

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM IN NEPAL: EMERGING ISSUES AND THE SEARCH FOR A NEW PARADIGM

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Background

The management of cultural pluralism and diversity has become a focus of attention because of their universal existence in terms of race, religion, language, cultural differences, etc. in most of the world's nation states. In Nepal, particularly after the restoration of democracy in 1990, there is a growing academic as well as public debate to redefine the role of the state and the nature of governance to accommodate its diverse social, cultural, ethnic, language, and racial groups on an equal footing.

Plural societies such as Nepal face one basic dilemma. On the one hand, all members of the liberal democracy are—in principle if not in practice—entitled to the same rights and opportunities. On the other hand, they also have the right to be different—and after 1990, the rights of minorities (especially of *janajatis* and *dalits*) to maintain and promote their cultural distinctiveness and to be visible in the public spheres, including the mass media, school curricula, and so on, are increasingly insisted on. A crucial challenge for plural societies therefore consists of allowing cultural differences to persist without violating common and societally defined rights. In other words, the challenge consists of finding a viable compromise, for the state as well as the citizens (representing power and agency respectively), between equal rights and the right to be different.

If we take a dynamic and positive view of ethnic, religious, and cultural and other forms of diversity as an invitation for people to interact, to celebrate and to learn from difference rather than a passive acceptance of the fact that diversity simply exist, it can make an important contribution to the balanced development of plural countries such as Nepal. This paper is an attempt to discuss some of these emerging issues of cultural pluralism and

diversity in Nepal and to propose an alternative perspective to address the issues in new ways. This paper is primarily based on a review of literatures but I have also used my own empirical materials (M.Phil, MA and other field research) while developing my arguments. The central issue of the paper guided me to adopt a range of theoretical perspectives and approaches. I have tried to introduce theories while presenting my data and developing my argument in the subsequent sections of this paper.

This paper has been divided into seven sections. The first section introduces the background of the paper. The second section clarifies the meaning of cultural pluralism, diversity and plural society. In third section, I present an overview of theories and perspectives of cultural pluralism and diversity. Section four focuses on Nepalese pluralism, presents a retrospective of ethnic and cultural accommodations and provides an assessment of constitutional provisions to accommodate the country's diverse groups into the national mainstream. Section five discusses the emerging and enduring issues of cultural diversity of the country. Section six proposes some paradigms of cultural and ethnic accommodation to address the tremendous diversity of the country. Section seven concludes the paper presenting an alternative perspective to deal with the emerging and enduring issues of cultural diversity of the country.

The Concept of Cultural Diversity, Pluralism and Plural Societies

The *Oxford Talking Dictionary of English* defines 'pluralism' as a form of society or state in which ethnic or cultural groups maintain their independent traditions, practices, and attitudes.¹ Other definitions include the toleration or acceptance of a diversity of opinions, values, theories, etc. Similarly, the dictionary meaning of 'diversity' indicates the condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied; variety, unlikeness. Thus the concept of pluralism reflects the social reality determined by languages, religions, ethnic memberships, and cultural traditions and implies control of institutions by members of the constituent groups (Bentley 1971:337).

The concept of cultural diversity also implies a societal condition comprising of many groups—ethnic, racial, and religious—with distinctive heritages, values, languages, and lifestyles. But the concept does not connote any clear-cut perspective, vision and movement to maintain equality, equal rights and separate identity among the diverse groups in the society. The concept of pluralism, however, implies not only the condition of existence of cultural diversity in any society but signifies a concrete vision, and

perspective of promoting, and maintaining the separate identities of the constituent groups on the basis of equality and equal rights.

Through differing in many ways, at present many scholars share Van den Berge's (1973:961) definition of pluralism which refers to "a property, or set of properties, of societies wherein several distinct social and/or cultural groups coexist within the boundaries of a single polity and share a common economic system that makes them interdependent, yet maintain a greater or lesser degree of autonomy and a set of discrete institutional structures in other spheres of social life."

In plural society, memberships in distinctive ethnic, religious, or cultural groups are accepted and even applauded. Pluralistic societies pride themselves on the freedom granted to diverse groups to preserve their different heritages, support various religions, speak different languages and develop independent associations. In essence, this freedom is qualified only by the enforcement of loyalty to the prevailing political and economic system. This implies an appreciation of, and respect for, intercultural difference. However, emphasis has been given to the manner, extent, and functioning of pluralism within societies rather than on identifying and defining plural societies.

Thus, the concept of cultural pluralism and diversity denotes at least four meanings. It is a metaphysical theory, which claims that reality consists of a multiplicity of distinct, fundamental entities. It indicates a particular social condition of racial and ethnic or cultural diversity resulting from immigration, conquest or any other means. It includes a vision or a movement of a free and diverse society in which all individuals or groups live peacefully and amicably on a footing of equality with each other. And finally, it is a complex network of laws, programmes, and policies for managing that diversity.

In most societies the relationship between ethnic and cultural groups is not permanently fixed but changes in time and space. Scholars have identified four basic patterns of interrelationship between ethnic, racial or cultural groups in a plural society:

- a. **Amalgamation** ($A+B+C = D$), the process in which contact between different ethnic, racial, and cultural groups lead to the formation of a new cultural and ethnic group. The Newars of Kathmandu Valley are one possible example of an amalgamated community.
- b. **Assimilation** ($A+B+C = A$), the process of interaction between different groups in which the minority groups adopt the values and pattern of behaviour of the majority, and are ultimately absorbed by the majority group. Some of the Hinduized ethnic groups of Nepal, such as Magars, might offer examples of this model.
- c. **Segregation** ($A \neq B = A \neq B$), the spatial separation of race, cultural and ethnic group by discriminatory means. It can be enforced by laws. The system of apartheid in South Africa and the caste system before 1962 in Nepal are examples.
- d. **Pluralism** ($A+B+C = A+B+C$), a condition of society or a nation in which multiple ethnic and cultural units co-exist in dynamic relation to one another enjoying more or less equal rights and opportunities. Canadian, Australian and Swedish societies could be some examples.

Thus different forms of relationship exist between and among the diverse groups of a plural society. Metaphorically, they are known as "fruit salad" or "rainbow" or "garden" on the one hand, the "fruit compote" or "melting pot" on the other. In the fruit salad/rainbow/garden, the components are clearly distinct, ethnic and cultural boundaries are intact, and reflexively rooted identities are secure and stable. In the fruit compote/melting pot, on the other hand, the different fruits are squashed and mixed together with substantial use of force.

Theories of Pluralism and Diversity

Theories of the plural society or of pluralism stress the relationships (cleavages, or discontinuities, or mutual respect or co-operation and so on) between sections differentiated by race, ethnicity, language, religion or culture. These bases of differentiation are, however, not totally regarded as "primordial" (Geertz 1963) but are socially, culturally, politically and historically structured in the process of interaction.

Political Perspective

When we talk about pluralism from the political perspective, we mean the institutional incorporation of different ethnic groups or collectivities into one societal state system. This formulation of theories of plural societies emphasizes political structure rather than cultural difference. M.G Smith (1974), one of the proponents of this approach of pluralism or plural societies, introduces the *mode of political incorporation* as a central concept. He identifies three modes of incorporation, the principles on the basis of which individuals or collectivities are incorporated into membership of the society: uniform or universalistic, equivalent or complementary and differential (1974:333-7).

Under universalistic or uniform incorporation, individuals hold their citizenship directly and not through sectional identification, and they hold their citizenship on the basis of equality, where as in equivalent or complimentary incorporation, and under differential incorporation, they are link to the polity, and their rights and duties are defined through their sectional membership. In equivalent or complimentary incorporation, the society is constituted as a consociation of complimentary or equivalent, but mutually exclusive corporate divisions, memberships in one of which is prerequisite for citizenship in the wider unit. In differential incorporation, the society is constituted as an order of structurally unequal and exclusive corporate sections that is as an explicitly plural regime. Thus, pluralism, then, defined in terms of unintegrated institutional structure, is much more widespread condition than the other criteria of plural societies, which must satisfy the additional criterion of differential incorporation.

Based on these different modes of incorporations, M.G Smith has distinguished three types of pluralism. The first of these is *cultural pluralism*, which refers simply to institutional differences without a corresponding collective segregation. Cultural pluralism usually exists in societies constituted on the basis of uniform mode of incorporation. Second, there is *social pluralism* that represents the condition in which institutional differences coincides with the sharp division of society in to closed corporate groups. Third, there is *structural pluralism*, which consists in the association of cultural and social pluralism with differential incorporation.

From the above discussion, I may argue that Smith's theory of pluralism is more taxonomical rather than explanatory. By this I mean his categories of analysis are comprehensive and informative but only an elaborate mapping exercise, covering neatly the different subspecies of plural societies

according to the degree to which cultural difference is embedded institutional rules and practices. This theory does not provide us the causal and functional account of origin and dynamics of the plural societies in question. For this we need another framework for understanding the complexity of pluralism.

Interactionist Perspective

It seems common sense that the term ‘cultural pluralism’ should refer to a situation in which several cultural traditions coexist in one community. But modern refinements in cultural analysis have increasingly rendered the concept ‘cultural pluralism’ as understood in commonsense unfit for any discussion of pluralism. Our accounts no longer provide empirically and distributionally bounded descriptions of cultures, composed of identifiable elements or items, and they no longer pretend to provide an exhaustive or gross picture of the content of a heritage (Barth 1984: 79).

For an analysis of the dynamics of cultural pluralism, one should develop some criteria by which one can identify and separate the ‘stream’ or ‘tradition’ that together comprise the plural scene. In this process, we need to develop a discovery procedure to ascertain how ideas/cultural items cohere in cultural stream or tradition, what the gross content of each tradition is, and how the contradiction and variation in a plural situation is reproduced and affects one another. Such contradiction and variation can be separated, and their coherence and contents can be explored by describing their social organisation, their distribution in space, their history, and their prospects (Barth 1984:82).

From the above discussion, it is clear that in order to differentiate the strands or streams of a plural society, we need to find out the separate tradition of cultures with their different histories and different prospects, so as to make an inventory of the local distinctive conditions of the perpetuation and change and their interdependence and dynamics. This focus on the distinct cultural traditions as the object of major interest must also affect how we phrase our question and description. Thus, in any plural context, we should not ask how culture is ‘shared’ between people, but instead investigate the process of ‘enrolment’ and ‘embracement’ whereby people come to participate in tradition.

Perspective from Power Relation: Pluralism is not merely a synonym for ethnic diversity within political analysis. Theories of cultural pluralism, which here include multiculturalism, identity politics, the politics of difference and the ‘new’ pluralism, involve questions about how the

distribution of power and resources is or ought to be affected by cultural membership (Eisenberg 2000). In other words, the study of cultural pluralism looks at how power and resources are distributed to cultural groups. What accounts for a cultural group as a resource that can be drawn upon to improve its cultural security, or what are the circumstances that disempower a cultural group? In this regard, one of the most common concerns today is that seemingly neutral policies, practices, institutions and ways of thinking maintain the dominance of one cultural group over other (ibid).

However, since almost all societies contain more than one cultural group, the question is not whether power is distributed to cultural group, but rather to which culture(s) it is distributed in what proportion. Issues as disparate as affirmative action, ethnic conflict and secession fall under the umbrella of inquires about cultural pluralism because all essentially involve debates about the power and resources ought to be distributed among people of different identities.

Cultural Pluralism and Diversity in Nepal

The composite fabric of Nepali culture has been woven with strands and shades of varying textures and colours. It is no exaggeration to say that since ancient times Nepal has been characterized as a meeting place for many groups, religions, races and cultures.

Despite its small size, Nepal is characterized by a cultural assortment of religions, languages, caste, ethnic groups and indigenous people. At present, 101 ethnic and caste groups and subgroups, and 93 living languages have been documented (CBS, 2001). In addition, these caste, ethnic and language groups are further divided into eight major religions: Hindu, Buddhist, Islam, Kirat, Jain, Sikh, Christian and Bahai. The following categories of people more or less represent the population composition of the diverse groups of the country (see annex 1 for details).²

1. **Parbatiyas**- groups considered caste Hindus (“twice-born” castes as well as so called “untouchables”) speaking Nepali as their mother tongue comprise about **39%**.
2. **Janajatis**- hill and mountain ethnic groups of Tibeto-Burman language speakers comprise about **22%**.
3. **Newars**- followers of both Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions comprise about **5%**.

4. '*Madhises*', peoples of the plains, comprise about 32%, including about 18% caste Hindus, about 10% plains ethnic groups and about 4% Muslims.
5. Marwari, Bangali, Sikhs, Christians and "unidentified" caste and ethnic groups consist of about 2%.

These wide-ranging cultural diversities in terms of caste/ethnicity, race, religion, languages, regionalism, and traditions of knowledge make Nepali society a cultural mosaic in the true sense (Dahal 1995; Bista 1982).

Management of Cultural Pluralism and Diversity:

A Historical Overview

The process of nation-state building, more specifically the ways the rulers in the past tried to 'manage' cultural diversities and pluralism had far reaching consequences for the different groups. This section presents an overview of the major efforts to accommodate Nepal's diverse cultures over the course of three political epochs, viz. the Shah and Rana Period (1768-1951), the Panchayat Period (1962-1990) and the Democratic Period (1990 onwards). It also discusses the constitutional (1990) provisions addressing cultural pluralism and diversity of the country.

The Shahs and Ranas Period (1768-1951): Before 1768, Nepal was divided into small kingdoms and principalities and therefore it is difficult to give an overview of pluralism and its management in Nepal. King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Gorkha king who unified the country in the late eighteenth century, referred to his new kingdom as a "garden bedecked with four *varna* and thirty-six *jats*", the four traditional castes of the Hindu *varna* system, by which the Hindu people of Nepal of lower middle hill regions were organized; and thirty-six known "tribes" or what today known as *janajati* people – who made up Nepal's known indigenous population of Buddhist, Hindu and animist peoples and occupied the higher hill and mountain ranges to the north (Sharma 1992). This caste and ethnic schema was gradually entwined with the Hindu great tradition, albeit without intensively disturbing the local cultures (Dahal 1995).

The schema was codified in the Muluki Ain of 1854, a legal code that prescribed different kinds of rights and duties based on a religiously sanctioned caste hierarchy. In effect, the Muluki Ain categorized all the people of Nepal into the following five distinct hierarchical ranks, without

seriously considering the diversity and complexity of the Nepali culture. The orders were:

1. Castes group of wearing sacred thread known as *tagadhari*
2. Groups of 'non-enslavable' liquor consuming caste, called *namasine matwali*
3. Groups of 'enslavable' liquor consuming caste, called *masine matwali*
4. Impure but 'touchable' castes
5. Untouchable castes

From the point of view of the rulers, the plurality of the Nepalese society was conceived within a uniform socio-political framework. The diverse caste and ethnic groups were incorporated into a holistic framework of a 'national caste hierarchy' (Höfer 1979). On the other hand, diversity was translated into inequality; positions were increasingly ascribed to different ranks that corresponded with caste/ethnic divisions. Rather than seeking to establish national unity through a vision of culturally homogenous population, the rulers sought to define a national identity which allowed for cultural variation but which had Hinduism as its major pillar (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999). In other words, by dividing their subjects into castes, the pre- 1951 rulers united large sections of Nepalese population under the aegis of a Hindu ritual framework, thus allowing for diversity.

During the period of Shah and Rana rule, social harmony as well as national cultural identity was maintained by strictly enforcing Hindu laws. In other words, the rulers consolidated their powers by arranging all groups of Nepal in a hierarchical framework of the Hindu caste structure. The Hindu values of morals and merits were enforced to provide the support base for the despotic regime. Within this framework of an emerging Hindu polity, ethnic populations, notably ethnic elites, responded by adopting the specific cultural symbols of those in the powers. Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997: 421-22) has rightly called this as the "empire model" of national integration, which resembles the pluralism of Byzantine Empire, with a high degree of structural differentiation against the background of a unifying socio-political framework with differing social function attributed to hierarchically differentiated strata.

The Panchayat Period (1962-1990): Along with the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1950, Nepal opened her door to the outside world encouraging the process of democratization and modernization. Rather than developing a new model of ethnic pluralism, the Panchayat rulers sought to promote modernization imperatives³ (e.g. abolition of the Muluki Ain of 1854, land reform, standardization of the system of education and development efforts with the help of foreign aid) by advocating homogenization—one nation sharing one culture. Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997) has called this model of ethnic and cultural accommodation the "nationalist model." Beyond forging national identity in a changing geopolitical environment, the requirements of modernization, as understood worldwide during the 1960s and 1970s called for national unity, particularly in the sense of sharing one culture.

Within the process of creating a nation, the Panchayat government adopted an assimilationist policy, insisting upon creating a homogenous development society (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999:55-56, Gaige 1975). In official rhetoric, however, the Nepali nation was presented as made up of equal citizens sharing a common culture, which is sharing cultural elements of *parbtiya* Hindus (Burghart 1984). Hence, equality was proclaimed but apparently it could only be achieved by suppressing difference. In addition, cultural unity was perceived as means of value integration and means of communication that became indispensable within the development process. Any claim to ethnic identity was reduced to political rebellion during the Panchayat period.

Even within this given structure, one of the most dramatic changes that took place was the introduction of New Legal Code (Naya Muluki Ain) in 1964. According to this Code, nobody could claim inferiority or superiority on the basis of race, caste and creed; everybody was equal before the law (Dahal 1995). No doubt many of the strictures of the caste system such as the 'defiling' of food and water by the low castes and religious sanctions against anti-caste behaviour have weakened after the introduction of the new code but the caste system is alive and, in some cases, has become more distinct and prominent over the years. Caste forms the basis of social interaction among the majority of Nepal's diverse ethnic population and there is a fairly uniform order of caste ranking even today. This is because those ethnic/caste groups whose social position is higher in the traditional hierarchy have appropriated much of the power, influence, wealth and prestige available within the system. Thus, "high caste" values have become a model to raise

one's socio-economic status and even to identify oneself in the existing social and political structure.

The Democratic Period (1990 onwards): After a long struggle, Nepal was able to form a democratic government in April 1990 that enacted a new constitution. The new constitution for the first time defines *adhirajya*, the kingdom, as a multiethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and constitutional monarchical kingdom. But the definition is not inclusive enough: the various ethnic groups of Nepal are not Hindus and their mother tongue is not the Nepali language. However, it can be taken as a breakthrough from the historical model of national integration in its promise to 'maintain the cultural diversity of the country' and to promote 'healthy and cordial social relations amongst the various religions, castes, tribes and communities and linguistic groups' by aiding 'to conserve and promote their language, literatures, scripts, arts and cultures (Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990).

On paper at least, the constitution of 1990 allows Nepalese the opportunity to abandon their subject status and emerge as citizens. Pfaff-Czarnecka (1997) has called this type of ethnic and cultural accommodation a "patchwork of minorities' model". The minorities are now uniting to institute internal reforms and take public action breaking way from the former modes of accommodation. The admission of ethnic languages in the Nepalese mass media, among others, helped to bring out ethnic articulations in the streets. During the Panchayat period, minorities' cultures were certainly neglected, if not suppressed; if ethnic culture was present in the public arena at all, it was folklorized. However, even though the majority of poor ethnic population continues to carry the heavy load of their identities (Campbell 1997), an increasing number of people now dare to assert publicly that their cultures are not inferior, but different. As a reaction to former government's assimilationist cultural policy, a number of ethnic groups, using open space of democratic era, publicly demand to protect and preserve their cultural traits and stress the importance of rethinking Nepal's cultural identity.

Thus, after decades of homogenization measures, it is now cultural diversity and pluralism that orient cultural discourse. Differences are stressed by insisting upon distinct languages, distinct origins, distinct religious orientations and distinct chronicles. In this process, the uniformity of cultural endeavours is striking. Distinctions are worked out by constant references to language (often seeking to invent a new script), narratives of ethnic origin

and debates on valid religious forms (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999:84). At the same time some groups (eg *janajatis*) have become ever more concerned to express how utterly different they are; culture and cultural differences are spoken about more often, and cultural differences are brought to bear on daily life, public rituals, media and political organizations to a greater extent than was earlier the case. Partly this is because different groups are in closer contact than earlier and compete for the same scarce resources; but it is also partly because members of ethnic groups in Nepal feel that their cultural boundaries are threatened by tendencies towards Hinduization and therefore feel an acute need to advertise their cultural difference.

Moreover, following the global debates on minority rights, indigenous people and human rights and the international recognition of the protection of human and minority rights as indispensable part of governance, different communities of Nepal have started to assert their status as 'minorities', 'nationalities', 'indigenous people' of the country. The constructed symbols of Nepali nationalism are being questioned. The benevolent and encompassing nation state of "gardens of all caste and ethnic groups" is now criticized as being the hegemonic power domicile of certain groups (i.e. high caste hill Hindus), a 'predatory state' (Bhattachan 1998), 'communal' (Gurung et.al 2000), 'cultural imperialist' (Lawati 2001), 'internal colonizers' (Subba 2000), etc., by different scholars and activists. Thus they see past efforts of state building as an attempt by some groups to gain state power over other groups through state policies that were favourable for such a purpose.

The Constitution of 1990 and Pluralism: The Constitution of 1990, for the first time in history, has recognized the plural character of Nepali society. It is a significant departure from the past rulers' reluctance to acknowledge the existence of cultural difference within the Kingdom. A number of provisions of the constitution (Articles 11, 18, 26) therefore, together seek to protect the rights of individuals whilst respecting the value of diversity to the goal of national integration.

The constitution (article 2) defines the Nepali nation as "having common aspirations and united by a allegiance to national independence and integrity of Nepal, the Nepalese people irrespective of religion, race, caste or tribe collectively constitute the nation." This definition of nationhood acknowledges pluralism in the sense that the concept of nationhood does not require homogeneity in terms of social and cultural or religious unity. What is emphasized instead is commitment to the independence and integrity of the

country irrespective of religious, racial, sexual, caste or ethnic differences among the people.

The constitution recognizes Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and constitutional monarchical kingdom (article 4). This article clearly recognizes the diversity with the different ethnic and linguistic groups making up the Nepali nation but underestimates the religious plurality prevailing in the country by declaring Nepal as a Hindu kingdom. However, article 19 (1) declares that a person shall have the freedom to profess and practice his own religion as coming down to him from time immemorial with regard to the traditional customs, but no person shall be entitled to convert the religion of any other person. Article 19 (2) further states that any religious community shall be entitled to its independent existence according to law and shall have the right to manage and protect its religious places and trusts.

Though the constitution declares Nepali to be the national and official language of the country, article 18 (1&2) guarantees each community residing in Nepal the right to preserve and promote its language, script and culture. It also guarantees each community the right to operate schools up to the primary level in its own mother tongue for imparting education to its children.

The Constitution (Articles 3 & 4) also empowers the state to enact laws for the protection and advancement of the interests of those who belong to a class or group, which is economically, socially or educationally backward. Untouchability has been abolished. No person can be denied access to any public place or be deprived of the use of public facilities on the basis of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe, or ideology or any of them.

The constitution enlists several directive principles and state policies (Articles 25 & 26) intended to manage the caste and ethnic pluralism of the country. The state is advised to maintain the cultural diversity of the country. It is suggested to pursue a policy of strengthening the national unity by promoting healthy and cordial social relations among the various religions, castes, tribes, communities and linguistic groups, and by helping in the promotion of their languages, literatures, scripts, arts and culture. According to Article 26 (10) the state is required to pursue a policy which will help promote the interests of the economically and socially backward groups and communities by making special provisions with regard to their education, health and employment. Article 25 (3) mentions that the social objective of the state is to establish and develop, on the foundation of justice and

morality, a healthy social life, by eliminating all types of economic and social inequalities and by establishing harmony amongst the various caste, tribes, religions, languages, races and communities.

Thus, we may conclude that the constitutional provisions of accommodation of the country's diverse groups with the spirit of co-existence of various ethnic and cultural groups and a rational choice of political action within the constitutional framework is not in any way offensive to the democratization process undergoing in Nepal. What is lacking, however, is a strong leadership having a real commitment to implement such institutional provisions to accommodate the diverse groups in the country.

Emerging and Enduring Issues

The post-1990 period, popularly known as the 'democratic period' has witnessed the rise of issues related to cultural pluralism and diversity in Nepal. The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 with ideals of meta-narratives (equality, liberty, social justice, and human rights) allowed many dissenting voices of different communities who had suffered discrimination at the hands of the state in the past to surface. Since then, there has been a growing politicization of ethnicity, regionalism, minority and *dalit* rights, accompanied by mounting public and academic debates on redefining the role of state and nature of governance in multicultural societies like Nepal⁴.

This section identifies and discusses the emerging and enduring issues of cultural pluralism and diversity in Nepal while dealing with its diverse groups of people. Specially, I shall discuss the issues of ethno-cultural cleavages, marginalized castes and ethnic groups, minorities, ethnicity and equitable or proportionate development as the leading issues of the country.

Ethno-Cultural Cleavages: Wherever may be the constitutional provision for accommodating ethnic and cultural diversity of the country, Dahal (1992) states that three main forms of ethnic divides are worthy of attention. The first is between the *pahade* (hill people) and the *madhise* (Tarai people) based on the regionalism and ethnicity. The second is the split between the high caste Hindu groups (particularly the Hill Brahman, Thakuri, Chhetri and Newar) and the so-called 'indigenous groups' or *janjati* of Nepal. The third is the split between the Brahman and Newar groups on the one hand, and the high caste Hindu groups and the low caste Hindu groups, on the other⁵.

Today, the Tarai is primarily inhabited by three major groups of people, namely the original inhabitants (e.g. Tharu, Dhimal), the people of 'Indian origin' (e.g. Yadav, Gupta, Shah) and the people of hill origin (e.g. Bahun, Chhetri, Magar, Gurung). The settlement of hill people in the Tarai increased rapidly following the malaria eradication program of the late 1950s and subsequent land resettlement programs of the government. Historically, neglect of the Tarai people by the hill-dominated government created an explosion of ethnic tension in the Tarai. Some Tarai leaders, particularly those representing the Hindu caste groups in the Nepal *Sadbhavana Party*, a Tarai based political party, have started a *pahadiya hatao* campaign to physically remove the hill people from the plains, which might be considered a disturbing trend in national politics. These leaders also advocate the use of Hindi as a link language in the Tarai, challenging Nepali, the national language of Nepal (see Dahal 1992).

The division between hill people and plain people also seems to be linked to the uncontrolled flow of Indian migrants crossing the border to settle in the Nepal Tarai. Because so many of the groups on either side of the border are culturally identical, it is difficult to differentiate between Nepali Tarai residents and Indian settlers. Daily familial, cultural and commercial interactions which take place between these groups further complicate matters (Bhattarai 2000). In recent years, more and more Indian workers have been coming into Nepal and settling with their wives and children. This could result in a problem of national identity among the Tarai people and fuel the suspicions of hill Nepalis concerning the allegiance of Tarai residents (Dahal 1992 and 1996).

Cleavages between the high caste Hindu groups and the *janajati* have also come to the forefront these days. The *janajatis* feel that the Hindu high caste people who have historically dominated Nepal's governments have always neglected them. They claim that they are the indigenous population of Nepal and demand a share of power in national politics and insist on the recognition of their cultural and linguistic rights. They consider themselves as non-Hindu groups; although the Hindu-dominated government of Nepal has always tried to incorporate them within the Hindu caste hierarchical model. The Hindu caste culture is considered as an 'alien culture' by the *janajatis*. Furthermore, the predominance of Brahmans in every field of life—political, economic, and social—is labelled as *bahunbad* and thus the Brahmans have been the subjects of attack in recent years in Nepal (Bista 1991; Sharma 1992 cited in Dahal 1996).

Likewise, Dahal (1996) asserts that social and political rivalry between the Newars and the Brahmins is creating serious problems for the nascent democratic structure of Nepal. Malla (1992) has clearly narrated the feeling of the Newars of Kathmandu Valley stating, "The 'outsiders', particularly the Parbatiyas (the hill people), the Madhesiyas (the plains people) and the Bhotiyas (the Mountain people), have gradually displaced Newars in their home". Newars actually claim that as they are the original inhabitants of the Valley, they should have access to all fields of Nepalese life—social, economic, and political. In fact, considering the present population size of Newars in Nepal (5.5% of the total population), Newars occupy the first position in Human Development Index (HDI=0.457) (Nepal Human Development Report 1998).

Finally, clashes between the high castes and the low castes are emerging rapidly. About 15 per cent of the total population of Nepal consists of untouchables. The New Legal Code, after its three decades of implementation, has not been effective in changing the socio-economic status of the untouchables, and they have the lowest social and the economic status compared to other groups in Nepal. As a consequence, they are raising voices organizing into several forums against the dominant Hindu castes (Dahal 1996).

The above discussion demonstrates that social, economic, and political conditions of Nepal over the years motivated people to show serious concern over their own ethnicity, race, caste, language, religion and region. This concern is being demonstrated more intensely and publicly after the restoration of democracy thus contradicting the assumption that democracy is the ultimate solution to all ethnic problems of Nepal. This also indicates that there is something wrong with democratic model that we have adopted.

The Nepali state, therefore, should play a constructive role of mutual empowerment rather than encouraging mutual apprehension in society. The ethnic blindness of the power elite is no longer a possibility under a constitutional framework that has recognized multiethnicity and multilingualism as bases of the country's reality. In addition, the constitution has opened opportunities for reforming and reconstituting the Nepali state as a cohesive society.

Issue of Marginalized Castes: The Dalits: *Dalits* are defined as those castes of people of Nepal who were categorized as untouchables in the Purano Muluki Ain (Old Civil Code of 1854) until the promulgation of Naya Muluki

Ain (New Civil Code of 1964). They have been placed at the bottom in the Hindu caste hierarchy (Jha 1998). The total population of *dalits* as reported in 2001 Census is around 15 percent of the total 23 millions population of Nepal but the *dalits* believe that their total population is actually at least one fifth of the total population of the country, that is, about 4.5 million (Bhattarai 2002).

They are the most marginalized caste groups in Nepal. A number of studies in Nepal in the past have shown that disadvantaged groups, particularly *dalits* have comparatively lower access to government institution and organization involved in development (e.g. agriculture and livestock development, forestry, health and education). They face excessive economic suppression and social exclusion that hinders them in accessing resources equitably and living a normal human life (Dahal and Mishra 1993; Sharma et al., 1994; Koirala 1996; Jha 1998; TEAM Consult, 1999; Bhattachan et al. 2001; Action-Aid 2002; and Dahal et al. 2002).

Dalits as a whole is the poorest community in Nepali Society. The average land owning per household among the *dalits* is 2.46 ropani of khet (irrigated land) and 4.5 ropani pakho (dry up land) land. Landlessness is acute among all *dalit* groups, but this is more acute among the Tarai *dalits*. About 50 % of the *dalits* households surveyed had the food deficiency (TEAM Consult 1998).

The educational status of *dalits* in Nepal is also very disappointing. The overall literacy rate of *dalits* was 22.8% in the 1991 census⁶ compared to national average of 39.6 percent. Male literacy was 33.9 % compared to only 12.0% of the female literacy rate among the *dalits*. The literacy rate of hill *dalits* is much higher, 27.0 % compared to only 11.0% of the Tarai *dalits*. Only 4.0 % female are literate among Tarai *dalits* compared to 14.7 % of the female literacy rate of hill *dalits*. However, the male literacy rate (40.2%) of the hill *dalits* is slightly above the national average. Of the total *dalits* enumerated in 1991 census, Musahar has the lowest literacy rate of 4.2 % whereas the highest is that of the Gaine (31.1%). Likewise the educational attainment of *dalits* (Primary, Secondary, SLC, Intermediate and above) is only 14.6% compared to 28.9 % of the national average.

Dalits in Nepal are not only economically marginalized but also discriminated by the high caste and *Janajati* groups in many areas of social, cultural and political life. They also face intra-*dalit* discrimination as well (Bhattachan et al. 2001). The caste based discrimination is observed in every day life of people and also noted in government offices, corporations, private

and NGOs. They don't feel socially equal with these groups of people. Even today, they have no courage to protest such discriminatory behaviors and they reluctantly accept these things as their fate (Dahal et al. 2002).

Dalits are oppressed even from other oppressed group while in case of *dalit* women besides being oppressed from rest of the society they face gender discrimination within their community as well (Lawoti 2000). *Dalits* face cultural discrimination also because even though they may share the language and religion with 'upper caste' Hindus, they have different cultural attributes, due to their extreme exclusion and domination. The *Madhesi dalits* face linguistic discrimination as well because they do not speak Nepali as their mother tongue (Bhattarai 2000). Tables 2.1 & 2.2 make clear the actual situation of *dalits* in Nepal

The table 2.2 clearly indicates that *dalit's* participation in the political, administrative, academic and judicial fields of Nepali state is very low or almost nil. Their representation in these domains is rather insignificant compared to their population size of about 3.5 millions. This situation is directly contradictory to the provisions of the democratic Constitution of 1990. In the directive principle and policies of the state, article 26 (10) asserts that the state shall adopt a policy of raising the standard of the socially and economically backward tribes and communities by making special provision with regard to their education, health and employment.

Despite the government's efforts for the *dalit* upliftment over the years (such as the introduction of New Legal Code of 1964, the Constitution of 1990, specific policies in the Eight and Ninth Five Year Plans, establishment of Dalit Vikas Samity in 1997 and more recently established National Dalit Commission (March 2002) with objectives of high level policy making and programme formulation for *dalit* enhancement) and proliferation of many NGOs and INGOs in enhancing the quality of life of *dalit* (social, economic, political and health condition) condition of the *dalits* has not improved much

In Nepal, adoption of the *pahade* upper caste Hindu Ideology by the state and defining rights and duties of citizens and the state based on it has universalized those values and rendered other value system invisible (Lawoti 2000). Some caste groups who were culturally marginalized got excluded from influential positions in other realms in the state and society because the cultural attributes became the main criteria for obtaining those positions. The economic impact of such cultural imperialism probably felt most severely by the *dalits*.

Despite being an industrious community that supported the society by providing farming tools, clothes, shoes, hides, jewelry and so on, the *dalits* always suffered from economic exploitation. Their tools were never upgraded and improved by creating and sustaining the competitive advantages of their product. Rather they were assigned the lowest social position and deprived of power, knowledge and a dignified social status (Dahal, forthcoming). The caste system that rendered the group politically and socially weak denied them the opportunity to negotiate appropriate price for their skills and products with their high-caste clients. Even today the *dalits* face discrimination in economic opportunities because they are effectively denied from the operating business in many areas such as food line, and getting employed, as peasants since many 'upper caste' do not take food touched by *dalits* (Lawoti 2000).

The policy of reservation to *dalits* in public offices, education and public employment may address the problem of unequal access to resources. But it is urgent to promote and encourage social integration of low castes or *dalits* with the general population whether in conducting trainings, forming groups, discussion with communities, excursions, hiring of staff, eating in groups etc. In addition, it is equally important to initiate a process by which the general population gradually accepts them as equal members of society (CARE 1996). Then only, the idea of reservation to *dalits* might work effectively.

Issue of Marginalized Groups: The Janajatis: The term *janajatis* has been used in Nepal to designate the non-Hindu groups who have their distinct culture and languages or the groups who are also referred as 'tribes' in anthropological writings on Nepal. However, the category of *janajatis* does not include non-Hindus groups like Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and others.

It is important to realize that *dalits* or low castes are not the only ones to be socially discriminate and marginalized though they do form the majority in this group (CARE 1996). There are several examples of other groups such as bonded laborers prevailing among the Tharus of far west under the *kamaiya* system, and a number of small tribal groups such as *Chepangs*, *Rautes*, *Satars*, *Danuvars*, and *Kusundas* who are surviving in a marginalized condition (Bista 1967, Mabuhang 1999).

The practices of *Kamaiya* system, despite the declarations of their liberation by the government in 2000, has forced a large number of Tharus in the far west to live almost as slaves working for landlords without wage in

order to pay back debts incurred both during their lifetime and those of two or three generation ago. Even those who have been liberated face dire living conditions, as the government has not initiated resettlement programs for them. Despite provisions in the Constitution that did not permit any form of slavery, the Kamaiya were not freed from their servitude for a decade even after the restoration of democracy. The Kamaiya case demonstrates lack of apathy of the ruling group towards issues of indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups in the country. Many Tharus were made bonded labor after being displaced from their land and territory by new migrants. The state policies of encouraging new settlements in the *Tarai* and cutting down forests for settling migrants were primarily responsible for displacing the Tharus from their traditional territories. Conversion of communally accessed forests into individually owned cultivated lands speeded the process of uprooting of the Tharus from their traditional habitat. The government did not recognize the Tharus' communal rights on lands and forests. It facilitated the displacement process.

Then, there are some groups scattered in pockets across the country who have been facing dire consequences in terms of discrimination, because of their small population as well as due to historic and current discriminatory treatment by the state and society. Imposition of dominant cultural values on these peoples has threatened their culture and traditions and Hindu religious hegemony has rendered other religious groups and customs vulnerable. The attempt of Hindu fundamentalists to encompass folk religions within its fold is deplorable because it refuses to recognize the separate religious identity of these peoples (Lawoti 2001). Promotion of one language, one religion, one dress and mono-cultural nationalism by the state not only hurt the culture of these peoples but it effectively marginalized them in economic, political and social realms (Bhattachan 1995). Some scholars have termed this phenomenon of imposition of dominant values, norms, and traditions on other communities of the society as cultural imperialism, which continues even today in lesser degree and in less explicit manner. These peoples face cultural imperialism because the state and society promotes the *pahade* culture. The Constitution and laws of the country also do not recognize equal status of non-Hindu groups and ways of lifestyle and practices (Lawoti 2000).

These groups until recently have been practicing semi-nomadic living roaming around the forest. The general population therefore, regards them as less "civilized". Consequently they are subject to exploitation in the hands of

their more "civilized" counterpart. The Rautes in the west, Chepangs in the central, and Meches in the east are some of the examples of such groups, in addition to other similar groups such as Danuwars and Chhantyal falling into the same category (CARE 1996). Their access to state and societal resources is also extremely limited in comparison to other ethnic and caste groups. Scholar like Caplan (1970) argues that these groups were economically marginalized by confiscation of their community land by upper caste people with state backing. The impact of these processes is still felt today as land and ancestral property, which these people normally lack, provide capital and properties that can be mortgaged for economic activities.

Similar to *dalits*, government policies and programmes have largely ignored these peoples. The government attitude seems to formulate universal programmes and policies for education and poverty alleviation. These have largely benefited the dominant group members rather than these people.

Issue of Minorities: Generally, the minority groups are defined by their powerlessness relative to other groups in a society, and majority groups are the reverse: they dominate other groups. The use of 'minority-majority' category exists only with reference to inter-group relationships of different groups in society. Eriksen (1993:121) has argued that the twin concepts of majority and minority are *relative* and *relation*. A minority exists only in relation to a majority and vice versa, and their relationship is contingent on the relevant system boundaries. In the contemporary world, these systems boundaries are nearly always state boundaries. So, the majority group/minority group concepts signify their sociological meanings only in power relations between different groups in local, regional and national level corresponding their social, cultural, economic and political positions.

Thus, it can be inferred that a majority-minority group relation implies a hierarchical relationship of dominance and subjugation, and the definitions of 'minority' encompass the group's distinct cultural or physical characteristics or social weakness as basis for discrimination and exclusion. The population size of such group may not be the necessary attributes for the group's delineation as 'minority'.

Nepal provides an interesting case with regard to the issues of minority group for no single group out of more than 100 caste and ethnic groups, is in numerical majority. Strictly speaking, all the Nepalese population groups are minorities (see annex 1). But in public discourse, the high caste *pahade*

Table 2.1 Human Development by Caste and Ethnicity, 1996

Category	Bahun	Chhetri	Newar	Madhesi	Janajati	Dalit	Nepal
Life Expectance	60.8	56.3	62.2	58.4	53.0	50.3	55.0
Adult Literacy Rate (%)	58.0	42.0	54.8	27.5	35.2	23.8	36.27
Mean Year of Schooling	4.7	2.8	4.4	1.7	2.0	1.2	2.3
Per Capita Income (NRS)	9927	7744	11953	6911	6607	4940	7673
Per Capita PPP Income (US\$)	1533	1197	1848	1068	1021	764	1186
Life Expectance Index	0.957	0.522	0.620	0.557	0.467	0.422	0.500
Educational Attainment Index	0.490	0.342	0.462	0.221	0.280	0.186	0.295
Income Index	0.237	0.181	0.289	0.160	0.152	0.110	0.179
Human Development Index	0.444	0.348	0.456	0.313	0.299	0.239	0.325
Ratio to HDI Nepal = 100	135.9	107.3	140.7	96.3	92.2	73.6	1000

Source: NESAC, 1998

Table 2.2 Integrated National Index of Governance, 1999

Institutions	Bahun & Chhetri	Janajati	Madhesi	Dalit	Newar	Others	Total
Courts	181	4	18	0	32		235
Constitutional bodies	14	2	3	0	6		25
Cabinet	20	4	5	0	3		32
Parliament	159	36	46	4	20		265
Public Administration	190	3	9	0	43		245
Parties Leadership	97	25	26	0	18		165
Leadership: local elected bodies	106	23	31	0	30		191
Leadership: Industry & commerce	7		15	0	20		42
Leadership: educational sectors	75	2	7	1	11	1	97
Leadership: cultural arena	85	6	0	0	22		123
Science/Technology	36	2	6	0	18	0	62
Civil Society Leadership	41	1	4	0	8	0	54
<i>Total</i>	<i>1011</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>170</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>231</i>		<i>1520</i>
<i>Percentage</i>	<i>66.5</i>	<i>7.1</i>	<i>11.2</i>	<i>.3</i>	<i>15.2</i>		<i>100</i>
<i>Population %</i>	<i>31.6</i>	<i>22.2</i>	<i>30.9</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>5.6</i>	<i>.1</i>	<i>100</i>
Difference %	+34.9	-15.1	-19.7	-8.4	+9.6	-1	

Source: Neupane, 2000

Hindus are usually referred as the dominant group in the sense that they are enjoying better access to state and societal resources. Most of the ethnic groups (*janajatis*), *dalits* and the people of Tarai origin (*madhesis*) are treated as marginal on two major grounds: one is their disadvantaged position in national human development index and, the other lower representation in integrated national governance index (table 2.1 & 2.2). From this reason minorities in Nepal can be defined in terms of domination or oppression: culturally and/ or in terms of access to societal and state resources.

The table 2.1 & 2.2 show that the difference exists between different caste and ethnic groups and by regional basis. To some extent, ethnic categories correspond to the actual division of societal resources: the high caste Bahun and Chhetri, along with high caste Newar population, share among themselves the block of governmental and political position. Similarly, inequalities are displayed if we take account of the literacy and educational status, income level, health and incidence of poverty. The *dalits*, *janajatis* and *madhesis* are at the bottom of the Human Development Index (table 2.1)

Similarly, Neupane (2000) has evidently demonstrated that the elite Hindu caste *Bahun and Chhetri* and elite Newar are enjoying better access to resources and are occupying a majority position in relation to the rest of the people. The former two groups are ruling groups whereas Newar community has done well in accessing resources despite facing cultural discrimination. The Newar's entrepreneurial skills in trade and commerce, their specialized knowledge and skills in administration and residence in the capital are responsible for their better performance compared to other indigenous peoples. Jointly these communities were holding more than 81.7% leadership positions in important areas of governance such as judiciary, executive, legislature, and public administration etc. in 1999. This situation, a legacy of the past, has not improved even after the advent of multiparty democracy and implementation of the pro-poor and disadvantaged groups focused state interventions via the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-1997) and at the end of the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) and other interventions (NPC 1992 & 1997).

Cultural discrimination on the basis of casteism, ethnicity, religion, language, regionalism, etc., is equally an inherent phenomenon of statehood and creation of minorities in Nepal. For the last two and half centuries, the ruling elite of Nepal - hill high caste Hindus and their cultural ethos (religion, language, etc.) have been adopted by the state and promoted as the Nepali national culture. Ethnic groups, the so-called 'low caste' *dalits*, Muslims, and

other non-Hindus religious groups have been critical of their continuous exclusion and subjugation. They have been demanding equitable participation and representation (including cultural) in the national mainstream for many decades. Similarly, the plights of the Tarai people- their subordinated position irrespective of their caste/ethnicity and religious background in the state dominated by the hill people and hill culture have been strongly assertive and their movements for ending this discrimination is equally significant in Nepal.

However, from the state point of view there is no official definition and recognition of 'minority groups' as such in Nepal. Concepts like 'backward' and 'oppressed', and 'downtrodden' are interchangeably used to designate some special disadvantaged groups like *dalits*, *janajatis* (nationalities/ethnic groups/tribes) and indigenous peoples in official documents and in the present Constitution of Nepal (HMG 1990). These concepts are used in political neutral sense as they are conveyed or understood more in terms of 'economic backwardness' or 'social backwardness' rather than in the fullest sense of the historical and present discriminations against these groups.

Issue of Politicization of Ethnicity: Ethnicity is regarded as one of the vital aspect of relationship among groups. It is basically concerned with the idea of distinctiveness, the 'them' and 'us' dichotomy, and distinctiveness on claimed basis of share origin and common cultural characteristics (Barth, 1969). Paul Brass (1991) has defined the concept ethnicity as the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups. He further asserts that in political arena ethnicity can operate at two levels: a. as an interest group to improve the well-being of group members as individuals, and/or b. go further and demand that corporate rights be conceded to the group as a whole. While the former may include demands related to economic well-being, civil rights, educational opportunities and the like, the latter may extend to demanding 'a major say for the group in the political system as a whole or control over a piece of territory within the country or they demand a country for their own full sovereignty. Though in lesser degree of magnitude, a similar trend of politicization of ethnicity, especially after 1990 has been observed in Nepal.

In spite of some flaws, the new Constitution of Nepal (1990) has created space for the development of a greater political consciousness of the various ethnic groups. A number of ethnic organizations had already come-up during

the eighties (only a few ethnic organizations had been found before 1979) but after the restoration of democracy in 1990 the number of such organizations increased rapidly. It has gained momentum by the steadily growing self-consciousness of the various ethnic groups. They remember their own cultural values, even though these may be interpreted by the current ethnic elites in a way different from the traditional one. The growing politicization of the ethnic organizations is prominent, even though their leaders always emphasize their mere cultural intentions. In this context, it is striking that the ethnic organizations call their group *nations*. Some organizations even go as far as demanding a more or less territorial independence from the Nepali state, mostly in connection with the call for a federal state. These demands are still forwarded with little militancy, but the articulation is getting more and more aggressive.

In order to defend their position and to achieve their goals in the near future, a closer collaboration among them is of great importance. As a result, *Nepal Janajati Mahasangh* (Nepal Federation of Nationalities or NEFEN) was formed in July 1990, which has been working as an umbrella organization for 42 ethnic associations (Gellner 1997). The word *janajati* often criticized by some other organizations is translated as *nationalities* by the member organizations of the Mahasangh. They stand for revival and saving of the traditional cultures and values of their ethnic groups (Kraemer 1994). The membership in the Mahasangh is open to all ethnic groups and organizations but not to the Hindu castes including the so-called "untouchables" (even though the latter are discriminated against in a similar way). Christian and Muslim organizations are also excluded. Thus, the concept ethnic group has been used in Nepal to designate the non-Hindu groups who have their distinct culture and languages excluding non-Hindu groups like Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and others.

Besides these organizations, which fight for the rights of their ethnic groups in a reasonable way, there are a number of other organizations, which show greater militancy. Organizations like Limbuwan Mukti Morcha, Khambuwan Mukti Morcha (a Rai-organization), Madhise Mukti Morcha (a Tarai organization) and Tamang Saling Mukti Morcha already use the word Mukti (liberation) in their names and thus signal their readiness to adopt more aggressive methods. Their avowed goal is the creation of autonomous regions along the boundaries of the traditional areas of their ethnic and regional groups.

Other organizations trying to represent various ethnic groups like the Mongol National Organization under the leadership of Gopal Gurung head in the same direction. Gopal Gurung sees his organization as a political party that has not been recognized by the Election Commission in the run-up to the general elections of 1991 under the pretension of communal orientation. Referring to this a complaint about infringement of the constitution is still pending and has not gone beyond any further hearings (Hangen 1999).

There was no official distinction between caste and ethnic group prior to 1990. In the past, there was an attempt to define ethnic group in narrower sense as people of 'backward' 'uncivilized' community with 'primitive' subsistence pattern. But now after many years of ethnic activism, the government has approved the definition of 'ethnic group' and recognized 61 groups as ethnic groups of Nepal in 1996. Accordingly, ethnic groups are now recognized as 'nationalities' of Nepal, and nationalities are defined as 'those who have their own mother language and traditional culture but who do not fall under the traditional four-fold Varna classifications of Hindu Varna system' (National Committee for Development of Nationalities (NCDN) 2000). Further, the *nationalities* are those ethnic communities having the following characteristics:

- Those who have distinct cultural identities;
- who have their traditional languages, religions, and customs and cultures;
- whose social fabrics are based on equality;
- those who have their own geographical and demographical areas in the country;
- those who have written and / or oral traditions of their own;
- those who have notion of "We/Us";
- those ethnic groups who have no pivotal or decisive roles to play and exercise in the polity and administration of modern Nepal;
- those who are the indigenous or native people of Nepal, and
- those who call themselves ethnic people.

Today, ethnic groups claim that they have been exploited; displaced from traditional land and resources; culture of ruling high caste group have been imposed upon them; the state apparatus; were given inferior caste ranking; excluded from the economy and polity, etc. The plights of the ethnic groups, they claim, have not been addressed effectively even after the advent of the multiparty democracy. They refute the claims by the state that it is guided by

the principle of equality, social justice and democracy; and they see the dominance of the 'high caste groups' as the 'undeclared state policy of reservations' for the traditional power elite in the democratic set-up. For them, Nepal's transition to democracy has not addressed the aspirations of the ethnic groups to mainstream their cultural identity and their rights to be different in a multicultural nation-state have so far been denied.

Thus, the development of ethnic consciousness and ethnic identity, according to the ethnic activists and leaders are product of the domination of the ruling caste groups. Cultural identity has always been a basis of group identity thereby of identity of its members. Kinship, language, religious ethos, common history, territoriality, culture practices etc, are significant anchors of one's ethnic identity and play important role in fostering collective sense of one's group as well as individual identity. These ethnic ascriptions cannot be simply subsumed as 'primordial ties' (Geertz 1963) or 'instrumentalist' i.e. emphasis of ethnic distinctiveness to gain some political goals (Gellner 1997:7). Ethnic identity in Nepal is also result of a real historical rivalry (Gaenszle 2000 cited in Lawati 2001). The designation of all ethnic groups of Nepal as Nationalities and indigenous peoples since 1990s to separate themselves from the Hindu groups i.e. the ruling groups and ruling cultural ideology also symbolizes the historical rivalry between the dominant and sub-ordinate groups.

The issues of cultural discriminations, subjugation to the Hindu domination, exclusion from the state decision making processes and socio-economic deprivations of the ethnic groups are the major core 'issues' being raised by the ethnic groups and their organizations to demand for the protection of their culture and political rights. Lawati (2001) asserts that ethnic groups in Nepal are facing multiple forms of discriminations (socio-cultural, constitutional, legal and other forms of discriminations). He identifies: Linguistic discrimination; religious discrimination; abolishment of land rights; Cultural Imperialism; Legal discriminations (as many as 25 constitutional provisions and 40 common and special laws are identified as being discriminatory to ethnic/indigenous groups); tampering and manufacturing of the census data; discrimination in access to resources; exclusion in participation in politics and administration; economic vulnerability; misrepresentation and ignorance of media; discrimination in Public Policy, Budgeting and Implementation of Programs and Ignorance of Ethnic/indigenous issues by the Human Rights Groups, as the major forms of discriminations towards indigenous and ethnic minorities in Nepal.

Kumar (2000) claims that ethnic articulation in Nepal has neither a content of secession nor an urge to replace the dominance of state power by a particular ethnic group but the demand of sharing of state power equitably with distributive justice in a multiethnic society. In other words, ethnic politics in Nepal is against the excessive centralization of the state power in the hands of the few that has continued to weaken the social fabric of the state. Such articulations are primarily the manifestation of the sense of denial of the rightful place to the citizenry as a whole (Gurr 1993, 1997); the perception of oppression of the "indigenous voices" (Wilmer 1993) for long through state's deliberate design of assimilation in the name of "national integration" (Birch 1978 cited in Kumar 2000). Their demands are related to the process of reorienting the social forces (Migdal 1994) to secularize the state, which provides the latter with the needful societal cohesion and coherence to build a multicultural and multinational, pluralistic state in its contents and meaning (Kumar 2000).

Thus, ethnicity may act as a trigger for violent conflict only when it is mobilized and manipulated to do so. There are many policy approaches to accommodate ethnic diversity. Constitutional formula, different types of electoral system, decentralization and devolution of power, bill of rights are some of them. Attempts of national building through making all groups homogeneous have already been failed. Ethnic revivalists, in Nepal, therefore have a common plea to abandon the assimilation or melting pot policy of one nation, one religion, one language and one culture and demand to create a sense of the nation as a civic community, rooted in values that can be shared by all diverse groups of the national society. Such a sense of community is best achieved if the concept of 'nation- state' is freed from any connotations of ethnic exclusiveness.

Issue of Disproportionate Development: Disparity among the diverse castes, ethnic, religious and regional groups is the core issue of current development discourse in Nepal. Various human development reports have clearly shown these facts. It is invariably the case that, the lower the caste, the lower is the life expectancy, literacy rate, years of schooling, and per capita income among the people in general (table 2.1). The women, *dalits*, and ethnic minorities in particular are more underprivileged in this regard. Women among them are the most deprived groups. They are not yet economically independent. They have either to depend upon people belonging to high castes or to their male counter parts. More importantly,

they have marginal existence in the spheres of politics and other public domains of decision-making. In spite of four decades of development efforts, poverty remains high and the incidence is pervasive for some particular groups.

The notion of development in any plural society must encompass the cultural factors into account. The development regime, thus embraces not only access to goods and services but also the opportunity to choose a full, satisfying, valuable and valued way of living together, the flourishing of human existence in all its form and as a whole—i.e. taking into account of cultural diversity. However, the relevant question now is: development for what and for whom? The first part of the question focuses on a holistic and integrated perspective on development, and the second emphasizes a people-oriented approach.

Since the development process must ensure the participation of people at the grass root level and take cognition of their perceptions and felt needs, the question of development has to be closely linked to cultural policy. The cultural policy in respect of development needs to be embedded in the framework of cultural pluralism and democratic decentralization. A consequence of the above is that a policy, which seeks to impose unitary solutions regardless of regional variations and cultural specificities, will prove to be counter-productive. Thus, though the policy for development needs to be attuned to national interests and aspirations, it might be wrong effort to ignore the culture-specific dimensions of development.

Thus, the notion of development in a plural country like Nepal should be viewed considering the existing cultural diversity, variations and national identity, which demand a cultural policy of development to comprehend these realities. The issue of national unity and integration is also closely intertwined with the cultural policy. A policy of integration, which disregards cultural pluralism and the composite character of Nepali society and seeks to impose uniformity, homogenization and regimentation on the country's heterogeneous population, has already been proved to be self-defeating. What is required is a humane vision of integration which would take due recognition of Nepal's pluralistic ethos and at the same time strengthen the long-standing bonds and inter-linkages among the people, especially at the grass root level. Nepali society is to be seen, as a honeycomb in which communities are engaged in vibrant interaction, sharing space, ethos and cultural traits, using an evocative metaphor.

In order to accomplish an equitable development, the development regime must be linked to national culture or the cultural identity of a nation, especially when a nation is composed of diverse ethnic/ caste groups with differences in race, language, religion and culture. For this, the government must adopt cultural policies of development incorporating various threads of cultures scattered from the east to the west of the country. In addition, since most of the Nepali people feel that they do not share adequately in the economy, polity and social life, a right-based economic policy might be an alternative approach to deal the economic and cultural disparities among the people.

Thus, we may say that the interface of development and cultural identity in the Nepalese context has two interrelated dimensions: the national, on the one hand, and regional-cultural, on the other. At both the macro and micro levels, the development process needs to be addressed and guided by the pluralistic and composite ethos of Nepali society.

Some Models of Ethnic and Cultural Accommodation

The discussion above, clearly indicates that the increasing awareness and snowballing sense of frustrations among the diverse groups of the country. This ultimately demonstrates the inadequacy of the conventional mode of ethnic and cultural accommodation and the dominant paradigm of national building process aimed at creating monolithic and homogenous Nepali national identity. Moreover, given the pluralistic and heterogeneous nature of Nepali society and the multiple identities that characterize its people and their culture will produce unpredictable complication in future. Accordingly, the managing of diversity and difference for the purpose of nation building is indeed a tremendous challenge for all.

Nathan Galzer and Michale Walger (1995) have proposed two broad frameworks or models for accommodating ethno-cultural diversity. One model rests on the 'non-discrimination principle' where as the other model involves public measures aimed at protecting or promoting ethno-cultural identities in a plural society or State (Kymlicka 1995).

The Non-discrimination Model: The first model is known as "non-discrimination model" and views that cultural identity should neither be supported nor penalized by public policy. Rather, the expression and perpetuation of cultural identities should be left to the private sphere. However, members of each ethnic and cultural group are protected against

discrimination and prejudice and allowed to maintain their ethnic heritage and identity consistent with the rights of the others. But their efforts are purely private and it is the space of public or government agencies to attach legal identities or disabilities to cultural memberships or ethnic identity (Kymlicka 1995:9). According to Walzer, "non-discriminatory model" involves a sharp divorce of the state and ethnicity. The state stands above all the various ethnic and national groups in the country refusing to endorse or support their ways of life or to take an active interest in their social reproduction. Furthermore, the state is neutral with reference to the language, history, literature, and calendar of these groups. Supporters of this model exemplify USA as an example (Ibid.).

But is it possible to find a 'neutral state' in this regard? Every country must make decision about government language, school curricula, and neutralization policies. They must also make decision about public holidays, and national symbols. In reality, the neutral state is seen as a system of 'group rights' that supports the majority's language, history, culture, and calendar. Even in USA, for example, government policy systematically encourages everyone to learn English, which is the language of public schools, court proceedings, and of welfare agencies. Immigrants to the USA are required to learn English before acquiring citizenship. However, the model can be taken as "non-discriminatory", in the sense that minorities are not discriminated against within the mainstream institutions of majority culture, but it is not 'neutral' in its relationship to cultural identities (Kymlicka 1995:10). Thus, the non-discrimination model is appropriate whenever the government aims at integrating disparate groups into a single national culture, based on a common language

The Group Rights Model: On the contrary, the second model involves public measures aimed at protecting and promoting the existing social and cultural diversity. These measures, according to Galzer (1995 cited in Kymlicka 1995)) include language rights, regional autonomy, land claims, guaranteed representation and so on. Galzer calls it the "group right model". This model demands that the government identify specific groups and enforce special legal provision or endorse certain privileges to them in order to promote and protect their cultural heritage and identities. He further argues that 'the group right model is appropriate if a society operates on the assumption that it is a confederation of groups, that group membership is central and permanent, and that the division between groups are such that it is

unrealistic or unjust to envisage these group identities weakening in time to be replaced by a common citizenship'. Then, the choice between non-discrimination and group rights is really a choice between forming a common national culture, and accepting the permanent existence of two or more national cultures within a national culture.

Most of the minorities in Nepal are territorially concentrated and are either settled or attached emotionally on their historic homeland (Bista 1971; Gurung 1989; Bhattachan 996). These groups find themselves in a minority position, not because they have uprooted themselves from their homeland, but their homeland has been incorporated within the boundaries of a larger state. This incorporation is usually involuntary, resulting from unification/ conquest, or ceding of territory from one imperial power to another. Under these circumstances, minorities are rarely satisfied with non-discrimination and eventual integration. What they desire is 'self determination' – that is some forms of local self-government, in order to ensure the continued development of their distinct culture and identities (Pfaff Cazerneka 1999).

Inclusive Democracy Model: In Nepal, advocates of pluralism put responsibility on the state to abandon assimilationist policies and adopt policies that recognize cultural difference. They argued that all cultural or ethnic groups of a plural society like Nepal want their cultural experiences and contributions to be recognized in the public spheres through sensitising public institution to their cultural and linguistic difference. However, their arguments in favor of pluralism or multiculturalism and recognition of difference aim to improve, not undermine, social cohesion by providing minority groups with the cultural security they require in order to maintain their distinct cultural identities and to integrate successfully into the majority societies of which they are the part (Bhattarai 2000):

But there always remains a fear that the more the state becomes involved in the recognition and regulation of ethnic minorities, the more groups must craft their interests and even their identities in terms of categories to which the state is likely to respond (Eisenberg 2000). In this sense, the state might not be neutral about the worth of different cultural values and therefore may prove to be an inadequate adjudicator and regulator of cultural power in the multicultural state (Kymlicka, 2000). Keeping this reality in mind, minority people have started to demand constitutional guaranty for protecting minorities and their rights. Including all these reactions, Lawoti (2001:4)

following Arend Lijphart (1999) has proposed another model which could be called as "inclusive democracy" model. An inclusive democracy model is basically derived from the following four assumptions (Human Development Report, 2000).

An inclusive democracy built on the principle that political power is dispersed and shared in a variety of ways- to protect minorities and to ensure participation and free speech for all citizens.

It emphasizes the quality of representation by striving for consensus and inclusion, not the electoral force of majority.

It also appreciates the need to promote civil society organizations, open media, right-orientated economic policy, and separation of power.

It creates mechanism for the accountability of majority to the minorities.

The Human Development Report 2000 states that the majoritarian model of democracy fails to protect the rights of minorities in many instances where as the consensual or the inclusive model of democracy has effectively protected minority rights. In inclusive democracy, incorporating minority groups requires a more enlightened view of sharing economic and political resources than simple majoritarian democracy. A precondition for building an inclusive democracy is ensuring right to elect representatives and development of a legal framework that protects the right to participation and free expression.

The inclusive democracy model for managing pluralism in Nepal proposes electoral reforms, constitutional protection of minorities, federalism, Nationalities' Upper House, self-determination, and other accommodative governance structure of inclusive institutions. These institutions can contribute towards equitable resources distribution as well, apart from ensuring recognition of different cultural groups (Lawoti 2001).

Supporters of this model argue that instead of adopting consensual institutions found successful in culturally plural democracies like Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands, India, Papua New Guinea, Germany, Austria etc., a highly culturally diverse society like Nepal has adopted the Westminster, or the majoritarian, model of democracy, found successful only in homogenous societies. They further emphasize that consensual political institution like federalism, some form of proportional representation, balanced bicameralism (more or less equal division of power), constitutional

guarantee of minority rights are needed to enhance power sharing, accommodation and inclusion. In other words, culturally plural societies like in Nepal, equality can be achieved not by eliminating group difference but rather by ensuring equality among different groups.

However, in practical ground, the issues of ethnicity, minority or marginalized caste cannot be seen separately from the broader societal problems facing the Nepali society. Nepal is a plural state, with a vast majority of its population living under the same precarious condition. Policy makers seeking to enhance the situation of the Nepalese must take into account the fact that despite ethnic differences or even cleavages, solution aimed at improving the living condition of all underprivileged groups whatever their cultural background, are urgently necessary.

Searching for New Paradigms

The issues of plural or polyethnic nation as discussed above could be approached from a different perspective, focusing on shared meaning rather than group difference. This perspective assumes that Nepali nation may be depicted as identical with the 'mosaic of cultures' that it embodies, and locates nationhood to the interface between the constituent ethnic or cultural groups and their mutual respect. Similarly, from this perspective, Nepali nation could be portrayed as supra-ethnic or non-ethnic community, which encompasses or transcends ethnicity, regionalism, rather than endorsing them. This perspective perceives the country as a 'wild garden where hundreds of flower blossom'. One of the important issues, however, is the question of how particular ethnic cultures can contribute to the process of forging the new notion of the Nepali nation under conditions of multiculturalism.

We have to acknowledge that each society has its own particular character and history of pluralism and accordingly there will be different understandings of pluralism in different contexts. Yet, pluralism is an issue that needs to be addressed at the personal, social, cultural and political levels. In personal level it is about who we are and how we define ourselves. In social level it concerns about how we interact with each other. We need to address pluralism at cultural level because it inevitably involves our beliefs, ideas and understandings. In political level, the accommodation of pluralism involves the distribution of power and access to resources. For this reason, we need to find out the role of both the State and civil society in dealing with the issues of pluralism. The most outstanding problem that we need to

address is how to unite a nation, which consists of more than hundred castes and ethnic groups, with diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity demands a symbol, or a frame of reference, acceptable for the whole population, which really able to play the function as a basis for the development of the national identity.

McKim Marriott (1963) has proposed a solution to accommodate diverse groups of a plural nation by implementing an appropriate policy of cultural management. For this, he has suggested that each newly emerging nation-state should be 'clothed in a cultural grab symbolic of its aims and ideal being' that could anchor different cultural groups into a single national frame with mutual respect and dignity. Choosing of an appropriate form of culture, dealing with cultural verity within the state, finding a suitable orientation of time, and relating to internal to external cultures are the major issues of cultural management that any plural country should take into account while enforcing the cultural policy.

A plural society then must find ways of developing a strong sense of mutual commitment and common belonging without insisting upon a shared comprehensive national culture and the concomitant uniformity of values, ideals and ways of organizing significant social relations. It needs to derive its unity not from cultural uniformity but cultural diversity and which should not resent and fear cultural differences but turn them into sources of strength. Its unity is strong like that of any nation state, but it is derived differently and has a very different nature and texture (Parekh n.d.) Once this basic cultural paradigm is accepted, the concept of majority/minority culture would either loss its luster or gradually become meaningless. The religious, linguistic, racial and caste identities would no longer simply remain "ethnic identities" but submerge into a new national identity of the people (Dahal 1995).

The plural nation like Nepal can make congruent unity and diversity only if it does not confuse unity with uniformity and seek comprehensive cultural uniformity among its diverse groups. It should evolve its unity out of its diversity by encouraging its cultural communities to evolve a "plural national culture" that both reflects and transcends them. Such a pluralistically constituted and constantly evolving common culture both unites them and gives them secure spaces for growth. Since different communities have helped create it, they are able to identify with it, and can be expected to feel both attached to and proud of it. The plural national culture should permeate ali areas of life and shape its overall ethos (ibid). In this way, Nepali state could gradually develop a pan-Nepali identity in which every one can pride

while at the same time allowing local variation to flourish. In essence, it means that a Newar is able to maintain his/her distinct local identity while at the same time he/she could feel pride to attach his identity with Nepali state. This requires the government to reorient its policy towards a politics of social inclusion and thus, mutual empowerment (Bhattarai 2001)

In most societies, however, the ethnic and cultural composition of population is changing and there is often an awakening of ethnic identities within the demography setting. So, there is no particular model that can be applied in all circumstances, and we need to adopt a flexible approach. The civil society organizations have the advantage of being flexible, creative and able to promote inter-group, inter-cultural dialogue through their network to address the challenges of cultural diversity and pluralism.

The challenge today is to develop a framework that insures that the current developments are integrative and that are best practice institution built on genuine commitment to being inclusive. This means securing the right of the diverse people to their resource base and its produce enforce by the state. It implies that the adoption of educational system that embody mutual respect, including the right to use their own language at different levels of schooling. It also means giving them full access to modern instruments of information, communication, technology and advice, and assuring their right to decide their own priorities in peaceful cooperation with each others.

Conclusions

Nepal remained a cultural mosaic forming a unique kind of multi-ethnic and caste society, throughout its history. There are more than 100 distinct ethnic/caste groups, who have lived side by side for the past two millenniums maintaining separate yet related cultural traditions of their own. However, past efforts of cultural and ethnic accommodation were not free from controversy.

The increasing self-consciousness and growing sense of political, cultural and economic marginalization among minorities clearly demonstrate the inadequacy of the conventional paradigm of ethnic and cultural accommodation aimed at creating monolithic and homogenous Nepali national identity. Moreover, given the pluralistic and heterogeneous nature of Nepali society and the multiple identities that characterize its people and culture might produce unpredictable complication in future. Thus, the managing of diversity and difference for the purpose of nation building is indeed a tremendous challenging job for all.

Taking account of the volume of current issues of ethno-cultural cleavages, marginalization of castes, ethnic groups and minorities, politicization of ethnicity and inequitable or disproportionate development, it is urgent to search alternative ways to deal with cultural diversity and the problems of variations. One such perspective could be developed by focusing on shared meaning and identities rather than group difference. Such perspective assumes that Nepali nation may be depicted as identical with the 'mosaic of cultures' that it embodies, and locates nationhood to the interface between the constituent ethnic or cultural groups and their mutual respect. Similarly, from this perspective, Nepali nation could be portrayed as supra-ethnic or non-ethnic community, which encompasses or transcends ethnicity, regionalism, rather than endorsing them. For this, Nepal should adopt more inclusive model of democratic system which could be built on the principle that political power is dispersed and shared in a variety of ways- to protect minorities, *dalits*, women and other weaker section of societies and to ensure proportionate participation in governance and public domains. In inclusive democracy, incorporation of minorities, *dalits*, women and poor entail a more enlightened view of sharing economic and political resources than simple majoritarian democracy- that we are following today.

However, we should acknowledge that each society has its own particular character and history of pluralism and accordingly there will be different understanding of pluralism in different contexts. Thus, pluralism is an issue that needs to be addressed at the personal, social, cultural and political levels. In personal level it is about who we are and how we define ourselves. In social level it concerns about how we interact with each other. We need to address pluralism at cultural level because it inevitably involves our beliefs, ideas and understandings. In political level, the accommodation of pluralism involves the distribution of power and access to resources. For this reason, we need to find out the role of both the State and civil society in dealing with the issues of cultural pluralism and diversity.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD) for providing me a fellowship to undertake M.Phil. Research on which this paper is partly based. I am grateful to Danish Association for International Cooperation (MS) Nepal for providing me financial support to undertake a review research on similar topics, which inspired me to write this paper. I am grateful to Prof. Kailash Nath Pyakuryal for his comments and

suggestions to improve the paper. I acknowledge Mr. Janak Rai and other colleagues at the anthropology department who shared their ideas while I was writing this article. However, the weakness appear in the interpretations offered in this article are my alone.

Notes

- 1 Oxford Talking Dictionary (1998)
- 2 Percentages of the total population (22736934) are taken from the 2001 census data (Population Census 2001: National Report, Central Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA 2002, Table 16 of Form 1). Due to rounding, totals may not tally to 100 percent.
- 3 The educational system encouraged nationalism and the creation of unified national society by enforcing the use of Nepali and building loyalty to king, country and Panchayat system (Pigg 1992). But emotional identification with the state was tenuous for marginalized groups of the Tarai as well as the Mountains regions (Whelpton 1997:39). The northernmost valleys, though politically within Nepal, are ethnically and culturally Tibetan. Similarly, at the other end of the country it is equally true that political and cultural boundaries are fail to coincide (Gellner 1992:11).
- 4 For detail understanding (see Bhattachan 1998; Bhattachan and Pyakyural 1996; Brown 1996; Shah 1993; and Sharma 1992, 1997; Dahal 1992, 1995; Lawoti 2000, 2001 and Bhattarai 2000, 2002)
- 5 Chamar Movement (1999-2000) of eastern Tarai is an example(see Bhattarai 2003a)
- 6 Even as of 2001 census the most deprived groups in terms of education are the Tarai *dalits*. Of them, the lowest literacy rate is that of Mushahar (7.28 %), followed by Dom (9.39%). Following them, are groups such as Patharkata/Kushwadia (Janajati) and Bing/Binda(Hindu group, water acceptable community of the Tarai). This is again followed by the Tarai untouchable groups such as Chamar, Paswan and Tatma (CBS 2001).

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Annex 1
Percentage¹ Distribution of Castes and Ethnicity of
the Population of Nepal

(1) Parbatiyas		(38.9%)
Twice-born:	Brahman	12.74%
	Chetri (formerly KHas)	15.8%
	Thakuri	1.47%
<i>Renouncers:</i>	Dashnami Sanyasi & Kanphata Yogi	0.88%
<i>Untouchables²</i>	Kami (iron-workers)	3.94%
	Damai (tailors)	1.720%
	Sarki (cobblers)	1.40%
	Gaine(singers)	0.03%
	Badi(dancers and drum makers)	0.02%
(2) Newars³		(5.48%)
<i>Entitled to full Initiation:</i>	Brahman	0.1%
	Bajracharya/Shakya	0.5%
	Shrestha	1.2%
	Uray	0.3%
<i>Other pure Castes:</i>	Maharjan (Jyapu)	2.4%
	'Ekthariya' etc.	0.7%
<i>Untouchable Castes:</i>	Khadgi (Kasai), Dyahla (Pore)	0.3%
	etc.	

1 Percentages of the total population (22736934) are taken from the 2001 census data (Population Census 2001: National Report, Central Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA 2002, Table 16 of Form 1). Due to rounding, totals may not tally to 100 percent. The layout is partly based on Whelpton 1997. The largest and/or best-known groups have been capitalized.

2 They are commonly known as dalits. There are significant numbers of untouchables among the Newars and within the Terai Hindu communities of Nepal, which altogether accounts about 15% of the total population of the country.

3 The census treats the Newars as a single group. Figures for the main sub-divisions are calculated from the estimates of the relative size of the different sub-divisions in Whelpton, 1997.

(3) The hill/mountain ethnic groups or Janajati (21.88%)

Magar	7.14%
Tamang	5.64%
Rai	2.79%
Gurung	2.39%
Limbu	1.58%
Sherpa	0.68%
Sunuwar	0.42%
Chepang (Praja)	0.23%
Loda	0.11%
Thami	0.10%
Bhote	0.08%
Nurang	0.08%
Yakkha	0.07%
Thakali	0.06%
Pahari	0.05%
Chhantel	0.04%
Brahmu/Baramu	0.03%
Jirel	0.02%
Dura	0.02%
Lepcha	0.02%
Byangsi	0.01%
Hayu	0.01%
Walung	0.01%
Raute	0.001%
Yehlmo	0.001%
Kusunda	0.0001%
<i>Adhibasi/Janajati</i>	0.02%

(4) Madheshis (32.11%)

(a) Castes Hindus (18.27%)

Twice-born:

Brahman	0.59%
Baniya (Vaishya)	0.56%
Rajput (Kshatriya)	0.21%

	Kayastha (Kshatriya)	0.20%
	Rajbhat ⁴ (Kshatriya)	0.11%
<i>Other pure castes:</i>	Yadav/Ahir (herdsmen)	3.94%
	Khushawaha ⁵ (vegetable-growers)	1.11%
	Kurmi (cultivators)	0.94%
	Kewat (fishermen)	0.60%
	Mallah (fishermen)	0.51%
	Lohar(iron workers)	0.36%
	Nunia	0.29%
	Kumhar/Kamhar (potters)	0.28%
	Halwai (confectioners)	0.22%
	Badhae	0.20%
	Mali	0.05%
<i>Impure, but Touchable:</i>	Teli (oil-pressers)	1.34%
	Kalawar (brewers/merchants)	0.51%
	Hajam/Thakur	0.44%
	Kanu (oil-pressers)	0.42%
	Sudhi	0.40%
	Barae	0.16%
	Kahar	0.15%
	Bhediya/Gaderi	0.08%
	Bing/Binda	0.08%
	Chidimar	0.05%
	Kusbadiya	0.001%
<i>Untouchable:</i>	Chamar (leather-workers)	1.19%
	Musahar(Basket weaver)	0.76%
	Dushadh/Paswan/Pasi	0.70%
	Tamta	0.34%
	Khatawe (labourers)	0.33%

4 Also known as Rajbhar or Bhat. Though classified as a Tarai in the census, they are also found in the hills. Both in the Tarai and western hills they still function as genealogists and match-maker for the other twice-born castes, though Bhat elsewhere in the hills are more usually the offspring of irregular unions between Brahmans and or Sanyasi (Gaborieau 1978: 180 and 217-8.cited in Whelpton)

5 Formerly known as 'Koiris'. Their new name indicates suppose from Ram's second son, Kusha, and thus a claim to Kshatriy but this has not yet been accepted by other groups.

	Dhobi (washermen)	0.32%
	Dom	0.04%
	Halkhor	0.02%
(b) Madheshi ethnic or Janajati groups		(9.55%)
<i>Inner Tarai:</i>	Kumal	0.44%
	Majhi	0.32%
	Danuwar	0.23%
	Darai	0.07%
	Bote	0.04%
<i>Terai Proper:</i>	Tharu	6.75%
	Dhanuk	0.83%
	Rajbanshi	0.42%
	Satar/Santhal	0.19%
	Dhangar/Jhangar	0.16%
	Gangai	0.14 %
	Dhimal	0.09 %
	Tajpuriya	0.06%
	Meche	0.02%
	Kisan	0.01%
	Raji	0.01%
	Koche	0.01%
	Munda	0.001%
(c) Muslims/Churaute/ Dhunia		(4.3%)
(d) Marwaris/Jain ⁶		(0.2%)
(e) Panjabi/Sikhs		(0.01%)
(f) Bangali		(0.04%)
(g) Unidentified caste/ ethnic groups		(1.78%)

6 Harka Gurung (1998) has treated the Marwaris as category outside the Tarai caste hierarchy both because many are Jains and because they are seen as outsiders by the Tarai population generally. Many do, however, claim to be Hindus and there is also a placing them like, the Baniya, in the Vaishya category