold citizenship documents.
Article 9(4), which deals with acquisition of citizenship, states:

After the commencement of this Constitution, law may regulate the acquisition of the citizenship of Nepal by foreigners, besides other matters on the fulfilment of the following conditions:

(a) He can read and write the national language of Nepal;
(b) Is engaged in an occupation in Nepal;
(c) Has renounced his present citizenship;
(d) Has resided in Nepal for at least fifteen years.

Article 9(4)(a) was tantamount to a clear discrimination against Madheshis and other ethnic groups as they speak languages other than Nepali as first or second language. Also “the same opportunity (as to Nepali) is not provided to any one knowing any of the other 100 native languages of the country” including the mother-tongues of any group among Madheshis. The consequence of denial of citizenship has created four main problems: they are not eligible to apply for service in government, public and private institutions; they are debarred from running industry and trade; they are treated as “foreigners”; they are not allowed to purchase land in Nepal (Hari Bansh Jha 1993: 66).

III. 11 Causes of Social Movements

According to Dev Raj Dahal, the new social movements in Nepal symbolize “inclusionary politics” in a highly stratified society (http://www.nepaldemocracy.org). Most of these movements can be viewed as parts of “dialectical process of inclusions and exclusion vis-à-vis the political system”, a system dominated by a valley-centred political and economic establishment, based in Kathmandu. This inclusionary politics appears as a new political phenomenon that cuts across the most “exclusionary boundaries” of power. The ethnic and regional movements have questioned the legitimacy of the relationship between state and society in contemporary Nepal on a broad range of issues.

“Hinduistic” orientation became a reactionary response across the Nepali hills. One of the initial acts of Prithvi Narayan Shah after the conquest of Kathmandu Valley was the expulsion of Capuchin missionaries from Patan. He visualized Nepal as “Asli Hindustan” (pure land of Hindus). Since then, Hinduization became the raison d’être of the Nepalese state (Harka Gurung 1997: 496–532). The Mulki Ain
(National Code) of 1854 was a written version of the social code that had long been practised as a part of Hinduized Nepal. Its caste categories diverged from the four Varnas of the classical Vedic model and instead had three basic divisions to accommodate the tribal peoples between the pure and impure castes. These were further classified into five hierarchies with the following order of precedence (Andras Hofer 1979: 51).

A. Wearers of holy cord (Tagadhari),
B. Non-enslavable alcohol drinkers (Namahsine Matwali),
C. Enslavable alcohol drinkers (Mahsine Matwali),
D. Impure and touchable castes, and
E. Impure and untouchable castes.

That scheme was biased in favour of dominant Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetri hill castes. The Mulki Ain was silent about the status of Madheshi castes, touchable or untouchable. There was also discrimination in the quantum of punishment, the extent of penalty being linked with the level of ritual purity of the offenders. The old legal code was revived in 1963 by amending some penal clauses on untouchables. The constitution of Nepal, 1990 guaranteed the right to equality by stating that the state shall not discriminate against citizens on the basis of religion, colour, sex, caste, ethnicity or belief (Article11.3). However, this constitutional right was negated by a clause in the Mulki Ain as amended in 1992, which states that the “traditional practices” at religious places are not considered “discriminatory”. This means that those castes, once categorized as untouchables, still have no access to shrines and temples. In the same way, adherence to “traditional practices” would imply exclusion of ethnic and lower castes; therefore, there exists inequality in other spheres also.

Thus, social discrimination and untouchability have remained a fact of everyday life in Nepal. The country has been unified only geographically but not socially and economically. The social model of national unification so far has been Hinduization, which is alien to the multi-ethnic foundation of the country.

There have been three forms of the state since the medieval period: proto-Nepal of Kathmandu Valley, imperial Nepal stretching from the rivers Sutlej to Tista, and feudal Nepal confined by the rivers Mahakali and Mechi (Harka Gurung 2001: 197–8). Nepal has maintained its independent status for a long period but it is yet to
emerge as a nation. The policy of the Gorkhali/Nepalese state since the late eighteenth century has been the creation of a Hindu theocracy by suppressing ethnic identities in order to consolidate and centralize power. This state ideology became progressively conservative during the Shah (1769–1846) and Rana (1846–1951) regimes. The democratic respite (1951–1960) was a period of political turmoil with no consideration for social concerns. The Panchayat regime (1960–1990) adopted a policy of national integration based on assimilation in the image of a particular culture group, i.e. monopoly of Hindu religion and the Nepali language to maintain the supremacy of the Parbatiya (hill people) high castes. Since the restoration of democracy in 1990, the constitution has conceded that the state is multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, although the hangover of a “Hindu Kingdom” continues. The phases of Nepalese social formation can be described as the empire model of the Shah and Rana periods, the nationalistic model of Panchayat period and a patchwork of minorities since 1990 (J. Pfaff-Czarnecka 1997: 419–70).

Mainly, there are three social groups that have been marginalized by the state’s biased monopolistic policy. These are Janjatis (ethnic) on the basis of culture, Dalits (untouchables) on the basis of caste, and Madheshis (Tarai) on the basis of geography (Harka Gurung 2003: 11), besides the Buddhists and Muslims on the basis of religion. The distribution pattern of their population is germane to locate areas of ethnic movement as well as to map future autonomous areas. There is no duality as to the identification of Tarai as the heartland of the Madheshi movement. This region has a population exceeding 10 million. The population of Madheshi ethnic and caste groups is concentrated in Tarai. Janjatis are predominant eastwards and Dalits in the west. Large cultural differences exist within these groups. Despite such anomalies, they share many commonalities as peoples marginalized by the state. Their agenda of convergence revolves round political autonomy, social equality and economic opportunity. The three marginalized contenders have the potential of becoming a formidable force if their core demands are moulded into a collective agenda for social equality and inclusive democracy (ibid.).

According to Harka Gurung, “History is the construction of the conquerors while the vanquished are left only with bitter memories”. The present Nepalese history is also the story about rulers and their legitimacy. Extended Nepal was created through conquest, astuteness and diplomacy. Delving deeper into the past, there are various episodes of ethnic protests, contests and insurgency (Krishana B. Bhattachan
2000: 135–62). The brave stand of the Newars of Kirtipur was recorded incidentally by a foreign witness. Other revolts by the ethnic peoples are to be retrieved from folklore of which only a few remain as anecdotal. In the late eighteenth century, the Limbus and Tamangs revolted against the rulers. The following century experienced uprisings by Gurungs and Magars in central hills as well as those by Rais and Limbus in the eastern hills. The early half of the twentieth century was marked by religious persecution targeted against the Buddhist clergy in this land of Budha. The 1950/51 political struggles against the Rana regime were also accompanied by Kirati and Tamang insurgencies. The abolition of the Kipat system in 1964, which ended customary land system in the eastern hills, also sparked violent movements among the Limbus. See Table 3.1 for the period and place of revolt in detail.

**Table 3.1: Ethnic/Cultural Episodes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Episode</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>The year of Nepal’s “unification”</td>
<td>East of Arun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>Limbu revolt and expulsion</td>
<td>East of Arun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>Limbu language suppression</td>
<td>Nuwakot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>Murmi (Tamang) revolt</td>
<td>Bojpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1808</td>
<td>Kambu (Rai) revolt</td>
<td>Lamjung</td>
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<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Gurung (Sukhdev) revolt</td>
<td>Dhankuta</td>
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<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Dasain boycott (two Rais killed)</td>
<td>East of Arun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Limbu language suppression</td>
<td>Gorkha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Magar (Lakhan) revolt</td>
<td>Gorkha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Gurung (Supati) revolt</td>
<td>Patan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Tsering Norbu Lama and four monks exiled</td>
<td>Kathmandu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Buddhist monks exiled</td>
<td>Eastern hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Kirati insurgency</td>
<td>Nuwakot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Tamang peasant revolt</td>
<td>Tarai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Save Hindi Campaign</td>
<td>Eastern hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Kirat opposition to Kipat abolition</td>
<td>Tarai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Sadbhawana Council formed to oppose Task Force Report</td>
<td>Throughout the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Many ethnic and regional movements emerged under the influence of the Maoists</td>
<td>Tarai and Kathmandu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Anti-Land Reform campaign</td>
<td>Saptari and Siraha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Pahari-Madheshi conflict in the aftermath of Hrithik Roshan episode</td>
<td>Rautahat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Madheshi Jantantrik Morcha</td>
<td>Tarai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Madheshi Tiger Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Madheshi Janadhikar Forum movement</td>
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III. 12 Ethnic and Regional Mobilization

In the three years after 1990, more than forty ethnic associations came into existence, reflecting the mobilization of ethnic groups after the dawn of democracy in the country. This ethnic mobilization led to several problems. The language issue became more complicated when, following the use of Hindi language in Parliament by members of the Sadbhawana Party, the parliamentarians of the hill ethnic groups began to speak in their own languages. Similarly, the people of Mongoloid origin expressed strong reactions to the Hindu domination of the country on the one hand, and discrimination against them by the Brahmin-Chettri-dominated elite. A number of Mongoloid groups also demanded self-rule. Subsequently, various ethnic groups sought alignment with one or the other political parties. Some of the currently effervescent ethnic and regional movements are briefly described below.

1) The Limbu movement of the Limbu ethnic group and smaller ethnic groups in eastern Nepal, especially in Taplejung, Panchthar, Terhathum and Ilam districts, has been in protest against the abolition of the Kipat system (Sudheer Sharma 2002: 23). The Kipat system was the traditional land rights of Limbus. Since the “unification” of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Limbus had enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy, especially in the field of judiciary and land tenure. The judicial right of Subbas of the Limbus was taken by King Mahendra in 1960 and the new land reforms implemented in 1964 abolished Kipat. The oldest Limbu organization was the Limbuan Liberation Front under the leadership of Bir Nembang (see Table 3.1). However, the front lacked mass support. Later on, a leftist leader from Terhathum, Bhakta Raj Kandangwa, formed an Autonomy Study Forum, which was later on converted into Limbuvan National Liberation Front (LNLF) in November 2000. The main objectives of the LNLF are to protect the identity of the Limbu community, restore the extinct Limbu script, promote socio-economic and political development of the Limbu community and establish a Limbuvan autonomous region (Bhakta Raj Kandangwa 2000: 7).

2) The Khambu movement also emerged in eastern Nepal led by Rai ethnic groups in Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, Bhojpur, Dhankuta, Khotang and Udaipur districts. Gopal Khambu established the Khambuan National Front (KNF) in 1992. The KNF announced its “Radical Action” in July 1997 by bombing the Sadananda Sanskrit High School of Dingla in Bhojpur district (KNF Bulletin 1997: 5), and has since then
carried out its violent activities. The KNF, whose main objective is to establish a Khambuvan state, had given an ultimatum to the government demanding that it must establish a Khambuvan government by 9 December 2000, failing which it would wage a war against the Nepali state (ibid.). The Maoists succeeded brought the KNF and the LNLF under their fold and merged them to form a Kirat National Front (KNF) in October 2001 (Sudheer Sharma 2002: 25). Bhakta Raj Kandangwa was made the head from the Limbu community and Gopal Khambu was made the general secretary from the Rai community (ibid.).

3) **The Tamang movement** emerged in central Nepal led by Tamang ethnic groups in Nuwakot, Dhading, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk, Dolkha, Ramechhap, Kavre and Makwanpur districts and also in some parts of Kathmandu Valley. The Tamangs never supported the Gorkhas’ military expeditions, which has led the Nepali rulers to suspect the Tamangs’ loyalty. The Tamangs were banned from joining the military and government services. Socially, Tamangs were placed in the category of the lowest Shudra caste and were referred demeaningly as Bhote. The Tamangs revolted twice against Rana Bahadur Shah and Girvan Bikram Shah in 1916 (Govind Neupane 2000: 67). The Tamangs were traditionally beef-eaters, for which the Hindu-dominated state, which forbids cow-slaughter, punished them. Under the influence of the CPN (Maoist), the Tamang National Liberation Front (TNLF) was formed in 1998 under the leadership of Kumar Yonjan. The declaration of the TNLF says that their community was “exploited by the state mechanism of Khas feudals” (Sudheer Sharma 2002: 22).

4) **The Newars** are concentrated in Kathmandu Valley. They made several attempts to gain autonomy in Kathmandu Valley. As has been described earlier, Prithvi Narayan Shah brutally punished them. After the “unification” of Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah shifted the capital from Gorkha to Kathmandu, the place of the Newars. To promote and preserve their cultural identity the Newars formed an organization called Nepal Bhasa Manka Khala under the leadership of Padam Ratna Tuladhar, but the organization remained weak. Later, a more radical organization was formed called Newa Khala led by Dilip Maharjan with the aim of obtaining the right to ethnic self-determination (*Janaidesh Weekly*, 30 May 2001). The main grievances of the Newars
are related to language and cultural identity. As a noted Newari scholar, Kamal Prakash Malla, observes:

With his social and cultural fabric of life slowly been destroyed, the average middle-class Newar of Kathmandu today feels like a displaced Nawab of Lucknow after the loot. He feels like an alien in his own home pushed too hard against the wall by ever-stiffer social and economic competition with some 20,000 migrants every year. The headlong rush is not only robbing Newars of their jobs, open space, and unpolluted civic life, but also destroys their culture, treating them as a dwindling specimen of aborigines deserving to be confined to the slum areas of Asan and the vegetable markets of Kathmandu” (K.P. Malla 1992: 5). It needs to be mentioned that the Newar community is much better off than other backward communities in the field of trade, business and administrative sectors. The Newars had major influence in the mainstream politics and continue to wield wide influence in most of the political parties.

5) The Gurungs also started a movement, named Tamuwan, in western Nepal in Manang, Mustang, Gurkha, Lamjung, and Kaski districts. When soldiers of the Gurung Regiment hatched a plot to kill Jung Bahadur Rana in May/June 1857, the Rana had the main conspirator slashed by a Gurung soldier at Tundikhel (INSEC, Kathmandu, 1994: 2). This led the Gurungs to revolt. A Gurung soldier, Jamadar Sripati Gurung of Lamjung, revolted against the Rana in 1857 during a military parade at Tundikhel. He was killed. Again, Shukh Dev Gurung led the Gurung insurgency against the Rana ruler proclaiming himself as the Baudha king of Gorkha and Lamjung districts. He was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment (Bishnu Pathak 2003: 12). With the initiative of the Maoists, a Tamuwan Autonomous Region was formed on 24 February 1999, headed by Mohan Tamu (Sudheer Sharma 2002: 22). The Gurungs' main aim is to preserve their culture and language and to advocate regional autonomy.

6) Among the sixty caste and ethnic groups, Magar (7.24 per cent) is the third-largest community after Chhetri and Bahun. The Magarant movement in western Nepal covers the districts of Tanahu, Syangaza, Palpa, Parvat, Mayagdi, Baglung, Gulmi, Arghakhanchi, Pyuthan and Rolpa. The Magars are in majority in Rolpa, Tanahu, Palpa, Mayagdi, Baglung and Pyuthan districts. They have three subgroups: Kham Magar, Purbeli Magar and Kaike Magar. The community speaking Purbeli Magar is the largest and Kaike Magar is the smallest. Historically, Magarat was an association of twelve smaller states. This association stretched from Rolpa to Tanahu. But later Khas rulers took control of this region and finally Prithvi Narayan Shah established
his rule over this area. After the end of the Rana rule in 1950, Thawang (a northern village of Rolpa), which was virtually autonomous because of geography and the inability or lack of the interest of the Ranas to bring it under their sphere of influence, came under the direct rule of the centre (Kathmandu) after the "revolution". The local Magars took offence at the behaviour of the administrators appointed by Kathmandu and saw them as a threat to their traditional power. Once they rebelled against one Badahakim (district administrative chief) for raising taxes arbitrarily. Berman Buda Magar and others were arrested and charged with the offence of being "communists". However, Buda himself later said he had not heard the word "communist" at that time and it was only after he was freed that he came in contact with the communist leaders of Pyuthan (Sudheer Sharma 2002: 20). In the 1979 referendum, the people of Thawang cast only four votes in favour of the Panchayat system. At that time the local people threw out the photographs of the king and queen from the Panchayat building. Again, in the 1980 Panchayat elections, Thawang sent back empty ballot boxes, as a part of the boycott of the Communist Party. After these two incidents, the central government undertook a major army operation in Thawang. But the resulting atrocities turned more people of the village and district against the establishment. The confrontation of Kham Magar communists of Rolpa with the local administration and the Nepali Congress cadres intensified after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The confrontation and suffering of the Magars continued in the 1990s that led to the formation of Magarant National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1998 under the leadership Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar. In his book, Thapa writes: "The role played by the Magar army in King Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification has been remembered in the history. But the same Magar community has been humiliated by the state. It is injustice of low level" (Lok Bahadur Thapa Magar 2000: 18). The MNLF has been demanding autonomy with the right of self-determination.

7) The Madhesi movement that began to fight against discrimination has been demanding regional autonomy and proportional share in state power. With the rise of the Maoist movement, the Madhesi movement became assertive in its demands. The Madhesis' plight, grievances and mobilization, being the focus of this study, are described in greater detail in the ensuing chapters.
The rise of the Maoist insurgency since 1996 gave a new dimension to ethnic and regional consciousness of the long-deprived population groups of Nepal. There is a debate whether the Maoists have come closer to the ethnic and regional movements or the other way round. The first argument, which is mostly advanced by the Maoists themselves, holds that the ethnic and regional movements have been the result of the Maoist movement as their activities have been mostly in the remote areas of the country and with the marginalized population. The second argument holds that it is the Maoists who have capitalized on the longstanding dissension and grievances of the ethnic and regional sentiments. This argument seems to reflect the reality objectively, though the significance of the Maoists' role in the rise of the ethnic and regional movements cannot be gainsaid.

The Magars, who have now taken the path of an armed struggle of Maoists, are not asking for their lost state but autonomy with the right of self-determination (Sudheer Sharma 2002: 20). The case of the Kham Magar is different from the other ethnic communities. They were involved in communist politics before the ethnic politics. The heartland of the Kham Magar community, Thawang (a northern village of Rolpa), had become a communist stronghold in the 1950s (ibid.). In the case of Madheshis, first they formed the Madheshi Mukti Morcha, a sister organization of the Maoists, who are committed to establish an autonomous state for Madheshis to whom they have even promised to give the right of self-determination. This kind of situation has given space to many other ethnic and regional organizations. At present, some organizations believe in non-violent methods but there are also some semi-militant organizations. These organizations are the key players in the ethnic and regional movement in Nepal.

III. 14 Common Features of Various Movements

Because of the inherent differences among the ethnic and regional groups, some causes are specific to certain groups; even when two or more groups face the same problem, the degree varies. However, we can find a number of causes that are common to the various movements, as outlined below:

1) Historically, the various ethnic groups consider that the “unification” of Nepal was rather a conquest of the independence of the various smaller kingdoms by the Gorkha rulers.
2) All the ethnic and regional groups believe that they have been dominated by the Khas-Bahun-Chhetri combination right from the inception of Nepal. Most of the ethnic and regional groups have raised the issue of marginalization of their culture, language, religion and identity by virtue of the forced imposition of the “one king, one nation, one language, one dress code and one religion” ideology of the Nepali state. Most of them have made the preservation and promotion of their own religion, culture, and language one of the important objectives of their movement.

3) The ethnic and regional groups have questioned the centralized power system and the concentration of the utilization of the local resources in Kathmandu alone. Even international resources that come to Nepal are invested only in Kathmandu at the cost of the other regions. As a consequence of the Kathmandu-centric development model and the semi-colonial policy of the state, the disparities between the centre and the region have greatly increased. Hence, all the ethnic and regional movements have asserted, as their aim, decentralization based on federal structure or regional autonomy with the right to self-determination. Another important aim of most of them has been the right to the use of local resources by the local people and securing regional equality in development and other sectors.

4) The ethnic and regional groups are also against the government’s exclusionary policies. The low representation of the various ethnic and regional groups in the state administration and in other decision-making bodies has also been an important reason for the cause of their struggle. It is in recognition of the grievances of the ethnic and regional groups that proper representation of the marginal groups features as a significant aim of their movement.

5) The imposition of Hindu religion in the past as state policy among the ethnic groups had been challenged; it has also been seen as a process of marginalizing their religion and culture. Many ethnic groups like Janjatis raise this issue by reasserting their traditional religion and culture as a counter to Hindu religion and culture. They also perceive that the process of Hinduization has placed them in the lower strata of the Hindu hierarchy, such as the 1854 Civil Code in which these ethnic groups were placed at the lowest rung (Civil Code of Nepal 1854: 1962). And the kind of state punishment that was also sanctioned in accordance with the status of the offender showed that the civil code was discriminatory. Thus, the aim to establish a secular state for Nepal also forms a vital component of the aims of their movements.
III. 15 NATURE OF THESE MOVEMENTS

Most of these are rural-based movements and their support base comes from the youth, farmers, and the lower strata of society. The movements vary in their strategies. While the Limbu and Khambu movements seem to be the most violently driven, targeting the state apparatus and political party cadres who are seen as the exploiters, other movements have also used violent activities to show their discontent. But movements like the Madheshi movement and Newa Khala have remained mostly non-violent and have been carrying out their activities by democratic means. There are indications of these movements also turning violent, as is the case with the movements launched by Madheshi Tiger Force and Madheshi Jantantrik Morcha which are the dissident groups of Maoists in Tarai. Another feature of the movements is the background of their leadership. Most of the movements are led by lower-middle class and average educated persons such as Dev Gurung of Tamuvan movement, Matrika Yadav of the Madheshi National Liberation Front, and Gopal Khumbu of the Kirat movement (Bishnu Pathak 2003: 6).

The ethnic and regional movements, which started immediately after the inception of modern Nepal, were diffuse in the beginning. In the last few years, however, they have grown systematically, especially after the 1990 people’s movement culminating in the establishment of democracy. A new dimension came after 1998 when many ethnic and regional movements emerged under the influence of the Maoist movement. Many ethnic and regional liberation fronts came as sister organizations of the Maoists, asserting their demands such as for regional autonomy with the right of self-determination. Most of the liberation fronts are similar in nature. A few dissident groups were formed in Tarai such as Madheshi Tigers and Madheshi Jantantrik Morcha after breaking away from Madheshi National Liberation Front, a sister organization of the Maoists, in order to show their discontent with the Maoist leadership. Dissident groups blamed Maoist leaders for not giving due recognition and importance to Madheshi problems and also for not giving the Madheshi cadres due place in the party leadership.
III. 16 Conclusion

Ethnic and regional movements have existed in Nepal since the beginning of the modern nation-state. Most of them share many similarities in regard to causes and aims. Ethnic and regional disparity is a leading reason for their eruption. These movements came on the surface after 1990 when multi-party system was established. After 1998 ethnic and regional movements started getting greater attention because they caused a lot of violence. Large number of people and huge property of the state were lost due to these movements.

It would appear that the historical formation of the Nepali state has been inappropriate in coping with the realities of the Nepali society. Yet the Nepali state continues to rely upon its traditional bases and as a result, has failed to accommodate emerging interests, groups and communities. These groups and communities feel discriminated against and marginalized and have tried to assert themselves on the basis of their ethnic identity. This has naturally complicated the process of nation-building and posed new challenges. It is possible to cope with these challenges by redefining the bases of the Nepali state and broadening the process of democracy and development in the country.

It is clear that restructuring of the state is becoming a major issue in Nepali politics. Therefore, the emerging trends of ethnicity call for restructuring of the state and the accommodation of diverse groups within a liberal democratic socio-political order. It is only through this approach that the project of nation-building can be pushed up in Nepal in the changing context.