

MARGINALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF NEPAL

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Introduction

Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nation with different ecological zones such as mountain, hill, inner Tarai and Tarai. It is a home to 59 indigenous nationalities, who speak more than 70 languages. But many of the indigenous languages are seriously endangered and quite a few have been extinct due to the wrong language policy of the state before the introduction of multiparty democracy in the country. This paper defines the indigenous languages listing them according to government gazette, points out the process of their marginalization, evaluates their present situation, and suggests ways how to bring them to the main stream of national language and culture.

Definition

According to The National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act 2002 (*Adivasi/Janajati Utthan Pratisthan Ain 2058*), Adibasis/Janajatis are 'those ethnic groups or communities enlisted in the Appendix 1 Schedule of the Act who have their own mother tongue and traditional customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or oral history of their own.' The act enlists 59 distinct groups as indigenous nationalities, who live in different ecological zones as mentioned in table 1.

Table 1: Indigenous nationalities of Nepal

Mountain		Mountain	
1.	Barhagaunle	2.	Bhutia
3.	Byagnsi	4.	Chhairotan
5.	Dolpo	6.	Larke
7.	Lhomi	8.	Lhopa
9.	Marphali Thakali	10.	Mugali
11.	Siyar	12.	Tangbe
13.	Thakali	14.	Thudam
15.	Tingaunle Thakali	16.	Topkegola
17.	Sherpa	18.	Walung

Hill		Hill	
1.	Bankariya	2.	Baramu
3.	Bhujel/Gharti	4.	Chepang
5.	Chhatntel	6.	Dura
7.	Fri	8.	Gurung
9.	Hayu	10.	Hyolmo
11.	Jirel	12.	Kusbadiya
13.	Kusunda	14.	Lepcha
15.	Limbu	16.	Magar
17.	Newar	18.	Pahari
19.	Rai	20.	Sunuwar
21.	Surel	22.	Tamang
23.	Thami	24.	Yakkha
Inner Tarai		Inner Tarai	
1.	Bote	2.	Danuwar
3.	Darai	4.	Kumal
5.	Majhi	6.	Raji
7.	Raute		
Tarai		Tarai	
1.	Dhanuk	2.	Dhimal
3.	Gangai	4.	Jhangad
5.	Kisan	6.	Meche
7.	Rajbangsi	8.	Satar/Santhali
9.	Tajpuri	10.	Tharu

Source: The National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act 2002

Among 59, 43 indigenous nationalities have one-to-one correspondence with languages as mentioned in following table.

Table 2: Language and ethnicity

	Mountain	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Barhagaunle	Barhagaunle
2.	Bhote	Bhote/Tibetan
3.	Byangsi	Byangsi
4.	Dolpo	Dolpo
5.	Lhomi	Lhomi
6.	Marphali	Thakali

7.	Mugali	Mugali
8.	Sherpa	Sherpa
9.	Thakali	Thakali
10.	Topkegola	Topkegola
11.	Walung	Walung
	Hill	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Bhujel	Bhujel
2.	Baramu	Baramu
3.	Chepang	Chepang
4.	Chhantel	Chhantel
5.	Dura	Dura
6.	Gurung	Gurung
7.	Vayu/hayu	Vayu/hayu
8.	Hyolmo	Hyolmo
9.	Jirel	Jirel
10.	Kusunda	Kusunda
11.	Lepcha	Lepcha
12.	Limbu	Limbu
13.	Magar	Magar
14.	Newar	Newar
15.	Pahari	Pahari
16.	Sunuwar	Sunuwar
17.	Tamang	Tamang
18.	Thami	Thami
19.	Yakkha	Yakkha
	Inner Tarai	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Danuwar	Danuwar
2.	Darai	Darai
3.	Kumal	Kumal
4.	Majhi	Majhi
5.	Raji	Raji
6.	Raute	Raute

	Tarai	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Dhimal	Dhimal
2.	Dhangar/Jhangar	Dhangar/Jhangar
3.	Kisan	Kisan
4.	Meche	Meche
5.	Rajbangsi	Rajbangsi
6.	Satar/Santhali	Satar/Santhali
7.	Tharu	Tharu

Among the indigenous nationalities, Rai is unique in having around 34 languages (Hansson: 1991). The languages spoken by these indigenous nationalities are called 'indigenous languages' in this paper.

Process of marginalization of indigenous languages from the period of Prithivi Narayan Shah till 1991.

According to Yogi (2016 V.S.: 24), Drabya Shah had six advisors who belonged to six different castes. They were- Ganes Pandey, Narayandas Arjyal, Bhagirath Pantha, Gangaram Rana, Sarbeswar Khanal and Kesab Bohora. He established Gorkha kingdom due to their help. Prithivi Narayan Shah included Basnet in the former advisory team. He raised army including four castes- Bahun, Khas, Magar and Thakuri and extended the Gorkha kingdom annexing the neighboring independent states. Except Magar, all of them were Khas language speakers with strong faith in Hindus religion and Hindu culture. So, Prithivi Narayan Shah and his successors planned to consolidate and strengthen national unity on four fundamental principles: the unquestioned authority and power of the Hindu king of Gorkha, Hindu culture in national life, Hindu social system based on caste hierarchy, and Khas as the language of government, administration and education. They were fully convinced that going beyond these points would lead the nation to ultimate disintegration. So, they would look rather provocative and offensive when they happened to see the use of indigenous languages in public sphere. Therefore, right from the creation of Nepal till before the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990, Prithivi Narayan Shah and his successors championed the policies of one language, one culture and one religion. They imposed Khas language, Hindu culture, Hindu religion and Hindu value systems on indigenous communities which had distinct language, culture, religion and value systems.

In addition, they initiated the process of linguistic and cultural suppression. Within greater Nepal many languages were spoken by the conquered subjects. In Kathmandu valley Nepal Bhasa was very rich in literature. Gurung, Tamang, Magar, Sunuwar, Hayu, Rai, Yakkha, Limu etc, had their own languages spoken in their original homelands. Among them, many indigenous languages which had no written literature suffered a heavy loss due to linguistic suppression. After the annexation of "this side Kirant" *wallo Kirant* and 'central Kirant' *Majh Kirant*, Hayu, Sunuwar and Rai languages were banned from the daily transaction. A few years later, after *Limbuwan* 'the land of the Limbu' had been united to the Kingdom of Nepal, king Rana Bahadur Shah issued orders to the Limbus to use Nepali language written in the Devnagari script while corresponding with the government. It deprived them of their linguistic right to use their mother tongue in official dealings. Janga Bahadur Rana in 1854 issued an order barring the use of languages other than Nepali in government service. The fact that endeavor was made to root out non-Khas languages is revealed by the publication of the following lines written by Krishnachandra Aryal and Vaidyanath Joshi (Sedhai) in *Gorkha Bhasa* published by the Gorkha Agency office in 1917 (Yakkha Rai, 2053 B.S.: 274-275):

Till now, the 'Gorkha Bhasa' has not been able to acquire universality, and the wild languages like Newar, Bhote, Magar, Gurung, Limbu, Sunuwar, Danuwar, Tharu also have not been able to leave their native places. As long as the one 'Gorkha Bhasa' can not kick out all other wild languages in the country, it is just wishful thinking to say that 'Gorkha Bhasa' can develop and that 'Gorkha Bhasa' is capable of calling itself the primary language.

Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shamser declared in 1921 that documents written in non-Khas languages could not be submitted in court as a proof. It barred the use of non-Nepali languages in domestic dealings. The Chhantel and Magar working in mines were prohibited to use their mother tongue. Rammani Acharya Dixit, a member of the 'Gorkha Language Publication Committee' formed in 1913, is said to have destroyed genealogies and the written inscriptions in copper and stone of indigenous peoples apart from burning 30,000 hand written documents of indigenous peoples related to their language, script, religion, culture and history in his campaign to destroy language, script and culture of indigenous peoples (Gurung, 1985:47). Lalsor Sendang of Athrai had to flee the country to save his life for his attempt to

educate the Limbus of his village with the help of books from his forefather's time. Nisthananda Bajracharya was prohibited to gather people and tell religious stories in mother tongue. Sukra Raj Joshi was hanged to death on the charge of publishing books in Nepal Bhasa. Dharmaditya Dharmacharya published a monthly magazine in Nepal Bhasa from India and he was banned to enter Nepal. Yogbir Kansakar was sentenced to jail on the charge of trying to open a public library. Later, Chittadhar 'Hridaya', a poet, was jailed for ten years in 1940 for publishing a poem 'Ma' in Nepal Bhasa. Siddhicharan Shrestha was jailed for life and his property was confiscated in 1940 for publishing a poem 'Barsa' in Nepal Bhasa. Fatte Bahadur Singh was jailed for life and his property was confiscated in 1940 for publishing a book 'Nepal Bihar' in Nepal Bhasa.

The revolution of 1950 overthrew age-old Ranarchy and introduced democracy in the country. Political parties exercised utmost practices to include the aspiration of people in the forthcoming constitution. However, they did not give proper thought to indigenous languages. The government proclaimed the Interim Government of Nepal Act 1951 on March 3, 1951. It only stated that discrimination would not be made on the grounds of ethnicity, religion and language while recruiting soldiers for the Nepalese army. However, it did not mention anything about the discrimination not being carried out on the ground of language.

In 1953 a significant breakthrough was made with the formation of an Education Committee, which laid stress on the need of working out a national plan for introducing timely and suitable changes in this area. Acting upon this suggestion, His Majesty's Government formed the National Education Planning Commission under the chairmanship of Sardar Rudraraj Pande, which began its work on March 22, 1954. The committee prepared questionnaires that included questions to be asked to the common people about the medium of instruction in primary level. The report shows that strong voice was raised by the people for mother tongue education. Nepali mother tongue speaker like Bal Chandra Sharma also polled his opinion for mother tongue education. The commission submitted its report to the Minister of Education Dilli Raman Regmi on March 1, 1954. However, it did not encourage ethnic languages. Education in Nepal: Report of the Nepal National Education Commission (1956:108) summarizes Pandey's recommendation about ethnic languages in the following way:

The study of the local languages in Nepal other than the Nepali will hinder the effective development of the latter, given that the

use by the student of languages other than Nepali in the house and society will cause Nepali to become an alien language. If the students are taught Nepali from the primary level other languages will gradually become unimportant, and it will help in national integration.

On page 107 of the same report, the following things have been written:

If we are to truly make Nepali the national language, we should be committed in its use from the primary level... It is necessary to remove immediately from such areas as schools and playgrounds directly associated with the lives of the students the local languages and dialects other than Nepali.

The non-Nepali speakers told the commission that the use of mother tongue as the medium of education would enable the students to read and write quickly. Such education would help develop the country's disappearing languages and contribute to the all round development of the nation. Moreover, support from all ethnic groups would be received for this purpose. However, the commission did not pay any attention to the suggestions given by the speakers of the languages other than Nepali.

On October 12, 1957, the Ministry of Education issued an order to implement the directives that ordinary Nepali language should be the medium of instruction and only Nepali and English languages will be the medium in the SLC examinations. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1959 stated that the Nepali language in the Devnagari script would be the national language.

King Mahendra deposed the democratically elected Nepali congress government in 1960 using military power and introduced Partyless Panchayat System. A year later, he constituted Comprehensive National Education Committee of twelve members under the chairmanship of Bishwabandhu Thapa on May 7, 1961 (Baisakh 25, 2018) to set the educational policies that would suit his interest. That was followed in 1962 by a visit of a team under the leadership of Dr Hugh B. Wood at the request of His Majesty's Government and in cooperation with UNESCO. After rigorous study, the committee recommended that the medium of instruction should be the Nepali language. The Constitution of Nepal promulgated in 1961 also continued the status of Nepali as a national language. The Partyless Panchayat System implemented the policy of 'one language, one costume and one culture'. King Birendra introduced National Education System in 1971 to orient children

and youths towards monarchy and the Panchayat System. However, it also neglected mother tongues as medium of instruction. It recommended that the medium of instruction from primary to the secondary level be in Nepali. The Royal Higher Education Commission with five members was formed in 1981 under the chairmanship of Randhir Subba to review the achievements of the National Education System Plan. This commission also did not encourage mother tongue speakers. It recommended the establishment of separate university for Sanskrit language, which had no speakers of its own. At the commission's recommendation, Mahendra Sanskrit University was established in 1982.

During this period, government carried out severe linguistic suppression. Hitkar Bir Singh Kansakar was put to jail in 1965 under Security Act for his involvement in linguistic movement. Mangalman Shakya and Kajiman Jawa were jailed for nine months in 1965 under Security Act for organizing a literary conference of Nepal Bhasa and reciting poems in the mother tongue. Malla K. Sundar, Durgalal Shrestha and many others were publicly arrested in 1988 for participating in procession to mark the birth anniversary of Siddhidas Amatya, the epic poet of the Nepal Bhasa. Similarly, Gangaram Lingkhim, Prithivi Maden, Randhoj Sereng, Asok Nembang and Bir Nembang were put to jail for their involvement in the development of the Limbu language.

From the viewpoint of language and ethnicity, the thirty years of Panchayat rule from 1961 till 1991 remained the most oppressive one. It is justified by the fact that 44 languages were returned in 1952-54 out of which 29 languages were indigenous languages, in the 1961 census 36 languages were returned out of which 26 languages were indigenous languages, in 1971, 17 languages were returned out of which 12 languages were indigenous languages, in 1981, 17 languages were returned out of which 13 languages were indigenous languages, in 1991, 20 languages were returned out of which 15 languages were indigenous languages and in 2001, 92 languages were returned out of which 70 languages were indigenous languages. During this period, one language and one people policy was introduced and the question on ethnicity was not included in the census questionnaire. It was only after 1991 that it was included in the population census questionnaire. These figures are presented in the following table:

Table 3: Number of Nepal's languages recorded in various censuses (1952/54-2001)

	1952-54	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Total number of languages	44	33	17	17	20	92
Number of indigenous languages	29	26	12	13	15	70

Source: Censuses (1952/54-2001)

Against such a suppressive environment for the preservation of indigenous languages, attempts made by foreign scholars command our respect. Among them, Hodgson (1874), Senior (1908) and Konow (1909) are remarkable. During 1970s SIL scholars worked on different indigenous languages but they were asked to quit the country within 42 hours. Linguistic survey of Nepal funded by the German Research Council was conducted in the eastern part of Nepal in the first half of the 1980s but before its completion, the project was forced to come to an end. However, Wiedert and Subba (1985) and vanDriem (1987) worked on Limbu dialects.

Process of marginalization of indigenous languages from 1991 till date

The people's movement ended the 30-year old autocratic Panchayat System and introduced multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy. With the end of Panchayat System also ended the constitutional protection of one language, one culture and one religion' policy. It created a new and congenial environment for the growth of ethnic languages, cultures and religions. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 recognizes Nepal as a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual kingdom. While article 4 of Part 1 of the constitution states that Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual kingdom, article 6 of the same section explicitly states that:

1. Nepali language in the Devnagari script is the language of nation. Nepali language shall be the official language.
2. All the languages spoken as a mother tongue in different parts of Nepal are national languages of Nepal.

There is a slight ambiguity of the constitution. While Nepali language is the language of the nation and the official language, mother tongues spoken by the indigenous people are the national languages of Nepal. So, they perceive it as semantic rhetoric. Article 18 of part 3 states that:

1. Each community residing within the kingdom of Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script and culture.

2. Each community shall have the right to operate schools up to primary level in its own mother tongue for imparting education to its children.

His Majesty's Government constituted the National Education Commission with 15 members under the chairmanship of Kesharjang Rayamajhi in February, 1990 in the interim period after the reinstatement of multi-party democracy. It was charged with eradicating the weaknesses and shortcomings of the past laying down the goals of national education, formulating policies to achieve them in a manner consistent with the human rights in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990, and the democratic values and norms as well as social justice. It was required to complete its assignment by May 14, 1991, but it could not make substantial headway due to the time limit of time. Later, another commission was constituted with 16 members. It stayed in office till May 18, 1992 to work out into report on the educational system for a new democratic Nepal. It recommended the education system in accordance with the letter and spirit of the constitution. It was a significant achievement to streamline the marginalized languages.

In accordance with the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual provisions enshrined in the constitution, National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission was formed on May 27, 1993 with Tilbikram Nembang as its coordinator and submitted its report in 1994 with the suggestions of conducting linguistic survey, designing mother tongue curriculum and text, and introducing mother tongue as the medium of monolingual and transitional bilingual primary education and literacy programs. The National Education Commission of 1999 envisaged a policy of providing education in mother tongue while the ninth five year plan (1999-2002) formulated explicit policies and programs to target indigenous peoples. The UNESCO meeting of the specialists held in Thailand in 1990 with the slogan 'Education for all' recommended that every effort should be made to provide education in the mother tongue to all children of primary school age by 2000. In order to implement the provisions of the tenth plan Nepali parliament issued an act in 2002 and established the Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) to ensure indigenous people's economic, social and cultural development as well as their equal participation in the main stream of national development. It has recognized 59 tribes as ethnic communities.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) has the following provisions for languages:

1. All the languages spoken as the mother tongue in Nepal are the national languages of Nepal.
2. The Nepali language in Devnagari script shall be the official language. Notwithstanding anything contained in clause (2), it shall not be deemed to have hindered to use the mother language in local bodies and offices. State shall translate the language so used into an official language.

Regarding the education and cultural right, the constitution enshrines the following provisions:

1. Each community shall have the right to get basic education in their mother tongue as stipulated in the law.
2. Each community residing in Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civility and heritage.

After the dawn of democracy, the numbers of mother tongue speakers, indigenous peoples and religious sects have increased, the constitutional provisions have been made for preserving and promoting indigenous and minority languages with the right to acquire primary education in mother tongue and the textbooks have been developed in local languages. The Curriculum Development Centre has so far developed text books in 14 national languages to be taught in schools as subject. Programs are being aired through Radio Nepal in 18 different national languages. Government of Nepal is committed to making quality primary education accessible to all children including children from indigenous and minority groups. It has endorsed a policy of transitional multilingual education according to which a child will acquire basic educational skills through the medium of his/her mother tongue and gradually switch to an official language so that s/he can feel at home in the language in which government affairs are carried on and finally learn a foreign language (English) for broader communication and access to science and technology. It has established the Central Department of Linguistics under Tribhuvan University.

Discovery of indigenous languages after 1991

The 1991 census was taken when multiparty democracy was introduced. So the census brought out the data on ethnicity, language and religion. In 2001 census too, questions on language, ethnicity and religion were included. The census records 45 indigenous nationalities as given in the table.

Table 4: Indigenous nationalities

Mountain		Mountain	
1.	Byangsi	2.	Bhote
3.	Sherpa	4.	Thakali
5.	Walung		
Hill		Hill	
1.	Bankariya	2.	Baramu
3.	Bhujel/Gharti	4.	Chepang
5.	Chhatntel	6.	Dura
7.	Fri	8.	Gurung
9.	Hayu	10.	Hyolmo
11.	Jirel	12.	Kusbadiya
13.	Kusunda	14.	Lepcha
15.	Limbu	16.	Magar
17.	Newar	18.	Pahari
19.	Rai	20.	Sunuwar
21.	Surel	22.	Tamang
23.	Thami	24.	Yakkha
Inner Tarai		Inner Tarai	
1.	Bote	2.	Danuwar
3.	Darai	4.	Kumal
5.	Majhi	6.	Raji
7.	Raute		
Tarai		Tarai	
1.	Dhanuk	2.	Dhimal
3.	Gangai	4.	Jhangad
5.	Kisan	6.	Meche
7.	Rajbangsi	8.	Satar/Santhali
9.	Tajpuri	10.	Tharu

Source: Population census 200.

The population census 2001 missed to record 15 indigenous communities viz. Barhagaunle, Bhutia, Chhairaton, Dolpo, Larke, Lhopa, Marphali Thakali, Mugali, Siyar, Tangbe, Thudam, Tingaunle Thakali and Topkegola.

Thirty- six indigenous languages have one-to-one relation with their ethnicities.

Table 5: Indigenous nationalities and their mother tongue

	Mountain	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Byangsi	Byangsi
2.	Bhote	Bhote
3.	Sherpa	Sherpa
4.	Thakali	Thakali
5.	Walung	
	Hill	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Bhujel	Bhujel
2.	Baram	Baram
3.	Chepang	Chepang
4.	Chhantel	Chhantel
5.	Dura	Dura
6.	Gurung	Gurung
7.	Vayu/hayu	Vayu/hayu
8.	Hyolmo	Hyolmo
9.	Jirel	Jirel
10.	Kusunda	Kusunda
11.	Lepcha	Lepcha
12.	Limbu	Limbu
13.	Magar	Magar
14.	Newar	Newar
15.	Pahari	Pahari
16.	Sunuwar	Sunuwar
17.	Tamang	Tamang
18.	Thami	Thami
19.	Yakkha	Yakkha
	Inner Tarai	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Danuwar	Danuwar
2.	Darai	Darai
3.	Kumal	Kumal
4.	Majhi	Majhi
5.	Raji	Raji
6.	Raute	Raute

	Tarai	
S.N.	Indigenous Nationalities	Mother Tongues
1.	Dhimal	Dhimal
2.	Dhangar/Jhangar	Dhangar/Jhangar
3.	Kisan	Kisan
4.	Meche	Meche
5.	Rajbangsi	Rajbangsi
6.	Satar/Santhali	Satar/Santhali
7.	Tharu	Tharu

Source: 2001 census

However, Rai ethnic community has 22 or more languages namely, Bahing, Bantawa, Chamling, Chhiling, Chhintang, Dungmali, Dumi, Jerung, Koyu/Koi, Kulung, khaling, Lingkhim, Lohorung, Mewahang, Nacchhering, Puma, Sam, Sampang, Tilung, Thulung, Wambule, Yamphe and so on. The 2001 census report is also not reliable for it missed to record Kham, Athpare Rai and Belahare Rai languages despite their distinct character.

Present status of indigenous languages

Family: Indigenous languages of Nepal fall into four different linguistic families: Indo-European, Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian. Indo-European languages are spoken by Tharu, Rajbangsi, Koche, Majhi etc. Sino-Tibetan languages include Gurung, Thakali, Chhantel, Tamang, Thami, Byangsi, Baramu, Kham, Magar, Chepang, Bhujel, Raute, Raji, Newar and Kiranti languages. Two languages Santhali and Khariya of Austro-Asiatic family are spoken as indigenous languages. Dhangar/Jhangar and Kisan are two Dravidian languages spoken in Nepal. In addition, Kusunda is a linguistic isolate spoken by a few indigenous nationalities.

Number: The exact number of indigenous languages has not yet been figured out. Kiranti languages are important parts of indigenous languages but they have varying figures presented by the scholars. They are presented below

Table 6: Kiranti languages

S.N.	Language	S.N.	Language
1.	Athpare	2.	Bahing
3.	Bantawa	4.	Belahare
5.	Chamling	6.	Chhintang
7.	Chhulung	8.	Chukwa
9.	Dumi	10.	Dungmali
11.	Jerung	12.	Khaling
13.	Koi	14.	Kulung
15.	Limbu	16.	Lingkhim
17.	Lohorung	18.	Lumba-Yakkha
19.	Mewahang	20.	Mugali
21.	Nacchering	22.	Phangduwali
23.	Puma	24.	Saam
25.	Sangpang	26.	Sunuwar
27.	Thulung	28.	Tilung
29.	Umbule	30.	Waling
31.	Wayu	32.	Yakkha
33.	Yamphe	34.	Yamphu

Source: Hansson (1991).

Table 7: Tibeto-Burman languages and dialects spoken in Nepal

S.N.	Languages	S.N.	Languages
1.	Athpariya	2.	Bahing
3.	Bantawa	4.	Barhagaunle
5.	Belahariya	6.	Bhotiya
7.	Brhamu	8.	Bhujel
9.	Byangsi	10.	Chamling
11.	Chhantyal	12.	Chaudangsi
13.	Chaurasya/Chaurasia	14.	Chepang
15.	Chhintang	16.	Chulung
17.	Darai	18.	Danuwar
19.	Dhangar/Jhangar	20.	Dhimal
21.	Dolpo	22.	Dumi
23.	Dungmali	24.	Ghale
25.	Gurung	26.	Hayu/Vayu
27.	Jirel	28.	Kagate Tibetan

29.	Kaike	30.	Khaling
31.	Kham	32.	Koi
33.	Kulung	34.	Kumhali
35.	Kusunda	36.	Kyerung
37.	Lepcha	38.	Lhomi
39.	Limbu	40.	Lohorung
41.	Magar	42.	Manangba
43.	Meche	44.	Mewahang
45.	Mugali	46.	Nachering
47.	Nepali sign language	48.	Newar
49.	Pahari	50.	Panchgaule
51.	Puma	52.	Rajbangsi
53.	Raji	54.	Rangkas
55.	Raute	56.	Rodong
57.	Saam	58.	Sampang
59.	Santhali	60.	Sherpa
61.	Sotang	62.	Sunuwar
63.	Surel	64.	Takale
65.	Tamchhang	66.	Tamang
67.	Thakali	68.	Thami
69.	Tharu	70.	Thulung
71.	Tibetan	72.	Tilung
73.	Toto	74.	Cheku
75.	Umbule	76.	Wali
77.	Waling	78.	Yakkha
79.	Yamphe/Yamphe		

Source: Matisoff et al. 1996

Table 8: Kiranti subgroups from east to west

Limbu	
	Eastern Limbu: Panthare, Tamarkhole
	Western Limbu: Phedappe, Chhatthare
Eastern Kiranti	
	Greater Yakkha: Yakkha, Chhilig, Athpariya
	Upper Arun: Lohorung, Yamphu, Mewahang
Central Kiranti	
	Khambu: Kulung, Nacchering, Sampang, Sam
	Southern: Chamling, Puma, Bantawa, Dungmali
Western Kiranti	
	Midwestern: Thulung
	Chaurasiya: Ombule, Jero
	Northwestern: Bahing, Sunuwar, Hayu

Source: van Driem 2001: 615

Table 5 shows 34 Kiranti languages. If they are added to 45 indigenous languages, the number of indigenous nationalities will reach 69. Yadava and Turin (2005) record their number as 70. Matisoff et al (1996) presents 79 Tibeto-Burman languages. Van Driem (2001) records 21 Kiranti languages as mentioned in Table 8. The classification of indigenous languages by Yadava and Turin (2005) according to the level of endangerment shows 86 indigenous languages. So the exact number of indigenous languages is uncertain. This uncertainty is caused by the absence of sociolinguistic survey.

Writing system

Only eight indigenous languages have a writing system. They are as follows:

1. Limbu is written in Sirijanga script.
2. Tamang is written in Sambota or Tibetan or Devanagari script.
3. Newar is written in Newari or Ranjana or Devanagari script.
4. Lepcha is written in Rong script.
5. Santal is written in Olchiki script.
6. Gurung is written in Devanagari or Roman or Khema script.
7. Magar is written in Devanagari or Akkha script.

[illegible]

55.	Uraw/ Kudukh												
56.	Walung										√		
57.	Wambule		√		√			√	√		√		
58.	Yakkha	√			√			√			√		
59.	Yolmo		√		√			√			√		

Source: Yadava 2009

Out of fifty-nine languages, only five languages viz. Limbu, Nepal Bhasa, Sherpa, Tamang and Tharu have all kinds of publications. Uraw/Kudukh, Byangsi, Chhum, Surel, Topkegola/Dhokpya, Tangbe, Larke, Satar/Santhali, Nacchering, Majhi, Danuwar, Bankariya and Meche have no publications. Sunuwar/Kirant Koit, Bote and Walung have only one kind of publication. Other languages have a few publications.

Language endangerment

Many of Nepal's minority languages lie at various stages on the continuum to eventual extinction. According to the degree of endangerment Yadava and Turin (2005) have categorized each of the indigenous languages in one of seven levels as given below:

(1) Safe languages (13)

Newar, Limbu, Magar, Tharu, Tamang, Bantawa, Gurung, Rajbangsi, Tibetan, Sherpa, Khaling, Kham and Nepalese sign language are safe languages as they have inter-generational language transmission, a large number of speakers, a high rate of language retention, an increasing response to new domains such as seminars/meetings, computer fonts, printed or electronic media, e.g. newspaper, radio, television and film, development of materials for language education and literacy and use of mother tongue as medium of instruction.

(2) Almost safe languages (13)

Chamling, Santhali, Chepang, Danuwar, Dhangar/Jhangar, Thangmi, Kulung, Dhimal, Yakkha, Thulung, Sangpang, Darai and Dolpo are almost safe languages because they lack a response to new domains of language use and media and have not developed materials for language education and literacy.

(3) Potentially endangered languages 8

Kumal, Thakali, Chantel, Dumi, Jirel, Athpariya, Mugali and Belhare are potentially endangered languages as they lack intergenerational language transmission and language use in education and media.

(4) Endangered languages (22)

Umbule, Puma, Hyolmo, Nacchering, Dura, Meche, Pahari, Lepcha, Bote, Bahing, Koi, Raji, Hayu, Byangsi, Yamphu, Ghale, Khariya, Chhiling, Lohorung, Sunuwar, Majhi and Bhujel are endangered languages as they are spoken by only a few elderly and fewer adult people.

(5) Seriously endangered languages (12)

Mewahang, Kaike, Raute, Kisan, Churauti, Baramu, Tilung, Jerung, Dungmali, Baragaunle, Nar-phu and Manangwa are seriously endangered languages because they are spoken by fewer than 500 speakers.

(6) Moribund languages (7)

Lingkhim, Kusunda, Koche, Sam, Kagate, Chhintang and Lhomi are moribund languages as they are spoken by fewer than 100 elderly speakers.

(7) Extinct or nearly extinct languages (11)

Byangsi, Chonkha, Longaba, Mugali, Sambya, Pongyong, Bungla, Chukwa, Hedangba, Waling and Khandung are extinct or nearly extinct languages. These languages are not spoken now.

The above scenario shows the alarming situation of indigenous languages. Only 13 languages are safe. Others are, in one way or other, facing the problem of survival. In fact, there is an urgent need to take effective measures for their survival by encouraging the speakers of indigenous languages, but the past event has given them enough ground to be suspicious of the government's attitude towards the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages

Doubtful situation

The local Self-governance Act of 1999 deputed to local bodies the right to preserve and promote local languages. Following this provision, Kathmandu municipality declared Nepal Bhasa and Dhanusa District Development Committee, and Rajbiraj and Janakpur Municipalities declared Maithili as the alternative official languages. However, on June 1, 1999, the Supreme Court announced its final verdict and issued a certiorari declaring that the decisions of these local bodies to use the regional languages were unconstitutional and

illegal. It raised serious doubts about the sincerity of government's commitment to the use of minority languages in administration.

Conclusion

Marginalization of indigenous languages has started right from the construction of unified Nepal by Prithivi Narayan Shah. During the autocratic regimes of the Shah and the Rana, policies of one language, one culture and one religion were adopted and the demands of the linguistic rights of the indigenous people were brutally suppressed. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, the linguistic issue has been gradually gaining momentum. Though still some conservative bureaucrats are disturbing the implementations of plans and policies for the preservation and development of indigenous languages, people are becoming more and more aware of their linguistic rights, and governments formed after the establishment of democracy are comparatively positive. Many languages have not been recorded in the census and still many languages have yet to be explored. Several languages have already been extinct and many languages are on the verge of extinction. The Government of Nepal has charged Central Department of Linguistics, TU to conduct Socio-Linguistic Survey within 7 years, and it has started its work too. It is a positive sign to mainstream the marginalized languages of Nepal.

Recommendations for mainstreaming the indigenous languages on the margin

Only 13 out of 76 indigenous languages are safe according to Yadava and Turin (2005:29-30). Rest of them are endangered in one way or other. The preservation and promotion of indigenous languages need government support. Constitutional recognition of indigenous languages is very important for their promotion. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 and Interim Constitution of Nepal have already accepted them as 'national languages' and 'nation languages' respectively. They have also provided citizens with linguistic rights to teach their children in their mother tongue up to primary level. However, these things are not enough for mainstreaming indigenous languages. Government must set adequate policies of administration, communication and education to achieve this goal.

Administrative policy for linguistic development

Government should formulate administrative policies giving high priority to the indigenous nationalities and their languages. It can adopt the following policies for this end:

1. Federal states should be structured on the basis of linguistic distributions as far as practicable. Similarly other political units such as districts, village committees and wards should also be divided on the linguistic line.
2. The official languages of federal state, provincial state and local bodies and bases of their recognition should be clearly stated.
3. The official language of federal legislature should be clearly stated in statute of parliament itself.
4. The provincial state should adopt two languages policy. It should use the official languages of the federal state and the provincial state.
5. Each community should be given right to defend his/her case in the court in his own mother tongue. The government must make provisions for the translation.

Communication policy for linguistic development

The government and private media, both audio-visual and printed, should do the following things to encourage the development of indigenous languages.

1. They should make radio announcements and bulletins pertaining to health, environment and other social issues in indigenous languages.
2. They should conduct regional broadcast service in regional languages by Radio Nepal.
3. They should publish news and articles in newspapers and magazines in indigenous languages.

Educational policies for linguistic development

Watters and Rai (2005:60-62) make urgent, mid-term, and long term recommendations. Including their recommendations, this paper makes the following suggestions

1. First of all, the information about the number, situation and status of indigenous languages is necessary to identify their standard variety and make any policy and plan for mother tongue literacy programs of indigenous languages. For this information, socio-linguistic survey is a must. Central Department of Linguistics has started a socio-linguistic survey. It should include proficient indigenous experts and hands in this survey.
2. At first the languages which are identified as seriously endangered must be documented and their descriptive grammar should be prepared. Then, descriptive grammars, reference grammars and pedagogical grammars should be developed in all indigenous

languages. Practical orthographies should be developed and script of choice should be used to document the languages.

3. Multi-lingual dictionary should be developed.
4. Model primers sensitive to the local language, local teaching style, local art, and local culture should be developed for the proper guidance of teachers.
5. National Institute of Indigenous Languages with autonomous status should be established to document and develop indigenous languages and set out best policies for mother tongue and multilingual education.

Mid-term recommendations

The following policies should be implemented as mid-term program:

1. One or more 'pilot projects' in mother-tongue education for language communities should be run.
2. Trained, competent and fully qualified people who are familiar with the life of indigenous people and who can teach in the mother tongue should be employed as teachers. Preference should be given to women for this purpose.

Longer term recommendation

1. Teaching materials, reading materials and other learning resources should be produced in all mother tongues and promoted in national educational program.
2. Educational programs should be conducted for the continued development of qualified mother-tongue teachers.
3. Primers, readers and manuals for mother tongue education should be developed.
4. Local, indigenous languages should be introduced as 'elective' subjects on a par with Sanskrit language.

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