

## TRAJECTORIES OF ETHNIC MOVEMENTS: NEPAL IN TRANSITION

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### ABSTRACT

*The ethnic movement is a part of ethnic identity construction process that takes different trajectories to be identified as separate groups in Nepal. Ethnic identity issues are seen as a rights claiming mechanism that helps ethnic groups to identify themselves as marginalized, disadvantaged and deprived from access to resources. In the process of claiming equal participation, representation and equal access to resources, ethnic groups follow different trajectories as their movement to be heard by the state. Ethnic movement occurred in different parts of the world adopting different trajectories to be visible with their demand to be identified for enjoying their fundamental rights. This article, thus, helps to understand trajectories of ethnic movements occurring in different parts of the world including Nepal. The argument made in this article builds upon a review chapter of my doctoral dissertation.*

**KEYWORDS:** Ethnic movement, trajectory, ethnic identity, protest ideology

### INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity and ethnic identity construction process in Nepal came to light after the 1990 peoples' movement. This movement helped many ethnic groups to establish their social organization as a common platform for collective movement. In this process of collective movement, political rights became major agenda of their movement for their equal participation, representation, and access over state resources. The issue of group identity became vital for them to be distinct as a separate group from other caste and ethnic groups. Each ethnic group began to use cultural codes (Shestakov, 2008) to be identified as a different group from others. Many cultural codes have been invented and reinvented (Hobsbawm, 1983) and revived from the past for their cultural distinctiveness to be visible in political arena. Ethnic activists affiliated with ethnic social organizations were guided by primordial thoughts that carried away the philosophy of having distinctive characteristics, focusing on cultural codes to move ahead to demand their ethnic rights from the government. The primordialist perspectives attracted many individuals within a group for collective strengths. The collective strengths within groups became stronger when they were aligned with other ethnic groups with their shared feelings. The shared feelings of being on the same boat to sail towards the rights helped to bring awareness among the people affiliated with these organizations. Confidence building, attaining new ideas, and coming together for the strong collective strengths

also brought opportunities for some with new insights for the researchers and academicians to analyze the situational works under the instrumentalist perspectives besides primordialist and constructivist discourses.

The positive part of ethnic movements in Nepal brought affirmative action not only in the favor of all disadvantaged groups but also for the majority caste groups with distinct percentage of reservation, an exceptional case occurred in Nepal. Political ideology plays an important role for ethnic movements in Nepal (Magar, 2015). Those individuals affiliated with ethnic organizations have given their services voluntarily, maintained their image as an ethnic leader, and ultimately targeted for their higher positional attainment within the ethnic organization that are able to reach the higher position if he or she is actively involved in any one of the political parties and referred to him or her for a party candidacy. Few ethnic leaders were able to achieve up to the members of Constituent Assembly and later nominated into the proportional representative reservation seat. The essentialism of political awareness and affiliation with ethnic organization thus helped a few ethnic leaders to achieve certain positions although they are controlled and maintained political ideological boundary restricting them to limit within their position.

Despite of all these individual and organizational obstacles, the state has maintained some reservation seats in the new constitution, mentioning gender and social inclusion issues in its sectoral development. In this political transition period of Nepal, the state is trying to address the issues relating to inclusive affirmative action on ethnic deprivation, gender discrimination along with Dalits and disabled issues, incorporating in the national policies. Nepal has now faced challenges whether these issues really address those issues by implementing at the grass roots. In this article, ethnic trajectories along with theoretical perspectives are discussed based on literature review for my doctoral dissertation to understand ethnic identity construction process.

#### **TRIBAL TO ETHNIC GROUP: A POLITICAL TRANSITION**

The distinction between ethnic groups and tribal groups is distinctively defined as primitive or traditional by the researchers who they defined as modern in comparison with the primitive one Eriksen (1993, pp. 9-10). Even though, ethnic groups are seen isolated from each other but they are connected with each other through the strong network as a member of the groups. Groups' identities are always defined in relation to other groups or non-member of the group (Bateson, 1979, p. 78; as cited in Eriksen 1993). Ethnicity carries the dichotomy perspectives of traditional versus modern, primitive versus modern or western (advanced) societies. The boundary between the we or us versus others or them are the core debate that created differences between two different societies. According to Fredrick Barth (1969), biologically self-perpetuating population play important role to maintain shared fundamental cultural values, unified overt cultural forms, strong communication and interaction, self-identified membership(asccribed), and achieved membership are distinguishable within a group (pp. 10-11). The social units that carry the traditional definition content as a race, culture, language and that an individual within a group also rejects or discriminates against others are applied in a modified form. He argues that following all types of models created preconceived view over the empirical factors in the genesis, structure and function of the groups.

Ethnic groups are generally understood in the context and relationship with other groups or non-members of the community. Commonly tribal groups and ethnic groups are understood synonymously but differ on its use with time and situations and politics of the country. In Nepal's case, the word "ethnic" was used only after 1991 constitution. Ethnic groups in Nepal were known as tribal group and nomads (Raute) before 1991 constitution. The state identified fifty-nine indigenous ethnic groups with five categories based on socio-economic condition. They were advanced, disadvantaged, marginalized, highly marginalized and endangered groups (NFDIN, 2002). The term is also attached with indigenous ethnic groups when Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) affiliated with UN Forum for indigenous nationalities and following ILO 169.

### **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FOLLOWING DIFFERENT TRAJECTORIES**

Social movements can be studied from the historical, psychological and sociological perspectives. Life cycle approaches deal with peoples' participation and motivation whereas the sociological aspects focus on the collective movements with sets of beliefs. Individuals' participation with needs and discontent inspired individuals to motivate to participate in the movements (Oommen, 2010, pp. 2-3). Following Durkheim, Oommen explained three different kinds of collective actions which are routine, anomic and restorative. The routine collective actions take place with the development of shared beliefs. When differences arise continuously out of the shared belief, then anomic collective actions are manifested. Restorative collective actions rise up with routine and anomic collective actions. The ultimate aim of these collective actions is to bring changes in the society.

Defining collective actions, Oommen (2010) explains that collective action (crowded behavior) acquire organizations to form a body using tradition, establishment of leadership, and enduring labor divisions, social norms and values. Social organization embodied culture formed a disciplined society (pp. 3-39). He explained in detail how social movements take place with their ideology and goals among the groups in India. Many groups in India and elsewhere have uplifted themselves into higher social status through social movements. Social mobility occurred due to their collective efforts to improve their social, economic and political position through changing their social and cultural behavior, collective economic efforts to bring their community economically strong and politically powerful.

Social movements in India can be traced from colonial India where many South Indians had faced discrimination from the Hindu high caste group. India itself is a big country with 28 states and 7 uni-territories. The major ethnic groups with linguistic and religious groups are divided into 9 Indo-Aryan groups, seven mongoloids (Meghalaya, Mizo, Tipur, Manipur, Naga, Lepcha (Rong) and Arunachal) and 4 Dravidian linguistic groups (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam). Many kinds of social movements have occurred pre and post-colonial period in India. Among them, some social movements in South India are discussed for understanding group movements for the identity creation. The Dravidian movement, the Nadars, the Izhavas and the Mahar's movements in India and minority movements in Bangladesh will be discussed briefly in the paragraphs.

### **Dravidian Movement from South India**

The core Dravidian movement rejected religious and caste identities in South India. The Brahmins of South India were believed to be drawn from Aryan elements and were considered as immigrants who dominated the local non-Brahmin population. The Dravidian movement rejected Sanskrit and promoted Dravidian languages (Oommen, 2010). Hardgrave (2010) has unfolded the cultural foundations of the Dravidian movement. The Dravidian movement was rooted in the earlier twentieth century as political activity around the issues of greater social reform among non-Brahmin castes. The movement focused on the upliftment of lower castes through education, awakening a Dravidian non-Brahmin identity (Seshadri, 2008). Out of the Dravidian movement, a few strong Tamil national political parties emerged with political ideologies. Dravidian people represent linguistic groups dominant in South India and differ from North Indian languages, food, and style of dress in general and everyday life.

Jyotirao Phooley of Poona, a man of Mali caste (gardener), who was only literate founded the Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873, with the purpose of asserting the dignity of man irrespective of caste, especially focusing on abolishing the caste system. C. Natesa Mudaliar established the Dravidian Home in 1914 for the Dravidian students who were not able to get hostel accommodation in Madras. The establishment of the South Indian Liberation Federation, known as the Justice Party became a strong Dravidian movement organization that spoke for the non-Brahmins. In 1917, February 26th was declared the Dravidian Day from which they started the Journal Justice and in Telegu Andraprakaskka. On December 1916, the secretary of the Association issued the Non-Brahmin manifesto in which it was clarified that the power of Brahmins over education, religious authority and economic power, political influence and social prestige stood as the main reason to place themselves higher in position in-comparison with Dravidians (Hardgrave, 2010, pp. 165-170). The main target of the Dravidian movement was against the Brahmins and the caste system. This was known as the Self-Respect Movement for the Dravidians. Dravidians movement brought programmes targeting the non-Brahmins upliftment among Tamils that was seen as radical in social, political and economic relations as it was claimed by Sarah Hodges. Dravidian movement became politically powerful to stand for the non-Brahmins in South India. With the division of Madras Presidency in to the four South Indian states, namely, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, Brahmin dominance had been removed by Dravidian political parties that promoted South Indian languages, and have special legal provisions for promoting the non-Brahmin caste and tribal groups in education and employment.

### **Ezhava of Kerala**

The Ezhavas of Kerala were tapping toddy from the Palmyra tree. They were kept out of the fourfold caste system by the Brahmins and Nairs, and placed under untouchability. To make themselves equal to the Hindu counterparts, they accepted the Hindu religion by following all practices through the guidance of Sri Narayana Guru. They gave preference to education for community upliftment of their social status. They established schools and gave priority to education. Many of them were able to attain higher education with which they obtained admission into the civil administration in Malabar. They began establishing themselves in many

administrative jobs. They became capable of competing with other members of the society over the state resources on equal footing due to individual development through collective efforts (Hardgrave, 2010). The social upward mobility movement was initiated by Narayan Guru Swami of Kerala in 1903 with combined efforts with Palpa and Kumaran Asan. They founded the Sri Narayan Dhana Paripala Yoga. It was formally founded in 1888 and registered with the government. This organization basically focused on religion and political issues.

Appealing to the educated and intellectuals among the Izhavas, Swami Narayan along with Palpa and Asan mostly gave emphasis on religion for the group upliftment. In 1904, they opened the headquarters in Sivagiri Math at Varkhala in Southern Travancore. In 1912, two more temples were built for them to worship their god since they were not allowed to enter temples. In 1913, they founded an association known as Vijnanodaya Sabha. In 1914, they established monasteries and schools in many places among the Izhava settlements. He wrote *Mimamsa* (critique of caste) in which he explained that the caste system is wrong and should be abolished. He started a rule not to ask another person's caste and not to think about caste. Each Ezhava was provided with a secret Hindu holy book. He called all lower castes to end all barriers to inter-dining. He followed the concept of "one god, one religion and one caste" especially written in Malayalam. His teachings were basically based on Advaita Vedanta, drawn from Bhakti saints, Tamil Saivaites and Tirukural. He was also influenced by Buddhist, Jain and Christian thoughts. Several traditional customs relating to being part of lower caste groups were removed. These included festivals such as celebrating a girls' marriage, puberty ceremonies and women's first pregnancy. They have struggled on school admissions for school children and later for placements in government employment. They started focusing on political representation on public roads and at public buildings. By 1920, they were able to get citizenship rights and were able to achieve those positions that they were deprived previously. Through Vaikam Satyagraha Campaign, they removed the restriction for untouchable castes to use roads in 1928. Access to educational institutions and reservations to certain government positions opened doors for them towards the path of equality. Yogam drew itself into political action and led Izhavas into advancement. The two strong institutions such as Yogam and Sangam were working in political and religious teaching that was added by the son of Palpa establishing Gurukulam in 1923 spreading its working areas abroad (Jones, 2010, pp. 55-73). This movement helped Izhavas to stand as a strong community with upward social mobility in terms of religion, economy and political as equal to the Brahmins and Nayar communities.

### **The Nadars (Shanars) of Tamilnadu**

The Nadars of Tamilnadu, who were known as Shanars, depended upon toddy-tapping and leather working. Nadar population covered 12 percent of Tamilnadu population. The meaning of Nadar is one "Who rules the land". But they commonly practiced toddy tapping and juggery making. Nadars included many assorted sub-castes and classes of different origins came under the single banner of Nadar. They were placed just above untouchability at the lowest level based on their traditional occupation marked by degree purity and pollution following the caste system in Southern India which is based upon division of castes into Brahmins, non-Brahmins

and untouchables. Consumption of certain food carried defilement. Some of them were known as climbers. They claimed to have an original history of their migration in Thirunelvely District in Tamilnadu (Hardgrave, 1969). Many of them owned palmyra trees. Due to government's new rules to donate land to the temples directly, Nadars' social, economic and political conditions were affected. In the post-independence years, the Nadars started giving emphasis to education as they realized that education is the only door to open opportunities to uplift themselves from the discriminated social system. They started focusing more on entrepreneurship while bringing changes in their behaviors. They asserted higher status by Sanskritizing their cultural behavior. They adopted vegetarianism and teetotalism by following Hindu practices.

An association called Nadar Mahajana Sangam was established in February 1910 through the initiation of T. Rattinasami Nadar. Through this association, Nadars started going against the production of jaggery and toddy tapping and especially selling hard toddy. To provide aid to the depressed climbers, levies on palmyra trees and tax abolishment was assured by the government. Provision of license was formalized. The establishment of Nadar educational institutions with scholarships, loans for higher education, and assistance for higher education and opening banks made them create large numbers of entrepreneurs (Hardgrave, 1969). They established numerous self-help group initiatives. The group movement helped them stand as equal to others in the society. The equal economic positions brought them higher status in society and made them acceptable in society. They mainly gave emphasis to education that brought them group consciousness to enhance their economic and political situation among other groups of Tamil Nadu.

### **The Mahars Rejecting Hinduism in Maharashtra**

Anjali Khurane (1999) has explained about the social mobility of a scheduled caste, the Mahars in India through social movement. She explained four major premises on which ethnicity operate in India. These are caste, language, region of origin and religion. Protest ideology has been an effective instrument among backward classes in India to establish their new identity as well as to build up social self-respect, honor and prestige by enabling them to assert their independence and equality. To establish a separate identity, the Mahars rejected Hindu religion and accepted Buddhism as a new religion to avoid the social inequality in society. Rejecting the religion and culture of the oppressors and embracing another religion is a process for establishing new group identities (Khurane, 1999, p. 12). Ethnic identity has socio-cultural and political dimensions. They developed their own ethnic associations which provided upward mobility for the group. These organizations played a pivotal role in the preservation of ethnic identity by simulating their culture and social mobility by promoting educational and accelerating cooperative activities.

Mahars, considered an untouchable scheduled caste in Maharashtra in India, were uplifting their social status through adopting Buddhism, avoiding Hindu caste system where Mahars were discriminated under the categorization of four varnas or Chaturvarna following the path of Ambedkar who himself came from the Mahar community. Ambedkar was known as Babasaheb. His original name was Bhimrao Ramji. He was born on April 14, 1891. He was the first Dalit (untouchable) to attain college education in India and his doctoral degree from law, economic and

political science from Columbia University and the London School of Economics. His works on advocating political rights and social freedom for India's untouchables, social upliftment of scheduled castes and welfare of 'outcastes' establishment with Bahishkrit Hitakarnini Sabha focusing on promoting education and socio-economic improvement. He launched an active movement against untouchability in 1927. The Mahars appeared on public marching on the street, demanding for public drinking water resources in the country. Mahars also demanded for the right to enter Hindu temple. Satyagraha was led as fighting for the right of the untouchable community. Manusmriti (Hindu behavioral codes) was burnt publicly. In March 1930, the second Satyagraha was held at Nasik under Ambedkar entering into Kalaram Temple with support from around 15 hundred Mahars and Chamars (cobblers or work associated with animal hides) forced to bring a round table conference convened by the British Government in London on 13 October 1933. Declaration of conversion into Buddhism was one of the main steps taken by this movement. Ambedkar in Arundhati Roy (Roy, 2014) explained that "it was their misfortune in spite of getting degenerative treatment that they called themselves Hindus. If they were members of another religion, nobody would treat them like that. They chose a religion which provide equal status and treatment" within their groups (pp.31). Understanding the importance of political party to make his movement accepted Independent Labour Party was founded in 1936 by him with success contested in the 1937 Bombay election to the Central Legislative Assembly from the 13 reserved and 4 general seats securing 11 and 3 seats respectively. He was invited to serve as the nation's first law minister. His nomination as Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee to write India's new constitution plays an important role over bringing untouchables issues in the committee. His research findings brought the issues of Mahars' religion to be Buddhist ancient India and forced to live outside the villages as outcastes due to refusal to renounce their Buddhist practices. His movement started on studying Buddhism and conversion of Mahars into Buddhism. He died on 6 December 1956 (<http://www.manase.org/en/maharashtra>; <http://www.ncdhr.org.in>).

Mahars were placed as untouchables although most of them were involved in the military due to having slender physical structure. Groups can be defined through their traditional cultural practices but culture can be adapted by following all cultural codes and can also be invented with initiation by an individual or group for their self-identification. For Mahars, if they were not supported by Ambedkar, they would not have been able to move upwards from being untouchables to water acceptable and acceptance to enter temples. This helped them to move upwards in social status by adopting Buddhist religion that had no caste hierarchy. The Indian government has categorized them under scheduled caste with provisions addressing development their community. Despite this provision they wanted to limit themselves within the scheduled caste to access the given opportunities (Khurane, 1999).

### **Tribal Groups of Northern (East and West) India**

The social movements among the tribal groups in India focused mainly on political rights. The Assam Movement by Sanjib Baruah (2010) explained the origin of the Assam movement as leading towards achievement of political rights. The Assam Movement focused basically on centrality of language issues in defining ethnic conflict in the state and aggressive intentions of the political parties. The

demand also focused over government preference to Asamese language as the official language. In 1979, the Assam Movement mainly focused on Bangladeshi migrants who overwhelmed the population of tribal groups. Strikes were held with support from Assam Student Association. Later, on 26 August 1979, Assam Gana Sangram Parisad was formed as an ad-hoc committee. With coalition with other groups, this group was able to negotiate with the government. They targeted for citizenship rights for those who came to the state from 1951 to 1961. Those who came after 1971 were to be deported but the problem was difficult to solve. Various riots between different groups occurred. Several protests took place. The main outcome of the Assam Movement was targeted on immigration issues that appeared to the wider public. The agenda of the Assam Movement was to stop future immigration than deporting those who were already settled. The ethnic accommodation was to focus on the stability of Assam. The Assam leadership learnt that the road to cultural survival of Assam lies on being Assamese. The understanding of having diverse groups within the state created difficulties to bring consensus and avoid ethnic turmoil in the state.

Likewise, Surajit Sinha (2010) also writes about the tribal solidarity movement where series of ethnic (tribal) rebellions occurred during the early days of British rule in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries in India (pp. 209-211). Among them, Sardar Larai (1885), Birsa Movement (1895-1900) among the Munda, Kol Rebellion (1832), Santal Rebellion (1857-8) were few of them which turned into violent movements. Majority of the movements focused on social reformation emulating cultural patterns of higher Hindu castes. The power on social mobility of Bhumij for Rajput recognition, Bhagat movement among Oraon and Vaishnavite reform movement and the Kherwar movement among the Santal were mainly focused on inter-tribal movement focusing on political association for the recognition followed by violent secessionist movements. Among the tribes in Nagaland, Mizo National Front Movement, and political movement in the tribal belts linked with agrarian unrest and the communist movement.

### **Minority Movement in Bangladesh: Failed Trajectory against the Bangali Muslims**

The social movements of indigenous ethnic groups for the development of community through group efforts and government policy promulgation for securing indigenous ethnic rights are reflected from above processes in India and Malaysia. The issues of Bangladesh and other armed conflicts claiming for separate autonomy created insecure position for the groups. This may lead them towards the enforced migration, dislocation from their own ancestral land and assimilation into the dominant group for survival. The case of Bangladesh is a prominent example of ethnic minorities disappearing from their cultural identity through assimilation into the majority Bengali identity.

Ethnic identity construction process in People's Republic of Bangladesh is different issue from Nepal and social movements in India and Malaysia. Bangladesh nationalism and religious extremism (Bertil Lintner, 2002), Ethnic people displacement and destruction (Uddin, 2008) and Political Conflict in Bangladesh by G.H. Peirish (1998) who explained about the struggle for independence from Pakistan, establishment of Bangladesh as a country under military power and forcing tribal groups displaced from their traditional land to assimilate into the

Bengali majority. In this process of nationalization, Bangladeshi people mainly gave importance to Islam as their religion and Bengali as their national language. Bangladesh became independent state in January 1972 from Pakistan. Bangladesh continues suffering from a territorial demarcation concerning its national security issues, environmental management, its way forward to survival needs of its large and rapidly expanding population, poverty stricken due to the largest agglomeration of population, and scarce cultivable land and physical resources, suffering from natural disaster such as floods and droughts. The Bangladesh identity can be identified from two distinctive cultural groups Vanga (long Muslim roots) in its eastern parts and Gauda in the west during the British rule. Bangladesh generally suffers from the internal conflict between Hindus and Muslims even before the independence of India. Hindu-Muslim conflicts gave support to East Pakistan which later became Bangladesh. Hindus owned 70 percent of arable land, capturing the business on transaction of lending money and hold good positions in urban based occupations. Bengali Muslims peasant movement was mobilized with the establishment of Krishak Praja (later Krishak Sramic Party) and Awami League after the death of its leader Fazlul Haq in the late 1950s. It was mainly challenging the West Pakistani dominance. The emphasis was given to Islam than to Bengali language as the unifying force among Bengali Muslims of East Pakistan. Language became controversial issues after the Pakistani inception. Urdu speakers flocked from West Bengal and Bihar and West Pakistan itself.

Caste Hindus migrated to India leaving potential economic opportunities behind. Urdu-speaking migrants were able to use those opportunities for their benefits later on. Rivalries between two linguistic groups were accelerated by the decision of the Pakistan reaffirming Urdu as the national language of the country in 1952. Dissatisfaction of the people appeared as street demonstration emphasizing language as essential part for the national consciousness issues in East Pakistan. Awami Muslim League accommodated smaller parties in its ranks that brought effective results on provincial election held in 1954 as coalition of Bengali political organization (Awami League, Krishak Sramic Party and fewer smaller parties) securing 223 out of 237 seats allocated to Muslims of East Pakistan. The Bengali speakers were facing discriminatory measures in economy especially in jute milling industries in collaboration with private sector favoring outside Bangali speaker business houses. Bengali speaking people had to face discriminatory and exploitative behaviors from West Pakistani people. Visionary leader of the Muslim League Mohammad Ali Jinnah, receive firm support from aristocratic and political leaders mainly from Punjab and Sind. Muhajirs (Muslim immigrants from India) were highly concentrated in urban areas of West Pakistan. Awami League became stronger with support from smaller parties and Krishak Sramic Party.

The death of Suhrawardy in 1963 passed to the hands of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Bengali Muslims were under privileged for the civil services due to having less educational attainments. The military power in West Pakistan was enhancing and power politics among military leaders were visible. Mujibur Rahaman was imprisoned since 1966 on charges for treason. General Yahya Khan was able to control the power throwing out Ayub. National Assembly elections of December 1970 showed results the Awami League was able to secure 75 percent of the popular vote. The government tried to suppress the agitators. Several strikes were launched

against the government. Awami League played an important role in the struggle for independence from Pakistan. The heightened conflict increased death-toll estimated about 1.5 million. Mukthi Bahini (the liberation army) was formed. Mukti Bahini received support trainings and weaponry from India. On 19 December 1971, Pakistani army drew back as the Indian army intervened. Indian army withdrew from Bangladesh in 1972. National elections in 1973 opened the gate for Awami League to win 305 out of 315 parliamentary seats. Bangladesh was formally accepted as an independent country by Pakistan in 1974 becoming a membership of the United Nations. 'Mujibism' was taken as political doctrine in the constitution of 1972 as the principles of nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism. Bengali was made as national language.

Twelve major tribes are found settled in Chittagong Hills and six tribes in other parts of Bangladesh besides other categories. Among them, seven groups are found following Buddhism, two Hindus and three Christians (Panday and Thiagarajah, 1996; as cite in Peiris, 1998). Passing through all the violent conflict for the independence, Bangladesh people were mostly found involved in Hindu-Muslim conflict despite having several tribal groups following different religions. Islam as the national religion and Bengali for linguistic homogeneity were the main identity of the groups in the country. Hindu followers and Urdu mother tongue speakers are the religious and linguistic minorities in the country. Those tribes living in Chittagong are considered of Mongolian stock and are named as Buddhist tribes such as Marma, Tripura, Mrong and Tanchagya. People belonging into Lushai, Bawm and Pankha are conversing into Christianity, although animism is still existed among them.

The Chittgong tribes were shaken by the policy of Pakistan to consolidate these tribal groups into the national mainstream. National mainstreaming process affected the local tribes through encroachment over the land by lowland peasants of East Pakistan. Hydropower projects on the upper reaches of the Karnaphuli River was located well within the tribal homeland. The impact of establishing industrial enterprises in areas bordering the Chittagong directly affected the livelihood of the tribal groups. It made them less privileged in comparison to other groups. They were displaced to the Bangladesh India border. This situation created discontent among tribal groups and manifested movement by a group of educated tribal youth. Uddin (2008) writes that historically Indigenous people living in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh have been oppressed by the dominate majority groups. They are outsiders in their own land because of the various forms of discrimination and exploitation since the colonial British Period in the region. They are also displaced from their own culture and tradition. They were facing double discrimination in their everyday life as being a Pahari (living in hill and jungle). They faced oppression and marginalization, discrimination and violence in their daily lives. For the establishment of tribal rights, they have formed Parbatiya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS). It was officially recognized as a political party founded in March 1972 headed by Manabendra Narayan Larma, a radical activist of Chittagong since 1960 and struggle for autonomy from the Bangladesh state. This group turned violent when government decided launching distribution of land in Chittagong. The government increased the intensity of its counter-insurgency operations. Massive violation of human rights were committed by the military, with extra judicial killings, torture, abduction, forced religious conversion, religious persecution, forced eviction, rape, harassment,

destruction of homes and properties and wide scale arrests and detention.

Bangladesh was projected as home of a homogenous Bengali nationalism and there was no place for the other groups. M.N. Larma, leader of Pahari, a parliament member from Chittagong demanded special space in the constitution for the Pahari groups. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called upon the Pahari people to become Bengali forgetting their own identity with his rejection. Due to having cultural differences, Larma went on arguing against the assimilation. The subsequent military regime suspended the constitution. Larma went underground and organized an armed resistance force known as Shanti Bahini (Peace Force), an armed component of the JSS, started violent activities for their existence with regional autonomy adopting non-constitutional means since 1976. Chittagong was militarized and brought under military control. The establishment of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) in 1976 for strengthening the military occupation and development of the military infrastructure in the Chittagong wholly focused on the development of infrastructure along with a soft corner to the other groups rather than Pahari people. The tribal people were displaced from their ancestral land by the Bengali settlers. This affected the natural resources that were managed in a sustainable manner by the tribal people for many decades. In the process of searching for a political solution in 1987, General Ershad initiated six rounds of peace talks. The agreement of 1987 only provided for limited autonomy and was largely rejected and the armed insurgency continued. Pahari people became the victims of politics of population transfer, land eviction, cultural assimilation and ethnic discrimination by the successive regimes of Pakistan and then Bangladesh. Under the Bengali domination, the Pahari culture is going to be fully assimilated into the majority Bengali and is in threat of disappearing in the near future. Everyday life of the Pahari people is still being interfered by the military force even after signing the peace accord between Bangladesh government and the Pahari people of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Twelve tribal groups who used to own their land and local resources were all captured by the immigrants under the influence of military power (Uddin, 2008; Peiris, 1998; Lintner, 2002). The case of Bangladesh reflects the direct and indirect force for the minority assimilation into the majority for their survival. The voices of the minority are never heard.

### **Protest Trajectory of Ethnic Movement in Nepal**

Indigenous ethnic groups in Nepal were commonly understood as tribal groups before the 1980s. It was reflected in government documents as well as scholarly works that were based on research by foreign scholars. The concept of tribe changed into ethnic group after the 1980s. Ethnicity took its place among foreign and native scholars' writings that influenced the government decisions. This was followed with the establishment of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) which celebrated the indigenous ethnic decade from 1994-2004. They were identified as ethnic groups until they became the members of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues under ILO Convention of 169 in 1993. The celebrations of this decade brought ethnic consciousness towards maintaining cultural traits for group identification. The promulgation of a new constitution in 1990 provided freedom of speech as one of the fundamental rights of the people. Political and indigenous ethnic social organizations were allowed to be established for cultural development. They

were generally known as Janajati<sup>1</sup> groups. The scholarly work by foreigners promoted ethnic groups in print. With increasing group consciousness, the ethnic group title merged with adbasi Janajati (Indigenous ethnic groups). NEFIN became member of the United Nations Indigenous Forum in 2004.

The term “Adibasi Janajati” has been understood as synonymous with the indigenous ethnic groups of Nepal (Whelpton, 2008; Gellner, 2008) even though newly emerging Janajati scholars are interested in using the term indigenous ethnic groups instead of using “ethnic groups” in their research as well as all indigenous ethnic group affiliated with NEFIN. Indigenous ethnic identity construction process in Nepal is also influenced by the impact of indigenous ethnic movements in other parts of the world via mass media and increasing information flow. All indigenous ethnic groups are becoming more aware about seeking socio-economic opportunities for the communities through social organizations. The contemporary indigenous ethnic movements are committed to secure economic and political opportunities for their groups. The indigenous ethnic movement in Nepal was viewed sympathetically by the government after the second people’s movement in 2006 and aggressive demand for proportional representation. The demand for inclusive proportional representation was incorporated in the Nepal Act Collection, Part 4 in 2067 (2010) by the Nepal Government<sup>2</sup>. Thus, it can be argued that the indigenous ethnic movement in contemporary Nepal is highly based on advocacy and not a violent movement although the group movement for social and cultural upliftment has precedents in India and Malaysia.

#### **‘Orang Asli’ Bhumiputra of Malaysia: Special Provision for Malays’ Development**

The Malay related groups of Malaysia call themselves as “Bumiputra” of the country. Being the majority of the population, they were a minority in the economic and political spheres. Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia focused on trying to protect the Malays of the country. This was part of the continuous process of protecting the group based on law, made by the British to protect the Malays from being overwhelmed by Chinese and Indian immigrant workers in Malaya. The latter two groups were identified as urban dwellers. A new constitution was drafted on the basis of the Report of the Reid Commission which laid the ground rule in favor of Malays. This report was taken as the milestone of the Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission in 1957. It created provisions for safeguarding the special position of the Malays and the legitimate interests of the other communities. The effort of raising issues on behalf of the Malays went to Tunku Abdul Rahman, the leader of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) which led the Alliance Coalition. He emphasized on the equal rights and privileges and opportunities for independent Malaya while respecting others and avoiding discrimination based on race and creed. Tunku Abdu Rahman became the first Prime Minister of Malaya with alliance of United Malay National Organization (UMNO), Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). Tunku Abdula Rahman tried to bring cohesion among Malays and non-Malays stating that those who truly love Malaya are the true Malaysians.

After the formation of Malaysia in 1965, and the racial riots in Kuala Lumpur on 13 May 1969, the existing privileges given to Malays were revised to add more opportunities for them. Besides land reservation, quota for admission to the public

services, issuing of permits and licenses for operating businesses, road transportation vehicles including scholarships to get admission to the universities were implemented in favor of Malays. There were no clear distinctions for mentioning the tribal groups called the Orang Asli. They were known as pre-Bumiputras of Malaysia. With the formation of Malaysia, the clauses to the original Malayan constitution were emended to include ethnic groups in East Malaysia. With amendment of the clauses, the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak were added as Bumiputra. With this, the Bumiputra group became the largest population in Malaysia covering 65 percent of the total population. The Malays were the largest majority among those classified as Bumiputra.

By 1970, after thirteen years of independence, only four percent of the Malays held substantial economic share in the country. Article 153 tried to recognize the Bumiputra as the special class of citizens. National Operation Council during the emergency period after 1967 initiated the Malaysian New Economic policy. This was to ensure that thirty percent share of the economy would be given to the economic development of Malays. The affirmative action mainly focused on Malays. The policy helped Bumiputra to pursue special courses for university admission, taking courses and sitting for examinations that differed from non-Bumiputras who had to sit for the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia, (standardized examination) in order to enter university. Even though, both Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra students can take the examination, it was found difficult for the Bumiputra to sit for Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran examinations. Bumiputra property buyers were given access to property loans as well as seven percent discount by the property developers. Non-Bumiputra buyers would have to pay the full market price as well take commercial bank loans which usually required higher interest rates. Bumiputra citizens also received special quotas in Federal Public Service positions, Federal scholarships, Federal trade or business licenses and tertiary education enrollment. But the constitution also clearly stated the legitimate interests of other communities stating that parliament may not restrict any business or trade solely for Bumiputra. Civil Servants were to be treated impartially regardless of race. Article 153 ensured that the government cannot deprive any person of any public office already held by such person. No person may be deprived of any federal scholarships already enjoyed by such person and laws reserving quotas in trade licenses and permits may not deprive any person of any rights, permits or licenses already enjoyed or held by him or authorize a refusal to renew such person's license or permit (Means, 1991; Musa, 1999; Kamarudin, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Ethnic movement is seen as part of ethnic identity construction process among many ethnic groups in South Asia and South East Asia. Some groups in India follow the tactics of group mechanism on economic and social development whereas some focused more on protest ideology such as among Nadars following Buddhism, Bangladeshi minorities on forced to accept Bangali language and becoming Muslims whereas Malays of Malaysia were able to get addressed with Bumiputra as the son of the soil with several reservations system. Nepali government has also brought some reservation to women, Dalits, and indigenous ethnic groups addressing the issues related to them in new constitution. The ethnic movement in Nepal has been slowed down after maintaining reservation for all the disadvantaged groups in new

constitution. This provision has given a political opportunity to ethnic leaders when they are in ruling party bringing division within groups; however, less priority given on collectiveness are major obstacles in this transitional phase for ethnic groups in Nepal.

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#### NOTES

1. Janajati in Nepali means people (jana) and groups with (jati) literally. Jat means caste and Jati means other groups later known as indigenous ethnic groups after the UN declaration. They started writing indigenous ethnic groups instead of writing only as ethnic groups as termed by the western scholars.
2. The demand for inclusive proportional representation was incorporated in the Nepal Act Collection, Part 4 in 2067 V.S. (2010) by the Nepal Government. The provision was incorporated in Government Servants Acts, 2049 V.S.(1993) in clause 7 with separation of reservation with quota based on the population stating inclusive proportional representation. This act is implemented in all government officers as well as government and semi-government corporations. Among them, Tribhuvan University, a semi government corporation, has incorporated this rule in its Tribhuvan University Teachers, Staff Service Rules 2050 V.S(1993) adding a provision from 7 December 2008 (22 Mangsir, 2066) from the T.U. Council.

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***Crossing the Border: International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies***

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