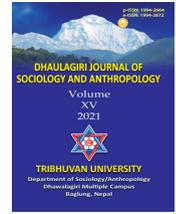


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One Facet of Ethnic Categorization, Ethnicization and Ethnic Activism in Nepal

Pradeep Acharya

Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

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Abstract

Ethnicity and identity, particularly for Nepal with diverse human and cultural groups, has become more important in the context of number of ethnic upsurges accompanying macro-level social movements in Nepal, resulting in a radical transformation in the political system. Given the context, this paper aimed to reflect one of the many dimensions of ethnic activism in historical context focused on one of Nepal's least studied ethnic groups, the Paharis. Further, the paper also attempted to connect the categorization of human groups with the politics of identity. The paper is prepared by extensive reviews supplemented by a number of in-depth interviews among the given community around Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Kabhrepalanchok, and Sindhupalchok district. The paper concludes that Pahari ethnicity and activism have their own trajectory within the broader ethnic movement and activism that became apparent after 1990, followed by the movement initiated by other ethnic groups.

Keywords: activism, categorization, democratization, ethnicization, stigma

Introduction

Ethnic Group and Ethnicity: An Etymology

To begin with the term 'ethnicity' as Regmi (2003) quotes Glazer and Moynihan (1975), it was for the first time used around 1953, while Rankin (2004) attributed Leach (1954) as one of the key issues in anthropology based on his research among the Kachins of northern Burma. Popeau (1998) noted that the word 'ethnic' is derived from the Greek 'ethnos', originally meaning 'heathen' or 'pagan' during 'racial' connotation. Guneratne (2002) notes that the sociologist David Riesman first used the term in 1953. Barth's (1969) defines 'ethnic group' as a biologically self-perpetuating human group from other categories. The concept of 'ethnic groups', for Gellner (1997), is a prerequisite to ethnicity, who has understood it in two ways –first, as minority groups represented by

ethnic dress, ethnic food, and second, also as majority groups, whose members consider each other culturally distinctive, for example. Han Chinese in China, *Parbatiyas* (Bahun, Chhetri, Thakuri) in Nepal also as ethnic groups. Furthermore, Ben-Rafael (2001) notes the popularity of the term 'ethnic group' since 1960s, following the political awakening of Blacks and other groups in the USA, while some of the proposed, like Anderson (1983)'s 'imagined communities'.

For Pyakuryal (1982), it can be defined as varying degrees of reciprocal, common identification (or peoplehood) comprising: a) symbols of shared heritage; b) an awareness of similar historical experience, and; c) in-group loyalty or 'we feeling' associated with a shared social position, common ancestry, similar values and interests, and often but not inevitably, identification with specific national origins. As mentioned earlier, focusing on similarities and differences among the human groups



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Email: pradeepacharya@hotmail.com <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1430-2443>

has been a core concern in anthropology from its very beginning across the globe. It was the major basis of social organization regarding caste hierarchy, division of labor, governance and social identity the long history of Nepal, and recently, issues regarding ethnicity have become particularly important in Nepal in the process of implementation of a new constitution following the ethnic upsurge and political movement resulting in the declaration of federalism.

Methods

This paper has been prepared based on both primary and secondary information regarding the description of identity politics in the Nepalese context. The vast array of literature have been reviewed to generate a conceptual and theoretical framework on the anthropology of identity politics, group dynamics and human similarities and differences. In addition, a quasi-participant observation based on intensive fieldwork accompanied by in-depth interviews with the people of the middle hills of Nepal around province three during 2014 was done for first-hand information.

Findings

Ethnic Categorization and Ethnicization: The Processes

Categorization of human groups based on various observable and concealed markers fundamental aspects of social organization. As mentioned by Sharma (1986), the various markers of categorization can be attributes like race, culture, language, religion and region. Such categorization is all about putting humans into certain 'social types', which are abstractions constructed by selecting and putting together some of the qualities that are supposed to characterize an ethnic category (Regmi, 2003). Ethnic categories only persist as significant units if they imply marked differences in the characteristic patterns of qualities and behavior. Therefore, 'ethnicity' comprises a fundamental process of classifying people given the various social and historical contexts over time and the 'ethnic group' as an entity and the 'ethnicity' as a concept are not static in themselves, rather the categorization and re-categorization go on with some continuity and changes in their manifestations.

According to Bhattachan (2005), Nepalese people belong to 4 racial categories – Caucasian, Mongoloid, Dravidian and Proto-Australoids involving 61 ethnic groups, speaking more than 125 languages divided into diverse religious faiths like animism, Buddhism, lamaism, kirant, hindu, jain, islam, and christianity. Traditionally, there were 12 regional ethnic clusters: *khasan*, *judan*, *tharuwan*, *awadhi*, *kochil*, *maithil*, *nepal*, *limbuan*, *khambuan*, and *tambasaling*, *tamuan* and *magarant*, and, people of Tarai identify themselves as *Madheshi*. As Acharya (2002), notes that a national convention of ethnic

minorities and nationalities in 1994 and a task force by government 1996 defined indigenous people as non-Hindu animist believers, possessing a territory and language, deprived of tribal resources, denied of policymaking role, egalitarian without caste hierarchy, and, later added nationalities (*janajati*) also having a distinct collective identity, own religion, tradition, culture and civilization, written or oral history and we-feeling, and, the term. '*janajati*' has become a palatable vocabulary of political organizations.

Likewise, another fundamental process that has been seen to follow ethnic categorization is *ethnicization*, which is more than just the categorization of people into social types, rather it has a political dimension regarding ethnic activism and mobilization. However, categorization and categories are prerequisites that actually precede *ethnicization* as it entails one or more markers of social categories to be highlighted for political mobilization and by *ethnicization*, categories are made more relevant and apparent in practice. In the Nepalese context, ethnic politicization relates primarily to the ongoing process of change in the relationship between the state and society as it is not confined to finding 'niches' within the existing social order, rather at redefining the nature of the Nepalese polity as reflected in constitution defining a new type of civic rights (freedom of speech, freedom to organize), political institution and procedures. Pfaff-Czarnecka (1999) acknowledges that the process of *ethnicization* occurs when ethnic groups emerge as collective political agents and their mobilization consist in shaping perceptions of common destiny and hence in demonstrating the necessity for common action, in which, cultural element whether understood as 'difference' or as 'identifier', may be a determining factor at different stages of ethnicity formation, as a result of increasing ethnic competition influenced by the political economy of specific group's social standing concerning other, and, the issue of the so-called minorities' strategies toward shifting the prevailing power of high-caste-*Parbatiya*-Hindus.

Ethnicity in Historical Context

As emphasized by Gellner (2001), nationalism and ethnicity should be studied in the historical context and in Nepal, like most countries of the world, there is and has been a conscious process of nation-building i.e., training diverse people culturally and linguistically employing schooling, military service, and disciplines of the market. The pattern of ethnicization in Nepalese society in historical context, as mentioned by Pradhan (2002), is nothing more than the reflection of the prevailing political systems of the country. Initially, during Gorkhali and Rana regimes, it was plural and hierarchical, where cultural pluralism was recognized, but differences were translated into a hierarchy regarding the caste system and *Parbatiaya* values; and during the *Panchayat* period, homogeneous

and non-hierarchical structure with homogenous national culture and assimilation was envisioned. In short, ethnicity was not the basis for legal identity. Finally, with the promulgation of multi-party democracy in 1990, the plural and non-hierarchical standard was constitutionalized, and ethnicity became one of the bases of legal identity.

The ethnic mix we see in Nepal today is the outcome of governmental attempts to handle the country's ethnic diversity and people's responses to the political system, which began with the territorial unification in 1789, when the government had to unify Nepalese society comprised of three culturally distinctive, historically and regionally autonomous caste hierarchies, and, the external political factors that have impinged on village's lives (Levine, 1987). The tibeto-burman speaking population on the northern border and the hills, the indo-aryan speaking people around the hills and terai; and the distinct terai population known as the madhesh, having different peculiarities specific to geographic regions as well as different nature and levels of connectivity outside the border.

Diverse and sometimes conflicting discourses on ethnicity in Nepal, which seem to be varying regarding three major subjects (conceptual framework – primordialist vs instrumentalist; definition of dominant and minority groups; and understanding and interpretation of caste-ethnic and minority groups), according to Hachhethu (2003) is in line with one's belongingness to particular group, i.e. primordialist – few observe in this line that ethnic movement is a quest for identity; instrumentalist – others, particularly those belonging to hill Bahun-Chhetri, take stand that ethnic upsurge is motivated to gain some political and economic advantages. He further states that,

Prayag Raj Sharma (1997) says the ethnic politics of Nepal in the 1990s seems to have elements conforming with both the primordialist and instrumentalist models. Jonna Pfaff-Czarnecka (1999) takes ethnic activism in Nepal as having elements of instrumentalism greater and lesser primordialism i.e. elitist nature of such movements because promoters of 'cultural politics' are many prominent politicians, parliamentarians, intellectuals in key positions, entrepreneurs, highly regarded priests and religious leaders and even government officials. Ganesh Man Gurung (1999) states that ethnic movements are headed to make hitherto deprived ethnic groups equal partners in developing a single territorial Nepalese nation-state because the movement is the outcome of age-old suppression through the imposition of the stratified hierarchical model by the Hindu rulers of Nepal. The widely accepted and adopted approach to the study of ethnicity in Nepal is addressing the issue of 'dominant group (Hill-Bahun chhetris) and minority group'. (Hachhethu, 2003, p. 217)

In the contrary, Dahal (1995) stresses on the notion of dominant 'individuals' not the dominant 'caste'. The

distribution of economic and political power does not strictly follow the line with caste and ethnic division because in history, Byansi of Darchula, Thakali of Thakkhola, Manangbasi of Manang, Sherpas of Solukhumbu, Bhotiyas of Olangchunggola, Newars of Kathmandu themselves were trans-himalayan traders and were prosperous despite of few cultivated land. In the 1991 election, it is hill Bahun and Chhetri and Newar, Thakali, Limbu, Gurung, and Tharu were over-represented in parliament than the size of their populations, reflecting the emerging feature of governing elite in the country (Dahal, 2000). In this way, while talking about ethnicity, identity and ethnicization in Nepal, we should not overlook the influence of the dominant members of different caste and ethnic groups, instead of just highlighting the notion of dominant ethnic and caste groups. In short, it is one of the most important dimensions of ethnicization and politics of identity in the Nepalese context.

Differences of opinions and varieties of discourses on ethnicity in Nepal also involve the understanding and interpretation of relations among different groups. In Nepal, relations between diverse groups in society are harmonious and free of tension and violence (Sharma, 1997; Dahal, 1995, 2000; Pradhan, 1995, 2002). Gellner (1997, 2001) points out that one should not assume that ethnic activists and ordinary people share the same agenda and the ethnic harmony may have been exaggerated. Similarly, Bhattachan (1995, 1998, 2000) takes the idea of ethnic harmony as a 'blatantly manufactured myth,' and regarding the primordialist-instrumentalist dichotomy, he confirms that the scholars from ethnic groups discarded instrumentalist and primordialist model and rather urged to see the ethnic movement of Nepal from the perspective of the principles of equality against discrimination. If ethnic conflicts, clashes, insurgencies happened in Nepal, it would not be replicas of ethnic problems in Srilanka, Bosnia, Kososvo, Rwanda and Fiji. Instead, it would have its own characteristics, features, nature and consequence based on the collective memory of the past and the existing social structure of the Nepalese society. Gaige (1975), a pioneer author, who explored and located a kind of regional conflicts between hill and plain groups on issues of language, citizenship, and land ownership. Dahal and Sharma (1992), in separate write-ups, avow that the rigid attitudes which divide the *Pahades* and *Madhesiyas* indicates and ethnic conflict of explosive potential which could well engulf Nepal in the future and the Tarai is the only area of the Himalaya which is simmering with ethnic discontent.

One of the recent ethnographic studies, Fisher (2001), explains the process of forming and transforming identity in Nepal among the Thakalis as having three general forms of identity (Thakali as once-devout Buddhists who became Hindu; Thakali as Buddhist who only appeared to become Hindu; Thakali were never devout Buddhist and neither did they ever become Hindu, though they pretended to be

one or the other under different conditions), in the context of which, the attempts by the Thakali over the past two decades to define their identity and clarify their practices reveal that to return to tradition they must first re-create it. However, this process of re-creation establishes tradition in a way in which it has never existed before. That is, to return to tradition – to become Thakali again.

According to Gunaratne (2002), on the making of Tharu identity in Nepal, Tharus of Nepal seem to have only a collective name (Tharu) and a specific territory (Terai) and to some extent, by the effort of *Tharu Kalyankari Sabha*, a sense of solidarity and further adds that Tharu differs as much among themselves as they do from non-Tharus, and some Tharu groups have more in common with non-Tharus with respect to these traits than they do with others with whom they claim an ethnic kinship. The basis of Tharu identity in contemporary times arises from the fact that the various groups identified by this *ethnonym* have historically shared a common subordinate status in the social structure of the Nepalese state, i.e. experience of discrimination and exploitation at the hands of hill castes to a varying degree since the malaria eradication program of the 1950s.

In Nepal, 59 ethnic groups have been categorized as indigenous nationalities (*aadivasi janajati*), not only as unique cultural groups but as minorities, having denied policy-making role in the country compared to majority groups.

Regarding the mutual influence of political structures and conceptions of society in Nepal, Lecomte-Tilouine (2009) states that, during 18th century, the construction of Nepalese state was accompanied by a governmental will or drive to simplify the social structures included within its territory through the inclusion of the entire population all placed into a limited number of culturally uniform '*jat*', literally species within a single hierarchical model. It was more than the process of Hinduization; strategies were also not all in favor of high caste; they were not based on high caste models. During the 1960s, the time of abrupt transformation in the nature of power and the official conception of Nepalese society, all particularism was erased by the law, i.e. 'cultural genocide' as termed by the activists.

The emergence of the issue of nationalities, on the one hand, is the result of indigenous activism, and on the other, it further accelerates the process of ethnic activism and indigenous movement. In Nepal, a class of 'new' intellectuals has recently emerged who are engaged in ethnic activism since the 1990s with discourses dealing with the local and ethnic pasts of Nepalese minorities, which is made up of Westernized sophisticated professionals engaged in donor agencies or abroad, and of the Sanskrit-educated intelligentsia, generally Brahman schoolmasters, civil servants, or political workers. Ethnicity is a strong mobilizing force in Nepal used by politicians and ethnic leaders, whether human right fighters or Maoists, to promote

universalistic idioms like the human rights discourse or the Marxist revolutionary discourse (Krauskopff, 2009). In December 2002, a national organization of Tamangs in Nepal organized International Tamang Conference was perhaps a historic moment in Tamang activism in Nepal when the term 'Tamsaling', referring to Tamang territory, was first employed before a large audience in a public meeting, including state authorities (Prime minister), regarding its historical past and desired future. The Interim Constitution of Nepal has envisioned Nepal's future structure to be federal as a way to end historical exclusions based on class, caste, and ethnicity, language, sex, culture, religion, and region by removing the previous unitary and centralized structure (Tamang, 2009).

During the 1990s, the government officially adopted minority activists' views. Conception of Nepalese society as formed by dual structure, in which, '*jat*' is opposed to '*janajati*' or '*indigenous peoples*', i.e. symbolic revolution. In the 1990 constitution, a distinction is made between *jat* (castes) and *jati* (tribes or ethnic groups). During the years immediately following 1990 the most striking socio-political reaction was the spread of ethnic activism and creating a new social grouping in Nepal. From 1990 onwards, *Janajati* came to mean oppressed minority and was translated into English as 'nationality' and was used to refer to the tribal groups. Then sixty-one nationalities were officially recognized by the state in 1995. This legal recognition of nationalities combined with virulent attacks on casteism, means that ethnicity is now promoted as a legitimate holistic framework with which to conceive society, with the difference that it is not (yet) systematic and all-inclusive. Two structuring logics govern Nepalese society in general – the lineage structure and the caste system include the farmer and give it a specific form. The lineage structure controls and regulates caste organization, a role similar to that played by caste (*jati*) councils in India. In Nepal, the local lineage used to guarantee the rules of caste within the village and semi-officially regulated infringements of the caste-related rules of commensality and alliance. In any case, it appears that organizations aiming to speak for, as well as to manage and control, the behavior of individuals belonging to the same '*jat*' or '*jati*' (tribe or caste) have multiplied in Nepal since the 1990s, whereas a similar process occurred in India at a much earlier date (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009).

Since 2006, two important contested issues are the extent of socio-political inclusion of diverse ethnic groups and forms of democratic structures for the 'new' Nepal, i.e. exclusion and inequalities among ethnic groups and the failure of democratization. Discourse on exclusion/inequality in the past attempted at development largely focused on class inequality for most of the time, i.e. development was seen as reducing poverty through modernization. However, inequality expanded, and the dominant group largely benefitted from the policies because even though couched in universal discourse, the policies

and institutions were influenced by dominant values, worldviews, and interests (e.g. *only Devanagari language in Public Service Commission examinations*). Dalits were facing caste-based discrimination and women were socially and legally discriminated against (Lawoti, 2010). Given the circumstances, the various political movements also embraced such ethnicity issues to a large extent. As Shakya (2010) states, Maoist did not bring ethnicity into Nepali politics, but it gave rise to the politicization of ethnic movements that added new dimensions to state-society relations. Nevertheless, ethnicity is not a new element in the way Nepali state and society have functioned over the past five centuries. In addition, Eudaily (2004) also indicates that the ‘present politics of the past’ refers to the conditions that have arisen in the recent politics of advanced liberal states with indigenous populations (such as US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia) where ‘the past’ is an issue or even at stake in contemporary struggles.

Ethnicity and Activism: A Case of Nepali Paharis

Paharis of Nepal are one of the least studied groups by ethnographers and historians; however, they have been mentioned in various texts so far. To begin with, 19th century descriptions of the native population of the Paharis as a group working with bamboo by Oldfield (1880 in Toffin, 2007) and another description of being linguistically closer to the Newari language according to Gierson (1909 in Toffin, 2007) indicate the long historical existence of Paharis around the outskirts of Kathmandu valley. The Paharis of Nepal are one of the “fifty-nine nationalities (HMG/N, 2002; NFDIN, 2003)”. Similarly, some oral histories indicate them to be originated during the unification period of Prithvi Narayan Shah. More importantly, though not exactly evidence associated with a specific historic era, the mythological account suggests the Pahari be a separate human category of the people of Nepal from the ancient period. In addition, Bennett and Parajuli’s (2008), caste ethnicity grouping categorizes Pahari as one of the ‘Disadvantaged’ groups within Hill Janajatis among Indigenous Nationalities (Adivasi/Janajati) of Nepal based on the list of 103 castes/ethnicity in the population census of 2001. Similarly, NEFIN’s ‘categorization of indigenous people based on development’ has put Pahari as one of the nineteen ‘Marginalized’ groups among the 59 listed nationalities of the country; other categories being – Advanced, Disadvantaged, High Marginalized and Endangered.

The term Pahari is an ethnonym applied to a number of linguistically and culturally similar and different endogamous groups occupying different parts of Nepal, particularly the middle hills of the central development region, mostly around the capital Kathmandu valley. As an ethnic category, they are among the small minorities in Nepal’s multi-ethnic population. Paharis throughout the country conceive of themselves as one ethnic or *jaat*

group; they believe themselves to be a particular kind of people, distinct from those who live around them. They also acknowledge that this consciousness is a new thing; they recall that in the not-too-distant past (before the establishment of their ethnic association), they did not think of themselves in this way. Although they are in interaction now, they formed local geographical groups that had little or no contact with one another, particularly with those far afield.

On the other hand, Pahari ethnicity, in terms of ethnic activism and movement, is recent phenomenon, which emerged by the influence of other bigger ethnic groups, only after the restoration of democracy in the country. Afterward, it resulted in the formal listing of Paharis as a nationality, having fulfilled the definitional criteria of the state i.e. recognition of the history-long existence of Paharis as a separate group. This process is further activated by establishing the Pahari association in the democratic socio-political context to conserve and develop Pahari ethnicity, culture, language, and social development. Pahari ethnicity can be subsumed under the rubric of social-historical as reflected with a similar expression such as the “contingent nature of ethnicity (Gunaratne, 1994:19)”, and “imagined (Anderson, 1983)” and “blurring and repositioning (Wimmer, 2008)” in various empirical cases other than Paharis. Pahari ethnicity is itself contingent upon the state and upon the relationships that Paharis have established with other neighboring groups, particularly the larger ones, long from history. The historical stigma attached to the Paharis made them to reposition themselves as belonging to Newar, but not of other groups and over time, distinctness from Newars was emphasized. It is how the Pahari ethnicity in Nepal is directed by the then socio-historical context of the country and recently, the political transformations have made the ethnic activist be openly active and Pahari ethnicity emphasizes the recognition of cultural, linguistic and territorial identity as well as inclusive developmental and general policies of the state.

Ethnicity and State Policies

The earliest mentioning of the Pahari as a group with an ethnonym as quoted by, Sigdel (2060 B.S.), “according to *laalmohar* given by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1827 B.S. provided as *mandalyain* to Siddha Bhagawant Nath,

Aage gusayike hamra muluk bhari ko jogi haru ko mandalyain chaharyu Majhi, Kumal, Danuwar, Daroi, Tharu, Pahari, Kusahari, Thami, Hayu, Sunuwar, Chepang, Jwalaha, Kushulya, Newanya yeti jaati ka ghara hi ek aana dastur dinu, saanjha bihana khana dinu (an order to made provision of two meals and some money to these listed caste/ethnic groups). (Sigdel, 2060 B.S.)

The Muluki Ain promulgated in 1854 organized the multi-ethnic population along with the model of the Hindu caste system which divided the population into five strata (i.

caste group of the 'wearers of the holy cord', ii. caste group of the 'non-enslavable alcohol drinkers, iii. caste group of 'enslavable alcohol drinkers, iv. impure but 'touchable' castes, v. untouchable castes), which had placed Paharis in this way – Bhotya – Chepang – Majhi – Danuwar – Hayu – Darai – Kumhal - Pahari (Hofer, 1979, p. 119). Therefore, the policies of the state of Nepal were the principal agent of reifying relations between human categories, which have attempted to reflect and represent the social structure of contemporary Nepali society. As Lecomte-Tilouine (2009) states that many texts from Prithvi Narayan Shah to Jung Bahadur Rana show that the strict rules relating to commensality and alliance were not the invention of 1854 legal code, but had existed previously.

Another dimension of state attempt toward the management of a diversity of Nepal has been described as the process of *Nepalization*. "The process of nation-building in Nepal has been called "Nepalization" by (Gaige, 1975, p. 216), who describes language as a major component of Nepalese nationalism, which, has been facilitated by the Nepal state's policy of cultural unification and development of modern education system but not without opposition from members of other language groups, particularly in the Tarai. The philosophy behind the process of Nepalization has been succinctly put:

it has become the aim of the government to integrate different ethnic groups towards a common goal of national development. Nepal aspires to achieve a common culture which could be the binding force, and attempts to create a socio-economic environment which could motivate everyone to achieve the national goals of development. (Pyakuryal, 1982, p. 70)

Nepal falls, therefore, into the first of the two sorts of state policy (integrative on the one hand, pluralistic on the other) that, according to Brass are followed by multi-ethnic states (Brass, 1991; Gunaratne, 1994).

Among the Paharis of Nepal, their dialects tend to be restricted to domestic contexts, though only in a few instances. Most of the Pahari members spoke Nepali at home and most of them suggested that Pahari speakers will gradually relinquish their language in favor of Nepali. It was commonly observed that many Paharis of Lalitpur can comprehend Newari language and around Sindhupalchok, they are quite familiar with Tamang language, as an influence of a bigger-sized population. Population statistics show that one fourth "3458 – 25.3% of 13615 CBS (2012)" of the total Pahari population can speak their mother tongue, who have been scattered around 45 villages out of 186 villages in 39 districts, out of which, more than half (59%) have been concentrated in Lalitpur district.

Over time, such structuring has resulted in the listing of Nepal's indigenous nationalities as having separate ethnic identities without hierarchization. Policies of social inclusion, reservations and non-discrimination are at work on the part of the Nepalese state. Therefore, the state's

role is vital in the dynamics of ethnicity of any group, so of the Paharis of Nepal. The time to time, occurring states attempt to define and structure various cultural communities and different human collectives/groups reflects the contemporary need of the people in everyday life in terms of inter-ethnic relation and life condition of the people (i.e. Hofer's term "ethno-sociology"). The concern for reconstruction, preservation and maintenance of language, culture and traditions is a recent phenomenon among the Paharis, along with the gradually forwarding process of democratization of the state in the multi-ethnic neighborhood of Nepali society.

Intra-group Politics

Politics is inherent in almost all human activities, as man is a political animal. Ethnicity itself has become one dimension of national politics in Nepal these days. Ethno-politics, identity politics, issues of social inclusion, and ethnicization have come to be common jargon in the political discourses of the country in recent days. Politics and Pahari of Nepal can also be viewed from various points of view, such as – first, the level and nature of ethnic activism or ethno-politics by the various ethnic groups and nationalities in relation to the state; second, access or inclusion of the members of a specific community in the political mainstream of the state; finally, the internal politics of the ethnic elite or the activist concerning the general members of the community.

The members of the Pahari community, like the general people of the country, have been divided into an attachment to various political parties and related wings. It is not uncommon as it is obvious among all the people of the country and other ethnic groups. Paharis of Nepal too are not an exception to this fact. Different Pahari members, both general people and the activist, are associated or affiliated or believe in one or the other political parties or political belief existing in the country, apart from the affiliation to own ethnic association as a part of ethno-politics or we may say just ethnicity as ethnicity itself has become more a political concern than any other nowadays. "Since the 1900s, the linked concepts of ethnicity and ethnic group have passed into everyday discourse. They have become central to the politics of group differentiation and advantage in the culturally diverse social democracies of Europe and North America. Ethnicity and related topics such as 'race,' 'nationalism,' and 'difference'—has become a rapidly expanding specialism (Jenkins, 2001)".

Gokul Pahari, Badikhel, a local young man and an entrepreneur of the bamboo-based cottage industry, is a member of Nepali Congress, Lalitpur District Committee. Similarly Amarbahadur Pahari from Badikhel VDC was chairman of the village committee during the panchayat period and Manbahadur Pahari from Chaubas held village committee members for several terms and Gaurishankar Pahari was general assembly representative in the Nepali

Congress party. Not all, but few, Paharis of a local people of a locality are actively participating in the national politics of the country. During the election campaign, the votes of Paharis, as a separate group, are also highly considered by the leaders, which are facilitated by the local Pahari activist. A quote regarding the voting behavior of Paharis is worth mentioning here;

.....we voted for the leader of the NCP (Maoist) in the first constituent assembly election and he won. This time we are supporting Nepali Congress and I must be there in the village for the election campaign to request our Pahari members for this work (Bhim Bahadur Pahari, Sindhupalchok).

In this way, Pahari activists seem to be switching voting behavior, as Bhim Bahadur Pahari, was affiliated to the Maoist party, though not an active political worker has changed his voting behavior in the last election. As he opined, public support for the previous winner party has changed for different reasons, and according to such public whim, they have changed their support.

After being listed as a nationality of Nepal, the political parties have also included the representation of Pahari community members. Mr. Sher Bahadur Pahari from Makwanpur was represented as a Constituent assembly member from the proportional representation of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) in the first constituent assembly. Some Pahari activists state that, in order to nominate him in the assembly, Paharis affiliated with different political parties, supported him as a member of their own community. Similarly, Nepali Congress nominated Gaurishankar Pahari from Badikhel and NCP (UML) nominated Rambahadur Pahari from Kabhrepalanchok in the second constituent assembly election, though they did not get the position later; and Dhana Pahari from Baitadi represented in the assembly from NCP (Maoist) in the second assembly. More clearly, the representation of Pahari was valued more than the representation of a political party. Though it is not always true that ethnic line cross-cut political line, ethnic representation was important for the Paharis as there have not been any single member in the parliament or constituent assembly so far. It is one dimension of Pahari politics.

At the local level, in a village with considerably larger size of the Pahari, in Chaubas, Kabhrepalanchok, Mr. Man Bahadur Pahari worked as a member of the then village *panchayat* for a long time. Though he complains about not receiving any upper-level post than merely the member, the presence of Paharis has been valued from *panchayat* period. Similarly, Mr. Badrinath Pahari, a resident of Badikhel was elected as a vice-chairperson in Badikhel VDC, representing Nepal Communist Party (UML) in the last local election. He mentioned that he is the only one so far to represent in the VDC from the Pahari community.

In the political arena, competition among and between Pahari candidates is uncommon. Public competition among them is not found to have happened in the Pahari villages

so far. However, the differences regarding the history and identity of Pahari, the formation and operation of the Pahari association has occurred frequently. In Badikhel, I observed some differences between the ideas regarding the Paharis between Kanchhakaji Pahari, Shankarman Pahari and Badrinath Pahari. They do not have a single voice regarding Pahari origin, history, and identity, as I have referred to many examples in these documents elsewhere. Obviously, when some argument lacks concrete evidence, various logical interpretations regarding an issue emerge. More clearly, different members have interpreted the mythological history and the content of the myths differently. It is another dimension of Pahari ethnic politics within the community.

The local political achievement of the Paharis in different parts of Nepal emerges from the formal social status they receive from some positions. Paharis have not yet reached such positions so far, except some. Political success and un-success among the Paharis in different locations is due as much if not more to the strength of each individual's connection in other *jaats*, that is, the ability to appeal beyond lines of caste or ethnicity.

Paharis, vary in their belief about the origin and history. In fact, the variation has been found to be based on the territorial settlement of the Pahari, i.e. Paharis of different geographical settlement do opine it differently. However, factions based on these stuff are not much significant; rather, there are differences regarding unequal representation in the ethnic association, particularly for the Paharis living outside the Kathmandu valley. First, most of the activists included in the central working committee were from around the valley.

Activism

The principal agents of ethnic identity formation are elites, and their activities are typically located in ethnic organizations of various kinds. There may be more than one elite group in any society, whose interest and philosophy may be at cross purposes; or elite may be divided on the question of what constitutes the essence of the identity it seeks to promote (Gunaratne, 1994). The Nepal Pahari Development Organization is the most important ethnic organization among the Paharis because it is the only organization that brings together Paharis from all the districts of Nepal, and because it is represented by few educated, professional and aware ethnic activist members of the Pahari community. Such members include educated professionals and position holder at bigger organizations, local entrepreneurs and farmer/traders, Kathmandu based students and job holders, school teachers, local community leaders, village development committee leaders, and CA members. These are the members of Pahari community whom I have been referring as ethnic activist and whom I met in person during the study.

Until recently, prior to the institutionalization of Nepal

Pahari Development Organization (NPDO), the Paharis of different localities did not think of themselves as all belonging to the same ethnic community or *jaat*. There was very little intercourse between Paharis from one district or locality and those of another, and in fact, there may be little knowledge among Paharis of other groups. A variety of factors motivated this initiative. One early motivation for the movement lay with the desire of some members to gain (or regain) some political recognition of the community, which they had forsaken when they had been stigmatized and scattered in different places. By 2000, the Pahari community set up an ethnic organization with major democratic values, such as – transparency, democratic decision-making process; equality of rights; target group participation. The organization has the vision to maintain Pahari identity at the national and international level with a mission to construct a prosperous society by awarding indigenous nationalities through empowerment and participatory process. The major objectives of the organization have been listed as follows – to conserve the culture, religion and language of Paharis; to emphasize educational achievement; to conduct programs to improve the economic condition of the deprived people; to ensure national ethnic solidarity among the Paharis; to promote public awareness. In addition, institutionalization has expanded from single umbrella organization toward more specialized associations such as Nepal Pahari Women Organization (2004), Nepal Pahari Student Organization (2006) various district branches of NPDO beginning from Kabhrepalanchok in 2008.

Given the context, Pahari ethnic activism can be seen as having gradual transformation in its understanding and manifestations by the activists/members themselves over time which is reflected in modified definition of the ethnonym “Pahari” itself in their initial and recently revised bylaw of the organization – originally, it was “*the ethnic group which includes Nepal’s indigenous nationalities as well as those living abroad adopting Pahari customs, traditions and culture*”; recently, it has been “*that community which is a Nepalese indigenous nationality having a separate language, culture and identity of their own*”. The most fundamental difference between then and now is increased emphasis on the concept of ‘identity’. Similarly, more emphasis has been given to a right-based approach for the members in recent amendments. Moreover, the notion of ‘the son of soil’ as a component element of the definitive criteria in the first bylaw of the Pahari association has been replaced by simply indigenous community. These are some revisionist construction in Pahari ethnicity.

Conclusion

The Paharis, as a whole, do not have the exact same language nor a similar culture, but this has not prevented them from conceiving of themselves as a group with a

common cultural, if not biological, identity. That is new, and it has significant implications. Why do ordinary Paharis find meaningful the claim made by their elites that they are, from the Mechi to the Mahakali, all one *jaat*? What issue or set of circumstances makes such an argument plausible and appealing? It can be straightforwardly confirmed that the single most important issue acting as a catalyst for the genesis of Pahari ethnicity has been the historical stigma and exclusion as well as the crisis of clear identification despite the self-ascription and ascription by other groups in terms of similarities and differences in the changing social-political context of the state which guided the multilevel process of making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries with preliminary boundary-making strategies of the actor in the given social field. This process has shaped the way Pahari ethnicity is formed and articulated.

Culture, language, and mythologies are the symbol of identity and the root factor in developing ethnic consciousness. The Pahari settlement Badikhel and other areas of the middle hills around the country's central development region, despite being close to the Kathmandu valley, could not effectively identify themselves in the national context, and last. However, by no means least, many of them abandoned even their surname/ethnonym or the fundamental marker of ethnic identity by substituting it by other terminology, representing an existing older bigger group or a new one. This experience is at the heart of Pahari ethnicity shared by almost Pahari communities in the hills of Nepal.

From the Pahari case emerges a picture in which conflicting discourses and patterns of practice and variation in linguistic features and mythology pose both problems and possibilities for actors. Culture does not operate as a static, homogenous force working on the actors but “in and through its varying relations with various actors” (Ortner, 1989, p. 14 in Fisher, 2001, p.14). The Pahari comprise actors culturally constructed in different historical eras and contexts interacting over time. As they forge their own lives under the circumstances, not of their choosing, they encounter and struggle with the constraints of their varying social, political, and material contexts. Paharis ethnic movement is, in fact, not an individual one, rather a part of a wider ethnic movement of the country.

The current Pahari ethnicity (recovery and continuance) dynamics is the contemporary manifestation of an ongoing socio-political process. Ethnicity is relational and thus dynamic, constantly changing, emerging over time through interaction with other groups and with the state. Pahari identity, the actual emergence or origin of which is not crystal clear yet, came to today’s form after the activity of the Nepal Pahari Development Organization. It is not that the organization created Pahari as such from somewhere, rather, a Pahari culture and ethnicity was there for a long, which was activated.

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Pradeep Archrya <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1430-2443> is Lecturer in Anthropology at CNAS, Tribhuvan University. He holds PhD from Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
Email: pradeepacharya@hotmail.com