

Chapter 2

Ethnic Awakening in South Asia: Drawing Analogy with Nepal

The modern world entered into a new dynamics of conflict with the end of World War II where nationalism grounded on ethnicity and religion became most powerful social and political forces. It remains one of the major factors that shape relations between nation states. It has also proliferated in different parts of the world as a movement of protest and self-assertion against the existing distribution of power within and between states. With the introduction of new dynamics of relationship, it also constitutes the most dangerous and precarious threat to the modern world given the historical context as discussed below.

Talking about the world history shaped around discourses of ethnicity, the two great cold war powers namely Soviet Union and Britain holds prime position in the discussion. USSR bears the most pronounced history preceding a degeneration of a country so large in its construct and powerful in its ideology while England is an interesting example with its successful absorption of ethnic manifestations into the “grand” British nationalism. In the Soviet case, the fault lines of its disintegration lay in its system. The foundations of the multi-ethnic, multi-national and multi-layered Soviet federal union were not self-professed idea of the people, but was built on shaky grounds of reconstructed history and sustained by ruthless repression. Although there were nationalist movements which were isolated and sometimes repressed by force it was the growing nationalism, utilised by the political elites for in their personal interest that ultimately led to disintegration of the Soviet Union (Manuel, 2010). The ethnic awakening triggered by the post-cold war politics defined by overwhelming influence of West, the rise of new powers and the loopholes embedded in its own foundation like the provision for secession resulted in its fragmentation. The ethnic awakening in England is an interesting example in contrast to that of USSR. Nineteenth century was not just the era of industrial revolution but also the era of the redefinition of the idea of nationalism in Europe.

With the fall of the colonial empire, British economy was in decline and the political institutions were proven ineffective. Britain was undergoing a transformation in the social and political landscape owing to the exodus of migrants being facilitated by industrialisation (White, 2004). These migrants were argued to have

created problems through introduction of an alien culture. Further, the rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism also added fear of disintegration. The traditional basis on which the British Empire was constructed, which in turn powered the British nationalism, was under potential threat. A strong leadership identified the challenges to the integrity of the nation and also addressed them to retain the declining sense of British nationalism or rather used it to construct the palatial British nationalism that was strong and stable (Chakrabarty, 2003). Its democratic ideals and robust leadership held the eroding national identity, leading to the survival of the declining state. Therefore, even the once most powerful colonial powers in the world were not exempted from the post-colonial uprisings of nation-state. The colonial rule that was instituted as an expression of cultural supremacy of the western world over the eastern also had a tough trajectory to retain its own identity with the fall of the colonial rule and introduction of era of industrialisation followed by globalisation.

It is the development of late nineteenth century when powerful ethnic nationalism was being encouraged to serve various national and imperial policies. In this case, the aspect that needs discerning is that the origin of conflict was not instinctual but a social process to be analysed (Bartos & Wehr, 2002). The concept of ethnic conflicts, according to this argument, was devised and used to maintain power and authority over territories. Regional politics has become one of the most prominent phenomena after twentieth century and twenty-first century has seen some of the most violent upheavals along this line. The growth of conflicts around the globe is therefore implicitly related to the economic growth and paradigm shift in the geo-politics.

After the Cold War, a new layer of complexity with regard to insurgency conflicts has been witnessed in the South Asian context. While nations were constituted into states in Europe, in post-colonial societies the problem is inverted: to transform states into nations in South Asia (Alavi, 1989). Indeed, South Asia has been an example of region plagued by violence and a depressing number of human rights violations in the past decades. Anecdotes of shocking brutalities and atrocities, caused by a lethal concoction of ethnic, sectarian or nationalistic antagonisms, have now garnered the attention of the international community. The Indian subcontinent has remained under turmoil ever since its independence. Despite the robust growth in the economy, the level of upsurges in conflict in terms of religion and cultural diversity has become unprecedented. Regardless of the economic placement, no country has been devoid of ethnic turmoil in the case of South Asia (Johnson, 2005).

All nation states in South Asia are diverse regions under central rule, which were essentially strategies designed in the colonial period. Ethnic conflict erupted in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka after the initial phase of optimism that characterised nation-making in the 1950s, and was followed by outbreaks of sectarian violence and demands for self-determination. The inability to subsume alternative identities based on language and religion within the framework of all embracing secular states also largely complicated the situation. The historical baggage intact, the contemporary ethnic and communal violence in South Asia is also the product of interests

rooted in present day representative democracy, mass politics, the uneven social and economic development of diverse groups and the great power of the media for mobilisation of large crowds. For example, Indian democratic institutions coexist with ethno-nationalist conflict and riots, especially during elections, when political parties seek to split the vote bank using issues revolving around caste, community, religion and ethnicity (Kasturi, 1998). In addition, China, which is the world's largest economy and also one of the most powerful nations, is challenged by ethnic turmoil escalating within its territory. Therefore, states over a period of time have constructed a hegemonic order and hence counter hegemony was inevitable of which the contemporary society is an example. As the capability of resistance among the groups flourishes, counter-hegemonies develop as a result of "contradictory consciousness" (Lears, 1985). People resisted this hegemony and consequently ideas of othering from a dominant community came into picture. The demands for autonomy based on ethnicity/culture, religion has emerged from these orders of hegemony. The Asian context and the countries where surge of cultural conflict has been marked have a new phenomenon unfolding altogether. The systems are changing to accommodate new systems that accentuate the popular demand for political devolution. This pattern has to be understood and acknowledged. Hence, the process of hegemony and counter hegemony is also directed towards establishing a new order of power relation. The following section discusses dynamics of ethnic conflict in South Asian states of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and also includes discussion on ethnic unrest in China.

India

The politics of nationalities is a rather complex phenomenon in India. With vast population and diversity within this informed by the rigid caste-system, it is one of the most dynamic countries to explore from the perspective of identity politics. Additionally, the politics of religion also plays a crucial role in defining the identity politics, which makes it even more complex. India faces greater challenge with some areas also demanding secession from the Indian territory due to its multi-ethnic construct. Although India has made effort to resolve these conflicts, most of the dissensions remain intact.

Powered by the historical ethnic difference with the main land India coupled with the state's conscious effort of eschewed power-sharing has led to ethnic violence in the North-East and other parts of India. Linguistic provinces were promised by the Congress even before India got its independence. On one hand, this worked as the binding force for garnering support against the British imperialism and creation of an independent India. On the other, it contained the already existing separatist sentiments in various provinces. The Indian ethnic disputes have not been linear but have settled and been re-invented with time. It is also interesting to observe that in India, identities shift their basis, readily and often, from one identity to another, and then another, in response to changing circumstances. 'As a result,

tensions do not become concentrated along a single fault-line in society, and do not produce prolonged and intractable conflict'—ethnic or otherwise—that might dismantle the democratic institutions (Manor, 1944). There are multiple nationalities that are gradually and continually emerging. Therefore, this makes India a nation-in-the-making. India's diverse and multiple nationalities with linguistic and cultural differences are still emerging, none of which form a nation as a whole, but are in the process of the making of the Indian nation, which is neutralised by the federal structure. The ethnic awakening that was overshadowed by the pan-Indian identity during the freedom struggle against the common enemy—the British manifested itself in a magnificent manner after independence. This awakening manifested itself as a struggle for recognition of their vernaculars and formation of unilingual provinces separating themselves from the bigger nationalities (Nag, 1993). Through the 1956, reorganisation of states on language basis was one major step to accommodate the different identities into the political mainstream of the country. However, even after the state reorganisation and the creation of many new states, expressions of multi-layered identities took the form of nativist, even secessionist movements. Such politics of identity has given rise to new regional movements, parties and forces.

The most prominent were the Punjab and the Andhra movement which were partially addressed. The rest were strategically subdued (Nag, 1993). The ethnic movements and armed insurgencies came into existence in the north-eastern region immediately after independence. As this territory remained unaffected by the culture of mainland India, it had a closer identification with the Southeast Asian culture rather than with India. The armed insurrection in this region was the result of unequal power-sharing by the state. However, as power-sharing was brought into picture later, the insurgencies subsided. However, the threat of armed insurgency with separatist tendencies continues to prevail (Bhaumik, 2007).

Therefore, despite the efforts made to address the needs of the diversity, the power dynamics, inherent in the construction of the state, has been evident in the case of India. Although concealed, the underpinning idea is to engineer a pan-Indian identity in the greater interest of pursuit of power at the global level to which India is yet to succeed.

Pakistan

Pakistan's current turmoil can be better understood in its historical substructures. Pakistan was a country formed on theological lines of Islamic unity and centralised polity with the notion that a strong unitary state was needed to face India (Jaffrelot, 2013; Buzan, 1983). Therefore, centralisation remained the core characteristic of the Pakistani state. A monolithic identity constituting of one language, i.e. Urdu and one religion, i.e. Islam was imposed on the Pakistani citizens, undermining the vast cultural and linguistic diversity that the country hosted. The major reason behind

this was the initial conceptualisation of the state by Jinnah¹ and the Muslim League, which was dominated by Urdu-speaking elite group, Muhajirs, who were interested in protecting their interests and dominant status. Therefore, as the military was deemed an important organ in pursuit of a strong state to face threat of being subsumed by India, this resulted in the civil-military establishment at the very inception of the country and still defines the Pakistani state, politics as well as society (Jaffrelot, 2013). Pakistan's excessive focus on centralisation resulted into the secession of East Pakistan within 25 years of its emergence. This was largely due to over-militarised approach of West Pakistan that deprived East Pakistan of political and economic autonomy (Paul, 2013).

In addition to promoting Urdu as national language and language of instruction in schools, a language largely alien to the Bengali citizens residing in Pakistan, the state rejected all demands of federal statehood by East Pakistan.² Instead, the master plan of the Pakistani president, general Ayub Khan was the merging of Eastern and Western Provinces into a single unit, which was known as "One-Unit Scheme". This proved particularly offensive to the Bengalis who were perceived by the state as weak and relegated them, to the status of second-class citizens. Importantly, their demand for an autonomous province was sabotaged by this move. Further, the skewed policies vis-à-vis reservation and participation further strained the situation. Approximately 40 % reservation for West Pakistan was divided among Punjabis and Bahawalpur while 20 % was for merit alone and the remaining 40 % for East Pakistan. The Bengalis did not benefit from this as it ensured over-representation of the Punjabis through reservations as well as provincial demarcation. These repressive measures culminated into secession of East Pakistan. The military intervention from India arguing that violence and refugee flow into West Bengal must stop provided impetus to the East Pakistan secession movement (Jaffrelot, 2013). However, it was mostly its internal failures that characterises Pakistan as a failed state. Pakistan's elites have pursued hyper securitisation of the state at the cost of its economic and political reforms. Its dependence on foreign aid from China and United States of America (USA) that come with strategic interest has made Pakistan's development lethargic and its political elites can easily abstain from taking pain of economic and social reforms required for development. The process of state building largely relies on states ability to invest in its people and loyalty, thus, comes from the benefits that the citizens receive from the state (Paul, 2013). Pakistan has largely failed to ensure this benefit to its people, and consequently failing to achieve national cohesion. Although Pakistan has embarked on a democratic model, it is still primarily a product of military-elite nexus that has chiefly failed to consolidate democracy that depends on participation from the people in power-sharing and removal of social inequalities (Talbot, 2016). These aspects define Pakistan to a large extent and the ethnic turmoil as well as separatist

¹Mohammad Ali Jinnah was the founder of Pakistan. He was also the first governor general of Pakistan.

²Bangladesh.

movement that pervade Pakistan today, such as the Pashtun and the Balochistan movements are the result of these.

Nepal exhibits crucial similarities with Pakistan. Nepal, like Pakistan, was conceptualised as a unitary state and was largely designed to protect the interest of the Shah dynasty. Ever since its unification, its focus was to develop as a sanctuary for Hindus as enunciated by King Prithvi Narayan Shah who termed it as “Asali Hindustan”. Later it was endorsed as the only Hindu nation in the world. This was similar to Pakistan that has been argued to have been a country designed as protectorate of Muslims who were under threat in India. Further, like the military-elite nexus in Pakistan, the King-military nexus defined Nepali state for significant part of history. As Nepal was a unified Kingdom, the core focus was on maintaining the centralised character of the state. The Nepali state imposed a monolithic identity based on a single language, i.e. Nepali language and single state religion, i.e. Hindu on its people. Nepali was later declared the national language and gradually promoted as compulsory medium of instruction in education. The national dress was based on dressing pattern of Pahadi community. This strategy was clearly designed to protect the interest of the ruling minority who feared the loss of their status quo, much like the Muhajirs of Pakistan. This generated much discontent among the Madhesi community who advocated for Hindi to be declared connecting language and ensure their proportional representation in the state and civil services. Any pursuit for democracy was subsequently sabotaged by multiple coups staged by the King-military-elite nexus (Bhandari, 2014). The opening of Nepal to foreign aid in 1950s, which is also regarded as entry of Nepal into the modern era, crippled the basis of economic foundation. The easy money that started flowing into Nepal in the form of financial aid also contributed in states back-tracking from investment to bring about economic and social reform in the country as evident in Pakistan.

The dynamics have become much interesting with the advent of democracy in Nepal after 2008, as military-civilian establishment is becoming apparent. The state has largely failed to ensure democratic consolidation through equitable distribution of power and participation of people in the state structure. The state has often resorted to using military repression in order to stifle any attempt to resist state actions, especially in the case of the Madhesi movement for federalism and greater autonomy. The federal design of Nepal has largely reflected similarities with the one-unit scheme pursued by Pakistan as almost all except eight districts of Madhes (Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Bara, Parsa and Rautahat) has been merged with Pahad districts causing much discontent and violent resistance from the people in plains leading to further attempts of suppression by the state (HRW, 2015; Bhattarai, 2015). Army has been instrumental in protecting the ruling elite in Nepal and it has the potential to prove to be a serious threat to the already fragile democracy, especially when the army elite nexus has already started to play against the interest of people. The state resistance on the other hand has also given rise to separatist group in the plains (Caprara, 2015; Jha, 2016). This has led to beleaguered democratic transition and increasing separatist sentiments to which Nepali state appears oblivious. Therefore, Nepal exhibits much in common with Pakistan.

If timely democratic measures are not taken to deal with the problems much cautiously, Nepal is soon to fall in an endless cycle of instability much like Pakistan.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka initially emerged as a strong post-colonial country with strong leadership and a deeper political understanding. However, a single fault-line has led the country to be embroiled in long-term ethnic turmoil the threat of which prevails even today. Sri Lanka's political conflict, which developed since the 1970s, had two major facets. One was the Tamil separatist movement, which is widely known to be between the majority Sinhala and the minority Tamil communities. The other is the militant movement of the Sinhala community, which erupted twice into armed struggles with the aim of changing the existing political regime. However, the fact that has remained long ignored is that this conflict was not inherently ethnic; it was the result of contradictions of the development process, resulting from the national development policy in Sri Lanka. Inconsistent development strategies created a fertile ground for the emergence of its twin political conflict and the consequent civil war. The Tamil separatist movement, however, gained momentum and continuity by exploiting the ethnic identity (Abeyratne, n.d.). This displays coherence with the Nepali context where the resulting upsurge is a result of uneven distribution of resources and unequal development opportunities.

Additionally, in Sri Lanka strong passions associated with language and religion appear to be reflections of the need of many individuals to preserve and defend the part of personal identity that is derived from the social identity of the ethnic community. Tamil grievances were centred around the 1956 declaration that Sinhalese was to be the only official language of the nation. This engendered fear of discrimination in public employment and difficulties in dealing with government agencies which later translated into reality. Further, the government sponsored migration of persons, many of whom were Sinhalese, to sparsely populated areas of the north-central and north-eastern dry zone, which were regarded by Tamils as their ancestral homelands came to be seen as encroachment by Tamils. Along with these specific grievances, there was a subjective sense of Tamils being relegated to the status of second-class citizens and quasi-alien in their own country (Kearney, 1985). Therefore, conflict in Sri Lanka also represents the persistent and pervasive nature of inter-group competition among disparate interests and values that underlies power dynamics. In general, conflict is most popularly described as a struggle for values and claims to scarce status, power and resources (Jeong, 2008). The feeling of disenfranchisement in both Nepal and Sri Lanka has been the same where language and ancestral territory has been the main concern of the people. This is followed by the requirement of job security which gets thwarted when the basic medium of communication, i.e. language spoken by the community, is disregarded. Madhesi in Nepal were alienated in their own territory through systematic

arrangement for influx of hill people and casted off their right to language by imposing Nepali as national language which was a direct threat to their identity.

Like in Sri Lanka, the state led migration of the ethnic Pahadiya into Madhes rendered the population in Madhes landless and alienated in their own land while the single language policy left majority of the population out of opportunities in state services. Homogenisation projects in ethnically diverse country often tend to lead to violent backlash. In Sri Lanka, the Tamil and Sinhala movement were two different groups with two different agendas: the Tamils wanted their own state and the Sinhalas were vying for state power (Badarage, 2009). Interestingly, in Nepal, the Madhes movement does not call for separatism but demands an autonomous province within the country. The struggle for democracy in which all three blocks—the Maoists, the national parties and the Madhesi—joined hands was based on an understanding that each party will be given a fair share in power-sharing and that ethnic demands will be fulfilled. The success of Maoist movement in Nepal, thus, can be attributed to their ability to utilise ethnic sentiments of the larger ethnic groups, such as Madhesi and Magars, who also have influence over large territories. The pre-existing tension between the state and Madhesi community was utilised during this upsurge (Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka & Whelpton, 1997). However, like in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, Nepali state has failed to meet the aspirations of the people to be identified as equal citizens with their unique identities. In such context, identity becomes a means to condemn a particular power relation. Historical awareness of our present circumstance and the reality that we are dealing with shapes our conceptualisation of power relations (Gramsci, 2009). Ethnic groups therefore claim an identity which is different than those of others. When this need becomes profound, a struggle emerges which replaces the initial order of power and transforms power relations. Here, the source of power becomes ethnic relations. This is what has largely unfolded in the South Asian countries discussed above.

China

The modern-day ethnic waves have been so strong that not even one of the strongest economies of Asia remains immune to its impacts. A country that was constructed on foundations of massive cultural revolution that rendered thousands dead and a generation deprived of formal education (Szczepanski, 2014) could not desist from ethnic upheaval.

China has been an inherently multi-ethnic country. At the inception of modern China, the most daunting task for the leaders was to design mechanisms for governing multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious communities. This resulted in the identification of the 56 ethnic groups based on a common language, and territory that still remains. With the rise of Han ethnic community in China, the ethnic contestation has grown stronger. The Han community was a conscious creation of leaders like Sun Yet Sen to bring all the ethnic minorities under the umbrella of single identity with defining five ethnic communities—Manchu, Mongolian,

Tibetan and Hui—centred on Han. The Han has therefore emerged as a doctrine rather than an ethnic community. This doctrine was used by the communists even after the overthrow of republic as a tool for liberating their minorities that they considered primitive. The strategic repression of religious and traditional rights of the minorities has been a means of preventing any extremist ethnic uprising in China and subsuming the diversity under a single rubric. The major challenge for China with regard to its nationalism has also been its relation with its neighbouring countries. There is the commonly held notion that ethnic homogenisation will make the country's nationalism strong. On the other hand, minorities can be used to extend culture beyond the nations' border for attaining stability in these regions (Rawson, 2009). However, carving a middle path into both preserving national integrity and cultural exchange across the border for stability has been a major challenge.

Although the Chinese government has accommodated its ethnic minorities in the mainstream, the inherent loopholes are evident. The important examples of this have been the Uyghur, who are the ethnic Muslims in Xinjiang, and the Tibetan clash with the Chinese government. China has utilised multiple tools and techniques for repressing identity conflict like prosecution of protestors but the uprisings are becoming increasingly rife and intense. The uprising of the Uyghur Muslims and multiple Tibetan monks resorting to self-immolations as means of protest has been alarming examples of ethnic tensions burgeoning in China. The Uyghurs have been protesting for more than half a century primarily for more autonomy but also against the Han colonisation, which controls the local economy. The Chinese government has curbed all religious rights of the Uyghurs. The unprecedented attempts by the Chinese government to repress the Uyghur protest have increased over the years. The year 2013 witnessed hundreds of death related to the religious and ethnic uprising. The state has adopted lethal measures like killing the protestors and framing the unrest as an act of terror in order to suppress the Uyghur's uprising (Szadziwski, 2014). The sporadic riots between the labourers and the Han majority, who control the economy of China, also engenders fear of transforming into ethnic violence.

The most important uprising in China vis-à-vis this work is the Tibet uprising. The major contention is the sovereignty of Tibet. Tibetans claim that they were an independent kingdom while China asserts its historical claim over Tibet. It is also argued that the claims which are said to have prevailed for centuries are in reality recent constructions. It was in 1949 that the Chinese troops marched into Tibet in the name of liberating Tibet and used extreme violence like torture and execution to gain control over it. Steps taken such as replacing Dalai Lama with a communist alternative and encouraging migration of Han into the territory are also indicators of the Chinese effort towards gaining control over the region (Sperling, 2004). The major resentment remains against the Chinese oppression against freedom of culture, expression and worship. The cases of self-immolation by the Tibetan monks and others are also on the rise, with eight recorded cases in 2011 alone. Although suicide campaigning is morally problematic for Buddhist monks, they are compelled to take this path to relinquish their identity (Douglas, 2011).

The case of Tibet and China conforms to the idea of a fear of absorption into a larger culture. While Tibet is struggling against the Chinese state to preserve their distinct identity and values which they assert is different to that of mainstream Chinese, for China, keeping control over Tibet on one hand offers the protection of the Himalayan frontiers and on the other, serves as an important trade passage to South Asia. The caution that China needs to maintain with Nepal is also vis-à-vis Tibet, as any ethnic turmoil in Nepal can trigger problems in Tibet. With thousands of Tibetan refugees making Nepal ground for seeking refuge, the threat becomes even more palpable³ (Kumar, 2011). These dynamics have made Nepal also a breeding ground for ethnic turmoil across Asia. In this regard, the Chinese centres proliferating in the plains amidst growth of separatist movement needs a very cautious approach by the Nepali state to prevent it from becoming a battlefield in the long-run. It is apparent that ethnic uprising in this block is not confined within a territory but interconnected across the borderlands whereby turmoil in one part can affect another easily as well as spill over into the neighbouring territories.

It is important to note here that Tibet, being an important geo-political territory, there are multiple dynamics at work to capitalise on the current situation of Tibet which can impact the whole South Asian region adversely. The recent protests of Tibetans against the Chinese imperialism are also based in India given that Dalai Lama, who escaped to India in 1959, is still in exile there (BBC, 2011). Serving sanctuary to Dalai Lama, India has become an important stakeholder and location for Tibetan protests. The over-lapping identities and the unbalanced geo-political environment characterised by competition for power becomes one of the major sources feeding into the turmoil, posing timeless insecurity in the region.

Hence, conflict has been an inherent characteristic of the human society. More precisely, ethnic conflict has proved endemic to the South Asian subcontinent. South Asia's major conflicts in the last 25 years have been ethnic conflicts or communal violence that have often crossed territorial borders and become externalised. Ethno-nationalist movements have not only created serious security problems internal to states, but have very often spilled over into bordering states, thereby creating major inter-state conflicts (Chatterjee, 2005). The uneasy existence of varied cultures, religion and language paves a way to politicise culture to acquire ones share in power. In all the cases, groups, large or small, have resisted the attempted monolithic constructions of nationhood by the state. This was mainly because of their attachment to subjective cultural heritage, symbols, memories, myths, linguistic practices, faith, territorial identity and their feeling of distinctiveness through deliberate use of selective cultural markers. Therefore, conflict represents the persistent and pervasive nature of inter-group and international competition among disparate interests and values that underlies power dynamics. In general, conflict is most popularly described as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources" (Jeong, 2008). These aspects of culture have mobilised identities to contradict with the state and become powerful in themselves.

³There are about 10,000 Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

This helps them stand against the state and also aids in bringing about change in the political order.

Some studies analyse conflict between ethnic groups under conditions of state failure, thus making the absence of the state the very core of the causal argument. Others assume that the state is ethnically neutral and try to relate ethno-demographic diversity measures, such as fractionalisation and polarisation, to civil war. In contrast to these approaches, is the view of the state as an institution that is captured, to various degrees, by representatives of particular ethnic communities and thus conceives of ethnic wars as the result of competing ethno-nationalist claims to state power (Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010). In modern nation states, rulers are no longer legitimised by the principles of dynastic succession, divine intervention, or civilisational progress. State leaders are expected to care for their own, ethnically defined people. Conflict with the government is more likely to erupt when: (1) representatives of an ethnic group are excluded from state power, especially if they experienced a loss of power in the recent past, (2) they have higher mobilisation capacity and (3) if they have experienced conflict in the past. In view of these findings, we conclude that ethno-nationalist struggles over access to state power are an important part of the dynamics leading to the outbreak of civil wars (Cederman et al., 2010).

The case of Nepal is not very different. A major section of the Nepali population has been kept outside the political mainstream and deprived of equal economic opportunities. Therefore, ethnic struggle in Nepal is induced by the disenfranchisement that this section, which forms the majority today, has faced. Particularly, the Madhesi community, which was never accepted as equal citizens, has now emerged as one of the most powerful interlocutors of ethnic politics in Nepal. Ethnicity has become politicised in cases where the state is the main source for the allocation of social resources (Pfaff-Czarnecka, Rajasingham-senanayake, Nandy, & Gomez, 1999). Following this, the argument that the deep rooted economic inequality and uneven distribution of resources as one of the major causes of ethnic unrest cannot be denied in case of Nepal. The onus lies on the over-centralised Kathmandu polity for its sheer ignorance of the population located outside vicinity of the Valley.

In Nepal, the Madhesi–Pahadi conflict therefore arose from the rigid governing norms not willing to be adjusted to new demands and expectations. Such inflexibility in turn bred resentment which became the basis for the mobilisation of groups that are dissatisfied with the status quo. Conflict emerges from inequitable social and economic relations which are found in the behavioural manifestations of the protestors. Parties to conflict make attempts to prevent each other from achieving desired objectives, in part, owing to perceptions of divergent interests. Tensions essentially emerge due to the pursuit of different outcomes or disagreement on the means to attain the same end. Differences in perceived interests, values, and needs are perhaps the most basic elements in the motivations behind social conflict. Inter-group conflict often represents different ways of life and ideologies with implications for incongruent views about relationships with others (Jeong, 2008).

When defining ethnic conflict in particular, these occur around contentions regarding possession of resources, land and economic opportunities. A coalition of those who can wrest control over these assets is required. The most effective way of having control of these assets is through the coalition of a particular group which can be differentiated easily from those who need to be excluded from the government jobs and land titles as this infiltrates the process to defeat the coalition purpose. Hence, to avoid this, a mechanism for successful discrimination against the group of non-members of the coalition is required. This is very effectively achieved through caste and ethnic divisions (Caselli & Coleman II, 2006). This process of division sets the origin of ethnic conflicts.

In Nepal, the inequalities were deep rooted in the governance structure. Along with the lack of acknowledgement to those marginalised culturally, socially and economically, the land appropriation project was the most detrimental. This rendered the rural population, especially the Madhesi, landless in their own habitat. Land has been the key instrument used to dominate and suppress the Madhesi and the other marginalised groups like Adivasi Janajati and Dalits. The Gorkha rulers confiscated the *kipat* (communal) lands from indigenous people and converted them into *raikar* (state-owned) so that the state could levy taxes on them to support ruling classes and military expenditure. The state also granted confiscated lands to non-local settlers under various forms of *birta*,⁴ *jagir*⁵ and *rakam*⁶ tenure. Since land and forest were the main sources of socio-economic life of the indigenous people, new land grant policy undermined the local autonomy of indigenous communities. The creation of national parks in the 1970s displaced many indigenous people and Madhesi from their ancestral lands and territories without a guaranteed option of livelihood. The customary rights of indigenous peoples over their land, forest and water resources were confiscated by the state. Planned hill to Tarai migration has resulted in further impoverishment of the indigenous and Madhesi people in the Tarai. The land reform programme converted the Tharu and Madhesi from land owning communities to *Kamaiyas* (bonded labourers) in western Tarai. The community forest programmes of the government forced the people to abandon animal husbandry and seek foreign employment as labourers in different parts of India (Gurung, 2009).

Further, the development plans promising inclusion never materialised into reality for the Madhesi population. The government's 5-year plan since 1992 had tried to address the needs and demands of other indigenous nationalities. The eighth five-year plan (1992–1997) stated that programmes targeting the Janajatis would be

⁴*Birta* receivers were usually from so-called higher caste and members of royal family.

⁵*Jagir* land grants were made to civil and military personnel for their services and loyalty to the state in lieu of their emoluments.

⁶It was *raikar* land for which the cultivators were required to pay taxes to the state and provide *corvee* (unpaid) labour, referred to as *hulak*, *jhara*, *beth* and *bethi*, to construct palaces, temples, bridges, roads, irrigation channels, transport military supplies and other materials, reclaim wastelands, and process and supply forest products.

carried out while the ninth plan (1997–2002) included a chapter entitled “Adibasis and Janajatis in development programs”. Similarly, the tenth plan (2002–2007) also devoted an entire chapter to ethnic issues such as promoting ethnic languages and ending poverty. Although these were seen as positive steps taken by the government towards recognising ethnic issues (Hagen, 2007), these plans never seemed to have been given due importance to Tarai in particular, unlike Adivasi Janajatis. The development initiatives in Tarai have been bleak. For instance, the Postal Highway (*Hulaki sadak*), the oldest highway which connects the Tarai from Mechi to Mahakali, still remains to be in a dilapidated condition causing much unease in commutation for individuals residing there (Onlinekhabar, 2015). As one of the Madhesi advocate pointed out, “the development initiatives have never been equal for the Tarai. Also the budget allocation for the Tarai region remains comparatively lesser than the Pahad. The Hulaki highway can be taken as an example to exhibit the plight of development in Tarai”. Due to the lack of specific development initiatives specifically targeting “backward” groups and rural Nepal, the largest share of the fruits of development and rapidly expanding educational opportunities and rewards have gone to those groups who were already well-connected and had long established traditions of literacy and academic study, namely, Bahuns, and Chhetris of hills, and some (principally high-caste) Newars (Gellner, 2009). This has led to rural poverty and inability of certain community or geographical area to participate in socio-economic and political development despite living in the same country. In contrast, political and social agencies that were supposed to ensure the rights and protection of rural people also proved to be inefficient as they did not have adequate representation of the people from the marginalised area. Their political system, which was essentially top-down in its approach, failed to address the struggle people from the rural area faced especially in maintaining culture and livelihoods (Karki & Seddon, 2008). This has served as the basis of the ongoing Madhesi movement for rights, recognition and representation in Nepal.

In all the countries discussed above, the factor motivating ethnic turmoil in one way or the other is interplay between the desire for recognition and acquiring power. Language and culture have become two most important tools for monopolising power. The powerful sections have used culture as a doctrine to maintain their supremacy. The common pattern that can be seen throughout is imposition of one language, encroachment of territories and resources by those in power. To gain recognition and establish their own culture as superior, the community at advantage has used repressive measures to suppress others. Therefore, various kinds of struggles finally lead to questioning the status and identity of an individual or a community.—“Who are we?” becomes the question from which the struggle emanates and takes shape. The quest for individuality and to be able to assert difference from others at various levels—national and international, culture and religion—though not be confined to one’s own identity, becomes important. The following chapter essentially seeks to answer this question vis-à-vis Madhesi identity.

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