

UNDERSTANDING NEPALI HISTORY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING POLITICAL SITUATION

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*“nepālī hāmī rahanchhaum kahān nepālai narahe
ūchāi hāmro chulīncha kahān hīmālai narahe”*

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1. Background of the formation of Modern Nepal

The very basis of the discourse of “New Nepal”, I think, cannot be launched properly without systematically delving into the history of the formation of the Modern map of Nepal by Prithvinarayan Shah and his immediate successors. Nepal today is going through an extremely difficult phase in its history. The thousands of years of old Monarchy has been eliminated and the country has plunged into the age of republicanism. At the same time, another difficult task of turning the nation into a federal structure is already in motion. The successful implementation of both of these difficult tasks are very challenging particularly in a country like Nepal where over 50% people are virtually illiterate and had been ruled by a feudal or semi-feudal monarchical system of government continuously for over two millennia. In this highly volatile situation, the politicians, members of the civil society, scholars and common citizens of Nepal must be aware of the importance of a proper understanding of our history from both analytical and factual angles. Since a balanced political vision cannot be achieved through romanticism and unnecessary excitement over the concept of change we must rather focus on a thorough, serious and clear knowledge of the formation and historical developments of the country. I think, what we seriously lack is an emphasis towards the need of a proper understanding of the formation and historical development of Nepal. We must accept that if we intend to address the present effectively and step forward in the right direction, all actors must not focus simply on being plain revisionists in analyzing the nation’s history and undertaking specific policies for the future. It seems clear that Nepali politicians and social activists today are distorting the realities of our nation’s history by highly romanticizing the discourses within the framework of social and political change. We as a nation are without a proper understanding of our own history. The late Father Ludwig Stiller seems to have rightly indentified this shortcoming in Nepali historical discourse decades ago by expressing “what we lack is the historical framework we need if we would question the present effectively” (Stiller 1999: I).

It is notable that the very existence of Nepal as an independent country was made possible only because of the timely realization of the geopolitical situation of the region by P. N. Shah alongside the committed, dedicated and trusted ministers and generals belonging to various ethnic origins. There were nearly hundred feudatories and princely states within the territory unified by the military efforts of the Kingdom of Gorkha.

This was a time when hundreds of old and powerful states in India were rapidly disappearing from the political map of the region. Very surprisingly, Nepal was able to stand its ground as an independent, unique and powerful multi-ethnic state situated in the lap of the Himalayas, even in such a vulnerable situation where such extreme colonial encroachment in South Asia was rife. In shaping Nepal as an independent country in South Asia, both the ruling elites and the common people of the region seem to have come forward with their full and wholehearted support under the leadership of the rulers of the tiny hill Kingdom of Gorkha. They appeared as if the entire populace of the region belonged to the same cultural tradition and ethnic background. Self determined natives from their states and villages stood in unison to save the newly founded Himalayan state of Nepal from the common colonial enemy of the region. The oral tradition of popular *khando* culture prevailed in Nepali society can serve as one of the few good examples of the history of such unison seen among the Nepalis of hill origin in which historic pride story of Nepal's victory over colonial British power and the grand success in defending the newly founded Himalayan Kingdom is nicely presented (Panta VE 2028: 148-152). A few cases aside, the regional archives of the Kathmandu Valley and the Kirant region show no evidence of any ethnic misunderstanding or conflict worth mentioning during and after the unification movement. Besides a large number of people of Khasa origin there were Magars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Lopas, Thagpas, Seribpas (people of Tangbe, Tetang, Chhuksang etc. of the Baragaun area), Thin-Gharabpas or Sumpo (lately known as Panchgaunle = people of Thini, Syang, Marpha, Chaira, Chim and a new settlement known as Zong-samba or Jomsom), Sherpas, Olungpas, Nubripas, Tsumpas, Narpas, Neshyangpas, Dolpos, Byasis, and many more belonging to various ethnic communities who either participated in the military campaign of Gorkha in their full strength or as a least common denominator, they did not resist the campaign launched by the rulers of Gorkha. In fact, people of different ethnic backgrounds seemed to have united under the umbrella of the newly emergent Nepali state. In many cases, a practical policy, offering dependent status to smaller friendly principalities was adopted by the rulers of Nepal. What's interesting in this regard is that people of different ethnic origin and background were appointed to top ranking military and administrative positions. Similarly, ethnic cultures and traditions of Newars and other ethnic communities were appreciated by the rulers of Nepal and they were offered special support.

Along with patronizing Hindu institutions, both Newar and Himalayan Buddhist monasteries were also offered support with massive land grants and various other privileges to their priests, Lamas and Bajracharyas (Dhungel 1989: 176-78, 1986: 1-3, 9-13, McDonald 1973: 6-7, 'Brug Na'-ga-thali'... Deb-khra). In order to keep traditional Newar culture intact as an important national heritage of this newly built state of Nepal, Prithvinarayan Shah, very openly spoke in appreciation and favored its continuity (Yogi VE 2022: 315). It can also be assumed that this policy was adopted with the intention of creating harmony between the Newars and the new comers in the valley and ultimately maintain peace within Nepali society. The Newar traders were asked to enhance their trade and business by opening *kothis* and shops in different places. In return for their effort in developing businesses and markets by supplying necessary goods to the villagers, they were provided with full security, protection and special privileges from the state. It is interesting to note that the prosperous Newar diaspora within and outside of the country today is the outcome of this policy of the rulers of unified Nepal. This was how a harmonious Nepali society was built as harmony was essential for the power seekers, state authorities and the common people in the region. In reality, the people of Nepal, irrespective of any ethnic background, at least, felt safe from internal disturbances, violence and external attacks. Surprisingly, the very notion of building a strong unbreakable nation (*dhungo banaune*) was the guiding principle of the time of the formation of modern Nepal (Yogi 2022: 4, 11-12 etc.).

Although the revisionist activists of our time do not want to recall the formative past of the country and the role played by some of the distinguished personalities, their names will forever remain etched in this country's history and in the shaping of Modern Nepal during and after Prithvinarayan Shah. They are Prince Bahadur Shah, Kajis Shivaramsing Basnyat, Kalu Pande, Amarsing Thapa, Bhakti Thapa, Bhalabhadra Kunwar, Keharsing Basnyat, Ramkrishna Kunwar, Bakhtabarsing Basnyat, Janga Bahadur Rana and the pioneer poet of Nepali language Bhanubhakta Acharya. Moving on to recent history, we can even pick up the names of B. P. Koirala and King Mahendra for their distinctive roles in shaping the image of Nepal in the international arena and for their contributions in promoting nationalist psychology in the country in their respective ways.

We must understand that Nepal is a cluster of four different traditional cultures developed historically in four different regions of the country. Thus the socio-cultural values and traditions of Nepal are either related to those developed in the Karnali region, Kathmandu Valley, Tirahut or in the high Himalayn regions. They can be named vaguely as Khasa or hill, Newar, Maithili and the high Himalayan Bhot cultures. After the fall of the Kingdom of Tirahut and the defeat of Makuwanpur, Chaudandi and Vijayapur by the Gorkhali force in the eighteenth century, most of the Terai region was a place

of jolting interests between the Gorkhali authorities of Nepal and the Awadh or what later became British India. The majority of ruling, literary and religious elites of old Tirahut had already left their homes and migrated mainly into the Kathmandu Valley or in some cases, to the hill areas of Nepal. It is interesting to note that most Brahmins and ruling class elites of the Newar community and some hill Brahmins with family names like Mishra, Marahatta, Pande, Panta etc. are definitely migrated from the Tirahut area of today's Nepal Tarai. Very surprisingly, the rulers and people of the Valley of Nepal or the *Nepal-Mandala* had warmly welcomed the Tirahute ruling families, ministers, priests, artisans, servants etc. and offered them dignified asylum inside the capital of the Malla Kingdom of the Valley of Nepal. It was during this incident even the native deity of Tirahut, the *Tulaja Bhavani* (*Taleju* in Newar language) had to migrate from her original home Simraungarh along with her defeated devotees for her own safety in Bhaktapur, the then Capital city of the *Nepal-Mandala*. It must be noted that this incident had occurred in course of the fourteenth century invasion and destruction of Simraungarh, the capital city of Tirahut by Muslim invaders. With the support of historical facts we can assume that the Valley of Nepal was flexible in adopting regional inclusive policies right from the fourteenth century. Both the deity and the ruling family of Tirahut (Nepal Tarai) were venerated and respected by the local rulers and people of the Valley. Ultimately, even the royal throne of the Valley was handed over to the descendants of the royals of Tirahut, who consequently adopted the family names of their in-laws or the ruling dynasty of the Valley of Nepal. This was how the late Malla Dynasty was formally established in the center of Nepal (Bajracharya VE 2064: 116-34).

Nepal is a multiethnic and multilingual nation in making and through this simple understanding Nepali society can be seen as a composite body of various ethno-cultural and linguistic traditions flourishing under the direct and indirect influence of the greater Gangaic and Tibetan cultural worlds.

The historicity of the making of modern Nepal seems quite remarkable. Before the emergence of the Gorkha's supremacy in the ruling history of Nepal there were many strong and minor principalities ruled by the kings and chieftains of different ethnic, religious and geographic backgrounds. Until around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were three major powers of different ethnic backgrounds within the territory of present day Nepal. A very strong and expanded Trans-Himalayan Kingdom of the Khasa or Yatshe rulers was established in the Karnali region of western Nepal. The Khasa Kingdom had dominated a vast territory between Garhwal in the west, Kaski and Nuwakot in the east and Purang region of western Tibet in the northwest and Gungthang of Central Tibet in the northeast. In the south, there was also a strong kingdom known as Tirahut ruled by the dynasty known as *Karnata* which was destroyed in the fourteenth century by the attack of Muslim

invaders. In the central region of Nepal there was a kingdom ruled by the Newar Malla Dynasty which was also known as the *Nepal-Mandala*. After the fall or disintegration of these three kingdoms, there then emerged nearly hundred stronger or smaller principalities. Although the total number of such principalities was around hundred, they were popularly known as *baisi* and *caubisi* (22 and 24?) states.

After the disintegration of the Malla Kingdom of the Valley of Nepal, there emerged at least three major kingdoms known as Kantipur, Lalitpur or Patan and Bhaktapur. Along with these three Malla kingdoms of the Kathmandu Valley, the Sena Kingdoms of Palpa, Makuwanpur, Chaudandi, Bijayapur, and Tanahu, and the Kingdoms of Gorkha, Kaski, Parvat, Lamjung, Jumla, Doti, Salyan, Bajhang, Jajarkot, Mustang etc. were immensely popular. The sudden fall of the central Khasa Malla power in Simja and the consequent disintegration of this Himalayan Kingdom paved the way for the emergence of dozens of smaller princely states in the north western region of present day Nepal and the Kumaun and Garhwal regions of India. All of these newly emerged principalities just followed the traditions, cultures, languages and to some extent, the administrative system developed under the authority of the Khasa Malla rulers of this Himalayan Kingdom. These traditions and their linguistic background later became the source of most of the princely hill states of pre-unified Nepal and later the unified Kingdom of Nepal. Thus, the “New Nepal” and the Nepali society what we see and talk about today cannot be looked at beyond the periphery of the direct historical influence of this medieval Himalayan Kingdom of the Karnali region. The Newar cultural tradition also seems to have some influence of the practices of Tirahaut. This was the reason why the Maithili literary and religious traditions had a special place in the Malla palaces and among the Newar elites of the Valley. Thus, at least at this critical juncture of national transformation, we must be very clear that Nepal is not a Kingdom subjugated to or occupied by the elites of immediate Indian origin who were said to have migrated to accumulate power and bathe in luxury in the region!

There is no proper or convincing historical evidence to trace the origin of the Khasas of Nepal. However, it is at least clear that they did not directly migrate from the southern plains or from Indian territory. They rather seem to have a long historical and geographic linkage with Central Asia and Western Tibet. It is important to note that the term or name Khasa has its original and etymological linkage with the places called Kasgar (*Khas-griha=home of the Khasas*), Kashmir (*Khas-meer=place of the Lord of the Khasas*) etc. The Kingdom of Khasa itself used to be known as *Khasa-desa* and its rulers *Khasadesaadhiraja*. Thus, the Khasa culture and tradition of Nepal should not be interpreted as the practices directly borrowed from Indian Vedic or Hindu Brahmanistic civilization.

The most essential aspect of our historical understanding today is the origin and development of culture and tradition of this centuries old trans-Himalayan Kingdom which was in existence between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Historical evidence confirms that the culture and traditions associated with the name *Khasa* is also a composite of western Tibetan and a corrupt form of Indo-Gangatic traditions. In fact, the Khasa culture and tradition cannot be solely seen as a product of the Indo-Gangatic caste based Hindu culture as many of today's activists claim. In fact, it is not even a product of Indian and the Tibetan Buddhist world. It is actually a mixture of a corrupted form of Hinduism and pre-Buddhist Bon and Buddhist Tibetan traditions. The ruling elites and the people of the Khasa Kingdom are therefore also the product of mixed genetic backgrounds and thus there should not be any confusion that most of so-called Thakuris and Bahuns-Chhetris of various princely states of Nepal were not of pure Indo-Gangatic Hindu origin. It seems that there was a clear flexibility in the practices of caste and cultural hierarchy. People had the choice to adopt Hindu traditions by wearing the sacred thread (*janai*) or to remain in *jad* by maintaining Tibetan pre-Buddhist Bon or Buddhist culture. There was a clear tendency of cross-cultural practices in society. Consequently, in some instances, it would be very difficult even to know whether a particular family was a *Jad* of Tibetan origin or a so-called Hindu Thakuri or Khasa. Interracial matrimonial relationship was a cause for the genetic mixture of the people of Khasa origin. One of a few cultural factors which clearly distinguish the people of Khasa origin from the people of Indo-Gangatic Hindu origin is the Khasa's religious and cultural practice of *Masto* tradition. It is interesting to note that most of Chhetris and Bahuns of Khasa origin of Nepal are the followers of the *Masto* tradition. Even today, they are distinctively known as the followers of various kinds of *Masto* even if they live far away from the original home of the *Masto* culture i. e. the Karnali region. It is a fact that the *Masto* tradition is by no means a culture related to *Vedic Sanatana* Hindu religious line. Rather it seems closer to the pre-Buddhist Shamanistic Bon practice of Tibet. It is interesting to note that some of the *Masto* tutelary deities of Bahuns and Chhetris of Khasa origin are known as *bange-masta*, *bahira-masta*, *thado-masta*, *bahra-masta*, *athahra-masta* etc. No such divine names can be found within Vedic texts, tradition and practice. From such historical reality, it is not so easy to prove that a particular family or community is of the pure Hindu or pure Thakuri, Brahmin or Chhetri of Indian or even Tibetan origin. If the so-called new reformers are serious in bringing about change by maintaining Nepal's national integrity, their policy makers must start rethinking over their wrong notion of inclusivity.

Another difficulty in this regard is the contradiction between caste and economic class hierarchies in Nepal. There are many traditional ruling elites within most of the ethnic communities who have been either considered to be

or are already established as underprivileged or marginalized groups (for ref. reports and booklets published by the National Committee for Development of Nationalities in different dates.). In this consideration, even the *raja* of Mustang, descendants of Thakali *Subbas* of Thakkhola and various local chieftains of Rais and Limbus, Ghale rulers of Gurungs, Lo-pa Thakuris of Baragaun, *Gopa* families of Olangchung, Mallas and other high caste Newars (including Rajopadhyas and Vajracharyas) and many more are listed under the excluded groups of Nepali society. However, we clearly know that most of these traditional ethnic elites were never excluded even from the state mechanism of Nepal. They were patronized by the rulers by offering plenty of privileges and administrative power that would last for generations. In many occasions, they were either appointed as custom contractors with local administrative power or even zonal or regional commissioners (Yogi 2022: 311-315= P. N. Shah's national guideline). The Newar business communities were welcomed for opening up shops and trade centers in various locations of the newly unified Kingdom of which many continue to stand today (copies of documents in personal collection of the author). On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of Bahun-Chhetris and even Thakuris of Khasa origin who simply do not have enough to live are listed in the privileged elite or even ruling groups of Nepal. This, by no means can be considered to be ideal practice in an inclusive democratic nation.

2. Which Nationalism-civic or Ethnic?

Under the catchy slogan of "building a New Nepal" a unique and bizarre type of nationalistic interpretation has surfaced in Nepal particularly after the abolition of the monarchy. This type of interpretation seems to have been influenced by a single and plain revisionist tendency overwhelmingly prevailed among political and civil activists of the country. However, it is not very difficult to understand that such a tendency has not surfaced on the basis of any proper knowledge of the post-modernist notion of 'deconstructing the past' (Norris 1983). It rather seems to have the outcome of a plain rhetoric of change announced without a serious study of the facts. The Nepali nationalism being preached by our politicians today does not actually match with our own historical reality, nor does it resemble any established theoretical stream. Our politicians, on the one hand, provoke the ethnic communities of the country to raise their voices for ethnocentric nationalism if not for federalism based on ethno-regional identity. On the other hand, they vocally talk about the need for maintaining civil supremacy. A clear anomaly is there because a proper civil supremacy can be achieved only if the civic type of nationalism is practiced in the country. If we seriously study the popular theories of nationalism, we find civic nationalism being identified with citizenship or citizens' supremacy and ethnic nationalism with genetic or cultural characteristics (Viroli 1997:7).

If we look through nationalist literature, we find various typologies of nationalism explained in various ways. A leading theorist of nationalism Ernest Gellner finds four different types of nationalism namely, western liberal nationalism, ethnic nationalism, diaspora nationalism and mature homogeneous nationalism (Hall 1998: 61). Peter Alter classifies nationalism in four types: a. liberal/risorgimento or genuine nationalism (anti-colonial), b. reform nationalism (old Asian countries which were not under colonial power), c. integral nationalism and d. ethno-cultural or nation-state form of nationalism (Alter 1994: 19-89). Louis Snyder observes four chronological typologies of nationalism: a. 1815-71 integrative, 1871-1900 disruptive, 1900-45 aggressive and 1945- contemporary or world-wide nationalism (Balakrishnan 1996: 184-85).

By its origin Nepal certainly falls in the category of reformed nationalism of Peter Alter's typology because it is an Asian country that has never been under a direct colonial power. Regardless, although Nepal was never colonized, the consistent lack of political stability caused by various movements has meant that the ideology of ethnic nationalism and ethnocentric and regional politics is thriving. Unfortunately, the question relating to Nepal's national unity, territorial integrity and communal harmony is being challenged by a deep skepticism among and within ethnic communities.

It is interesting that scholars and researchers of nationalism and patriotism think that democratic politics does not necessarily need ethno-cultural unity; they in fact need citizens committed to the way of life of the republic (Viroli *ibid.* 176). Viroli clearly defines that a democratic nation must be based on bonds of citizenship motivated by shared loyalties and memories made up of ethno-cultural roots, and good political reasons to live together. He further opines that if we overly adhere to ethno-cultural identity based nationalism, there is a chance of losing the political values of citizenship or even the citizen of the nation (*Ibid* 175). He finds more civic virtue in common liberty based democratic society than in a society indulged with ethno-cultural excitements or romanticism. Viroli advocates for a common liberty based democratic nation than for an extreme communal liberty (*Ibid* 12).

Since the culture of citizenship is the best way to institutionalize democratic values, the civic form of nationalism might be more fruitful to a nation like Nepal. Contrary to a common expectation, excessive priority on ethno-cultural supremacy may not be much harmonious in a multicultural nation (Viroli, *Ibid* 184). Similarly, the nationalism directly copied from historically colonized but multi-ethnic nations like the USA or India is not suited for a country with thousands of years of independent history with a strong, cultural and historical tradition of its own.

In earlier days of nationalistic innovation, both opposition politicians and the rulers of Nepal seem to have opened to applying the concept of nationalism (in Indian and Nepali vernacular *rashtravad and rashtriyata?*) from post-colonial India even though Nepal was never colonized by external forces. It seems that the notion of 'building a free and prosperous nation' (*swatantra ra samriddha desh-banaune or rashtra-nirman garne*) was borrowed from India. This was a common slogan of the Panchayat era basically employed by both the rulers and the opposition parties. This early chapter of Nepal's experience with nationalism is fading so quickly and the other face of nationalism has surfaced with bold strength. This move has taken much momentum after the abolition of monarchy in Nepal. Slogans of social freedom and communal identity are the fundamental aspects of ethnic nationalism today. Through its inherent nature of neglecting the interests of 'others' a chance for greater hatred, prejudice and intolerance between different communities is created. Since in most cases, ethnocentric nationalism in the world has caused brutality and devastation, we cannot expect much in Nepal from this ideology. A clear symptom of ethnic, communal and regional tensions along with related occasional incidents of unrest has already surfaced in Nepal. If we are serious enough in safeguarding peace and harmony in the country, now is the appropriate time to rethink and redefine the nation-state ideology. We can think of a middle way by mixing good characters of civic, ethnic and reform nationalism but at the same time, not eliminate the notion of patriotic practices. However, very surprisingly, one of the leading political parties of Nepal, United Maoist has brought back the anti-colonial trope of nationalism along with the slogan of 'self-rule' or 'independence' (*in original Nepali swadhintako yuddha*) in Nepal by wrongly understanding as if Nepal is a nation with colonial legacy. However, it must be clear that Nepal does not have such legacy as other federal republican nations like India and the United States of America. Nepal's Maoist Party did not even dare to march up to various southern bordering districts chanting so-called slogan of independence!! Unfortunately, both the Maoist Party and the people of Nepal at large did not achieve any positive outcome from this visionless and undiplomatic activity.

3. Anomalies relating to the history of ethnic identity, current identity politics and challenges to preserving ethnic cultures and traditions

Today's leading theorists are clearly divided on the issue related to the discourse of national, ethnic or individual identities. The main question in this regard is about whose identity should be given top priority in the process of building a nation with more practical way of institutionalizing democracy? The Issue of identity becomes very serious while dealing with the discourse of nationalism, patriotism and ethnicity. Theorists of patriotism always put first priority to the country's identity. Similarly, the civic nationalists also

give priority to the nation's identity (Viroli 1997: 162-184). The ethnic nationalists however, put their priority on the identity of particular ethnic communities (Alter 1994: 66-67, 79-80, 87-90).

In Nepal, the issue of identity has become an important component of national politics particularly after the *Jana-andolan-I*. By around the mid 1990s, the Maoist movement added additional strength to it. After the announcement of the republic, the ethnic and regional identity politics in Nepal has become the focal issue. The process of inclusion (*samabesikarana*) in national politics has already been dominated by easy going superficiality of visionless political thugs. A good example of such act is the present Constituent Assembly itself. Quite a big chunk of our national treasury is being consumed by a mass of incapable junkies favored by a few visionless political brokers lamented with their vested interests. A superficial interpretation of social marginalization, suppression and abandonment by the state or the so-called high cast privileged is reaching its pinnacle. Terms such as *simantakrita*, *abhavavma parieka*, *pachadi parieka*, *bahiraparieka*, *davaieka* etc. have been easily accepted even by the interim constitution and other governmental and nongovernmental agencies. These are the common terms being massively used by Nepali political and social activists today. We should however, understand that these terms are intentionally borrowed from European and American literature of activism and forcefully translated into Nepali. They do not necessarily resemble the history and practices of Nepal and they can be translated with two different meanings: one giving a sense as caused by 'others' or outside force/forces and the other as a result of time and circumstance and may even be a product of themselves. If we seriously revisit the history of Nepal, we cannot find evidence of official policy of such suppression or abandonment. However, we certainly find examples of marginalization and abandonment caused by situational circumstance or by the very tradition and native practices. Scholars like Ogbu have preferred to explain this as 'cultural volunteerism of a certain ethnic minority.' In such cases, it would not be fair to blame any other community or a particular ruler or alike. If we avoid doing so, there is a better chance of maintaining peace and harmony in the country. If we observe the history of the formation of modern Nepal, we can also find good examples of policies of practical ethnic inclusivity adopted by the rulers of Nepal. Prithvinarayan Shah in his national guidelines clearly mentions the distribution of higher official responsibilities to personalities of different communities in accordance with their field of expertise. For example, he had announced the policy of giving joint legal responsibility to Thakuri, Magar and educated Brahmin Pandit, defense forts command and regional commissionership to Gurung, Magar, Khand or other trusted courtiers. He was also in favor of giving supreme commandership of the army to Magars (Dept. of Archaeology VE 2054: 16, 24 etc.). There were numerous Magar and Gurung generals in the Gorkhali army from the

beginning of their expansion campaign. It is interesting to note that Prithvinarayan Shah had even introduced the tradition of appointing Muslims as army training officers (Ibid 27). It must be noted that the rulers of Nepal that time did not have many choices of other ethnic communities to include in their administrative and army positions since the Kirant region was recently brought into the emerging power of unified Nepal and in some occasions was still trying to fight back making alliance with Sikkim and Tibet (Dhungel 1989: 9-13) and most of the high Himalayan region had not been fully consolidated. Tarai's case was also the same because there was no direct support from or clash with the locals of Tarai. Traditional dispute in Tarai was actually with the Awadh or lately with the Company authorities of British India (a further discussion on the issue of Tarai and other regions is done under the sub-title "History and the issues relating to federalism/regionalism" below).

The other problem being faced by Nepali democracy today is the issue relating to the "*adibasi*" and "*Janajati*" movement, which no doubt is directly linked with the common question of ethno-cultural identity. This also has a common objective basically linked with the questions of self determination, inclusive policy in politics and other aspects of the country. This is also a movement which has evolved with a notion of ethno-cultural nationalism among the Nepalis newly identified as "*adibasi*" and "*Janajati*". This notion, by its inherent nature, denies the civic or patriotic sense of nationalism and not surprisingly, supports exclusively the notion of ethnic rights and liberty. Because of the self-centered notion of ethnic identity and the objective of self-determination, it seems that the movement has put aside the universal question of common liberty. In order to establish a high urgency and importance of ethno-cultural identity and rights, the ethnic activists and organizations have been deeply involved in even inventing various ethnic nationalities and listing them in the national chart of "*janajati*" and "*adibasi*". Even the forgery and misleading cases have been found in the list of so-called marginalized and indigenous communities. A leading example of such an invention is the case of the Panchgaunles of lower Mustang and the Tibetan origin people of Upper Tamor and Upper Arun Valleys. The *Panchgaules* have been listed in new categorization as *Tingaunles* and *Marpha*.

The root of the problem in this movement is related to the lack of proper identification of true ethno-history of the people of Nepal. Superficiality and to some extent, ethnic prejudice has become a major problem in the movement. As discussed above, a better understanding of the origin and development of Nepali society with a clear and convincing historical picture of the people of various ethnic backgrounds is a task of foremost importance. It seems that there is also a direct or indirect feeling of "otherness" in the movement otherwise a list of such distinction would not have been produced

without having a detailed ethno-historical survey and a national common debate in the country. Here, the problem arises due to the inclusion of many ethnic groups in the list of “*janajati*” and “*adibasi*” who are either simply invented and claim to be “*Janajati*” or simply not real adivasis. There are, in fact, many more real “*adibasis*” who are excluded in such lists. The recent claim to be listed as “*adibasi*” by the Khasa Chhetris and Bhauns of Nepal is one of such problems officially surfacing in Nepali ethno-centered national politics. There are numerous Chhetris and Bahuns of Khasa origin who have their ancestral antiquity very clearly traced back from 10th-11th centuries who are surprisingly excluded in the list of “*adibasi*”. Similarly, there are many ethnic groups on the lists whose ancestral history in this country is not more than two to four centuries old.

3.1 Politics of Language and Ethnic Cultures

Under the activism of ethno-cultural identity politics in Nepal the language related issue has also been placed in high importance. Activists of various ethnic communities and political ideologies usually blame the rulers of Nepal for the long time suppression of the languages of ethnic minority communities by implementing a single language policy in the country. However, the historical reality is different. Except a couple of instances in the late Rana period and early Panchayat era of Nepali history, the rulers of Nepal were not very keen on such a policy. The royal orders and letters in Tibetan, Maithili, Hindi or Hindustani languages issued by various rulers of Nepal are examples of the absence of one dominant language and the suppression of minority languages by the former rulers of Nepal. Historical evidence tells us that way before the advent of Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha, the Khasa-Parvate language or an earlier form of Nepali of today had been accepted as the state language and lingua-franca of various feudal states of Nepal. It was also not because of states’ policy but because of the demand of that time. It was in fact the historical legacy of the Khasa Kingdom, which controlled a vast territory between Garhwal in the west and the Kathmandu Valley in the east. The Malla Kingdom of Parvat also contributed a fair share in making Parvate or Khasa language richer and important. The rulers of modern Nepal always appreciated religious scriptures and languages of various ethnic backgrounds. They often turned to religious authorities of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries to maintain the practice of religious teaching and scriptures. It is surprising that not a single official order was issued against any minority languages within their domain. In the due course of time, numerous individual scholars put their self-emerged effort in enhancing the language of their mother tongue i.e. Khasa-Parvate or present day Nepali. Pandit Bhanubhakta of Tanahu was one to do so. He never stopped himself from composing simple poems in Nepali (commonly known as *bhasa*), even during the days of his house arrest in Kathmandu and

the busiest summer days in Tanahu. It is important to note that Bhanubhakta's project of composing Nepali verses of Ramayana was not sponsored by the state and he himself didn't invest any money in advertising. The appreciation for it happened on its own, due to the situation and time perhaps. It was only during King Mahendra's Panchayat rule that the one language policy was officially adopted. However, the activists with vested political and communal interests time and again make baseless propaganda without any seriousness and thoughtfulness towards a possible social disorder and violence keep repeating the same misinterpretation of history. One such example is the stories relating to state action against some Newar literary figures of the late Rana Period (Sharma VE 2008:402). Actually, that was the state's policy against democratic and literary awareness in general and by no means intended to suppress any particular ethnic language or activism. We must understand that no activists of any ethnic background were spared from brutal action of the state, no matter whether the activists were making speeches and producing literary works including pamphlets in Nepali, Newari, Maithili, Hindi or others. The *library-parva* incident is one such example in which so many young activists of different ethnic and literary background were suppressed with states brutality (Regmi 1958: 169.).

The history of Nepal seems rather unique in various aspects. This is the country where a conqueror submits himself to the culture of the conquered and adopts the name of the defeated Kingdom (for solid reference to it, see P. N. Shah's guideline/Upadesh). This was the case of Prithvinarayan Shah of Gorkha who successfully subjugated the three kingdoms of the Newar Malla rulers of the *Nepal-Mandala* and made an announcement that the rich cultural traditions and cultures of the Newars be appreciated and preserved. He himself preserved every single religious and social custom of the valley, helping to keep them intact. He whole heartedly worshipped the *Kumari* and bowed down to touch her feet despite being the daughter of a Buddhist Shakya Newar. He asked his ministers to clean and polish the statues of the rulers he defeated with new gilding of gold and preserved them right in front of the main gate of the palace where he lived. Prithvinarayan Shah and his descendants were aware of preserving both Buddhist and other traditions in the Kingdom. They always honored both Hindu and Buddhist traditions and offered special privileges and different kinds of grants including land to Buddhist monasteries of both Newar and Tibetan traditions. But today the political and ethnic activists of Nepal blame them as the destroyers or suppressors of ethnic cultures and traditions. It is very surprising that nearly two hundred and forty years after the unification of Nepal by Prithvinarayan of Gorkha, Nepal is only now known to the world as one of a few nations which has very uniquely preserved its diverse ethnic cultures and traditions. Actually, in their own way, the rulers of Nepal had adopted the policy of preserving ethnic cultures of the region. At the initial days of Nepal's

unification, in his national guideline speech Prithvinarayan Shah clearly pointed out the need of preserving self identity and tradition of each ethnic communities of Nepal (*aphna-aphna kuladharm nachhodnu...etc.*) (Dept. of Archaeology VE 2054: 22). His successors and courtiers of early modern period of Nepal seem to have followed this original guideline. In this situation, how can we brand the Hindu rulers of Nepal as the destroyers and suppressors of ethnic cultures? History tells that the rulers of Nepal were actually the saviors of its ethnic cultures. Should this virulent type of misconception of our history not be changed before we practically enter into a true democracy of inclusive character where legislative and executive bodies are formed by the majority of elected representative and learned professionals?

4. History and the Issues Relating to Federalism/Regionalism

A sensible discussion on the issue of federal republicanism in our country requires a thorough knowledge of the historical geography of Nepal and the Himalayan region at large. It is already discussed earlier that until the beginning of the formation of *baisi-chauvisi* and many other princely states and feudatories, there were only three major powers within the territory of today's Nepal. They were: the Khasa Kingdom in the northwest, Tirahaut in southern plain or Tarai, and the Nepal-Mandala in and around Kathmandu Valley. These three stronger powers were very surprisingly disintegrated during fourteenth-fifteenth centuries that caused the emergence of around hundred smaller principalities within the territory of today's Nepal. Finally, under the superb and very ambitious command of Prithvinarayan Shah, the tiny Kingdom of Gorkha was able to launch a successful campaign for Nepal's unification. The territory between Gorkha and River Tista was already brought under Nepal during Prithvinarayan Shah's reign. Following the foot-step of his father, Prince Bahadur Shah continued the military campaign launched by his father. It was during the regency of Bahadur Shah that the Gorkhali force was able to expand Nepal's territory up to Garhwal in the west. However, the Treaty of Sugauli signed in 1816 between Nepal and British India confined Nepal's territory to just between the River Mechi and Mahakali. More than four decades after the Treaty of Sugauli Janga Bahadur Rana was able to bring the Terai region of today's far western Nepal back from British India by employing his diplomatic tactfulness. The region brought back by the effort of Janga Bahadur was thus known as "naya muluk," translated as "the new territory" or the newly acquired region.

The Khasa or Ya-tse rulers of the Karnali region were the first to launch several strong military campaigns intended to expand the Khasa Kingdom and unify militarily the Himalayan region comprising the territory between Garhwal in the west and the Koshi region in the east. However, the expanded Himalayan Empire of the Khasa rulers could not last longer than four

centuries. By the late fourteenth century the Khasa Kingdom seems to have totally disintegrated (Dhungel 2003: 75-79). It is important to note that although the Khasa Kingdom did not last longer than four century it certainly left a profound and deep-rooted cultural impact to the entire hill states of Nepal which were emerged after the disintegration of the Khasa Kingdom. The Sen Kingdom of Palpa was one of the stronger succeeding fragments of the Khasa Kingdom to follow the Khasa's tradition of expanding territory in vast as well as to unify the tiny principalities with an intention of creating a stronger Kingdom in the region. However, Mukunda Sena's successful campaign went in vain when his sons became highly ambitious to hold a separate independent kingdom under each of them. Similarly, King Yaksha Malla of the *Nepal-Mandala* had also launched several successful and ambitious military campaigns intended to territorial expansion of his kingdom. His sons did the same mistake as Mukunda Sen's son had done in Palpa. Consequently, the *Nepal-Mandala* was divided into three major kingdoms in the Kathmandu Valley. Thus it seems that after the early Licchavi rulers, only Prithvinarayan Shah and his successors were able to expand and keep hold of the expanded territory for long time. Prithvinarayan Shah had laid the foundation of Nepal's unification by expanding territory between Gorkha in the west and river Tista in the east. His successors continued the process until the strong military encounter with British India.

From the historical narratives described above, we can understand that Nepal's history is completely different than other countries with federal structure in the world. Before entering into federal system we must seriously understand why we enter into this system and if we find it is essential for national existence and peace, harmony with development, then we must immediately launch a national debate intending to find the appropriate way/ways of structuring federal states for example on the basis of history, ethnicity or geography etc.?

We must also understand that federalism implemented by different countries in the world is basically intended for a national unification or formation of a new country. In this context, a common question can always be raised that for what purpose a federal structure is needed in Nepal? History confirms that this is a nation integrated about two and half centuries ago and has experience of comparatively better situation of social harmony and coexistence. I think, along with our ethno-cultural debate, this is a crucial time of questing for common Nepali cultural characters. Aren't there common cultural characters which can be called Nepali? This is a common question being asked by the world today. Instead of finding a positive historically proven answer, we are overwhelmingly saying "no". The world again asks then, what about the unique form of Shamanism--Dhami-Jhankri, agricultural patterns, trade and commerce, living style, dresses and ornaments, many Hindu and Buddhist festivals, common pilgrimage centers,

art and architecture of this region which cannot be found in other part of the world? We answer “no. we don’t care about those because we are entering into New Federal Nepal”. We must also understand that these are actually the determining factors of indentifying the common regional ethnic similarity. At the present context, are we just talking about ethno-genetic similarity and forgetting about the historicity of a common Nepali cultural identity? By going into such an anti-historical shallow notion we would not be able to maintain peace, harmony and coexistence in the country and ultimately we may lose everything including the very existence of our nation and ourselves. If we feel that we really need a federal structure in the country we must go with historical and geopolitical reality. We cannot, by any chance, think of creating imaginary ethno-federal structure based on language and genetic similarity. The climax of our shallowness towards such a serious matter is that we are ready even to propose for a federal state of a so-called ethnic community which actually does not exist as it is proposed. One of the leading parties has just proposed for a state under the name *Lama/Bhote*. Later, this proposed name was changed as *Jadan/Bhote*. It represents a serious shallowness of our scholarly situation. In reality, there is no such an ethnic community by the name *Lama*, *Jad* or *Bhote*. The term *Lama* is just a title of a Himalayan Buddhist scholarly priest which can be compared with the Sanskrit term *guru* or in English spiritual teacher. The term *Bhote* also cannot be used for a state because for the first, this term has been understood these days as derogative and second, there are various ethnic communities who live in the high Himalayan region of Nepal can fall under this common term linked with the people of Tibetan origin. Similarly, the term *Jadan* is also a very vague and confusing. In the present context, It may also be considered a derogatory.

A proposal for a separate Sherpa state is also very shallow thinking. Besides Sherpas, there are various other Himalayan ethnic communities residing in this region for over thousand years who can easily claim for a separate state. The communities like Lopa, Neshyangpa, Nubripa, Tshumpa, Dolpo are the example of such communities. Some of these communities had their way longer history with their own Kingdom. The history of Lopa community and the Kingdom of Lo (Mustang) is one of them (Dhungel 2003). Contrary to this, the Sherpa historicity published by the researchers clearly indicates that the Sherpa community did not have its own independent political entity in history and the date of first small group of community to enter into the present territory of Nepal is just around 1530 (Ortner 1989: xxii.). The total number of Sherpa population is also too small for a separate state status.

In Nepal’s Tarai, there were strong Kingdoms and culturally rich communities whose kingdoms were destroyed by external attack and new entrants hundreds of years before the beginning of Gorkha’s military

campaign. We must recall the history of Tirhut and the brutal destruction of its capital city Simraungarh and the political asylum of the Tirahute rulers and people in the *Nepala Mandala*. By the time of the Gorkha's military campaign, there were no political entities of its own in the Tarai of Nepal. In order to claim the Tarai region, the ambitious Gorkhali rulers had to fight either with the rulers of Awadh or lately with the British in India. No states, even feudatories by the name Madhesh, Kochila, Tharu etc. were in existence. Similarly, we don't find any historical evidence of independent Kirant or Limbuwan political entity in Eastern Nepal. In order to capture the Kirant region including its Tarai, Pahad, and Himal, the Gorkhali army had to fight either with the Sena rulers of Makuwanpur, Chaudandi and Bijayapur or with Sikkim. Thus, before Gorkha's Nepal Unification Campaign, except a few independent and semi-independent states in the Himalayan region and the Kathmandu Valley the entire territory of today's Nepal was under various rulers of the Khasa descent. The local sporadic indigenous communities in the Tarai were highly threatened by the new entrants from India. Consequently they were politically indifferent and silent. These historical realities must be given serious consideration while analyzing Nepal's past and the framing structure for the future.

5. Are we on the Right Track?

I think Nepal is passing through difficult days in various aspects including the discourse relating to its historiography. The field of interpreting the nation's history has been pre-occupied by a plain revisionist and hegemonic deconstructionism prevailing among ill-schooled political activists of the country. Philosophers like Croce Benedetto and Hayden White believe that this type of plain critical tendency in historical interpretation is a trope described as 'ironical' (White 1990: 75), which always leads the interpreters of historical data towards narrating history as just 'what happened in the past?' However, a historical narrative of true nature should not look just for a record of the past but it must be focused on interpreting the cause and situation by addressing 'why it happened and how it happened?' (White op. cit.:52). In Nepal, the discipline of history itself has been seriously engulfed with visionless politico-centered oratorical craftsmanship. They may be politically correct but socio-culturally and realistically wrong. Thus, to save the nation from such a hegemonic leap-talk against the nation's historiography, the responsibility of professionals, researchers, students and every conscious citizen engaged in studying, understanding and interpreting the history of Nepal has become of immense importance. The very surprising and frustrating factor in this context is that the revisionist activists and professionals use the same historical source and data in order to bring out a very virulent self-centered and hegemonic interpretation of the past. Thus the Nepali historiography today has been under a serious threat of the absence of

proper interpretation if not of misinterpretation in terms of balance between popular theoretical ground and factual or truthful means. In many cases, we may also see examples of inadequate interpretation of the past. One such example of Nepal is the issue relating to the preservation of traditional ethnic cultures. On the one hand, Nepal has been recognized as one of few countries in the world to have been able to preserve its multi-ethnic traditional cultures and on the other, we blame the rulers, so-called feudal groups and even Bahuns and Chhetris (broadly known as the Khasas) as the suppressors or destroyers of ethnic languages and cultures! It is very difficult to find any rational, truthful and factual evidence behind such an interpretation. Contrary to such arguments, we do not find enough examples of official suppression of ethnic cultures and languages. From the very inception of Nepal's history, a policy of social and religious harmony seems to have been the priority of the rulers of this country. The customs and clan traditions of various ethnic communities of Nepal are recognized even by the historical civil code of Nepal (Hofer 2005: xix, xxv). In order to encompass the regional traditional practices and local social values in the civil code, a 219 member commission of experts and informed representatives of various ethnic communities was formed by the Government (Government of Nepal 1952 Civil Code of VE 1910). It is interesting that the leadership of the civil code project was given to two Jha brothers named Lokapati and Leshapati, prominent Sanskrit scholars from Saptari of Nepal Tarai (Ibid).

6. Concluding Remarks

There are a few quite difficult challenges to be faced in the process of implementing a true social inclusion policy in Nepal. In the process of this course, the first task will be the proper identification of the very root of social and economic inequalities in the country. The process of such identification has already been dominated by virulent types of ethnocentrism in Nepal. Such tendencies are creating even a state of racial and regional conflicts in the country. The Tarai has been the first region to be afflicted by such regional and racial notions of ethnic politics. In this context, a question should also be raised addressing whose identity should be given first priority—the identity of the country or the identity of one or more ethnic communities. It is a pity that the territorial and institutional concept of nationalism has been challenged by national self-determination or the so-called principle of nationality not only in various places in the world but also right here in Nepal. Some theorists of nationalism and patriotism argue that a milder symbolic ethnic identification or a limited form of ethnic awareness is fine (Alter 1994: 90). However, in most cases, the very nature of ethno-cultural concept of national politics seems to be the source of ultimate destruction of the nation. In this context, we can take various examples from history beginning from Hitler's ethnocentric nationalism to the current Sri-Lankan,

Eastern European and African experiences. The present symptom of ethnic politics in Nepal does not look any better than the worse experiences of other countries of the world which were and are deeply afflicted with ethnic unrest. After all, in most cases in the world, the ethnocentric activism has created more hatred in society than peace and harmony. It seems that Nepal is not an exception to such frustrating experiences. The peace-loving common Nepalis are even compelled to have seen, time and again, the most virulent expressions like *thakurilai phansi and bahunlai kanshi* translated as: "assassination to the Thakuris and exile in Benaras to Brahmins". Such expressions were even publicized as a statement of hatred or "fun" possibly by some of the more immature ethnic activists in some papers and public walls in Nepal. Such expressions by any sense cannot be categorized as simply the product of the movement of ethnic identity. Theoretically, this can be seen not beyond the notion of racial darkness and hatred towards the "other". In order to create a ground for a lasting democracy and a peaceful and true inclusive culture, the state must adopt a balanced policy of social inclusion by leaving enough space for a state of meritocracy. Political activists and policy makers must be aware of the concept of positive discrimination in order to maintain balance between quality/ability and social inequality. If massive ability exclusion occurs in the name of social inclusion there will always be a danger of the collapse of the whole system. Thus, functional importance must also be given equal space during the course of making inclusive policies. The policy of ethnic, regional and gender inclusiveness should not be implemented alone with a romantic type of excitement. The present symptom of Nepali society seems to have headed towards an irrational notion of over excitement and lacking any real rational thoughtfulness supported by country's true history. The system of reservation in professional areas including medical and university teaching and research fields would ultimately be a dangerous decision to have been taken for the maintenance of educational and professional standards. Its ultimate negative impact will be on the nation itself and on us, citizens ourselves. The history of American experience can serve as good example of the failure of reservation system in a federal republic of multi-ethnic nation. The incidents relating to the flaws in the 'affirmation action' introduced during the presidency of L. Johnson and the consequence of reverse discrimination surfaced in the United States of America by the late '70s are worth mentioning here. Following the famous cases known as *Bakke case* of 1978, *Wygant case* of 1986 and several other incidents linked with regulations and practices of positive discrimination had ultimately awaken up the lawmakers and executives of the United States of America by compelling them to rethink over the existing codes of 'affirmative action'. As soon as the flaws in the system were discovered, the principle of 'affirmative action' was no longer justified and it was ended with a drastic change with the introduction

of new experiment which eventually opened up the door of basic understanding that "path to leadership must be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity". Consequently, the point system of rating students and awarding additional points to minorities had to be modified by ending the system of "individualized consideration" for admission in colleges and universities. Similar regulations were also made and implemented in order to guarantee a place for talent and ability rather than for racial background (Encyclopedia Britannica).

If Nepal is to enter into the new era of true democracy and social change, she needs to learn a useful lesson from this experience of the United States of America since only a very small section of historic ruling class and business communities of the country seem to have enjoyed the taste of different kinds of feudal and other privileges of financial benefits. In contrast, the majority of Nepalis, irrespective of any ethnic origin, seem to have been out of touch of even the minimum privileges and state mechanism since the inception of country's history. This is true even in the case of over 95% of Bahuns and Chhetris of Khasa origin.

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