Identities in the Making: Cultural Pluralism and the Politics of Imagined Communities in the Lowlands of Nepal

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Chapter: One
Introduction

"Nepal's southern low lands, the Terai, doesn't fit the [national] image most people have in the country. The kingdom of Nepal is ...an archetypal hill and mountain society''.

- A Himalayan Anthropologist (Himal, 1990:5)

Case 1.1   A Small Event which Speaks of a Big Issue

In March 1996 some local youth, mostly of *pahade* (a general term for people of the traditionally dominant hill people) backgrounds raised an issue of corruption in school in the Gouriganj Village of the Terai Lowland of Nepal. The issue was raised on the day of guardian meeting of the Gouriganj High School. They blamed the headmaster, who was also the ex officio member secretary of the school management committee, for corruption and requested him to resign from the post. The headmaster, an influential *madhise* (a general term for Terai people associated with an Indian origin) personality in Gouriganj refused to resign and did not admit to have had anything to do with corruption. To support his position he searched political backing from the Nepali Congress party and tried to mobilise local *madhise* people. On the other side, the local youth also began to unite irrespective of their party affiliations and demanded the resignation of the headmaster in a more dramatic way.

As the conflict increased, school students also appeared in the scene and they called for strike. The school remained closed for several weeks. One day, suddenly an inciting crowd of students entered into the headmaster's office and dragged him out with bumping and beating, breaking two of his teeth. It was reported that some local left oriented politicians of *pahade* origin backed the students. Similarly, some Congress politicians and *madhise* people backed the headmaster. His resignation then became a question of party prestige. The school conflict escalated into an issue that manifested and exaggerated latent divisive lines among the people of Gouriganj. The population became divided into two groups either supporting the headmaster or supporting the students. ''Some appeared openly but many of them remained behind the curtain in both sides'', reports Kachalu Rajbanshi, my field assistant.

The conflict no more remained between teacher and students, but went behind their control. "We began to see and hear daily *nara julush*, or protest and procession, of either side in Gouriganj", said a local teashop owner. The pattern was clear that *madhise* people of all political affiliations supported the headmaster, while *pahade* people of all political parties backed the students. Both the groups were looking for wider support and backing to win the battle. Since the CPN(UML), Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist and Leninist was in Government and the students were backed by some of its cadres, they eventually got support from the central government. On the other hand, "the headmaster not only mobilised the local *madhese* people in his favour but many people across the border also appeared on the scene'', said a school friend of mine. "Those days were really terrific, people of unknown and unfamiliar faces with long sticks and knives in their hands were roaming

around the village. No one was clear what would happen the next moment", says a local businessman remembering those days.

In the mean time, the UML government at the centre fell down and the headmaster succeeded to obtain strong support from the Congress government and secured his job. Furthermore, he registered a court case under the Act of Public Security for 12 persons including his own students and their supporters who were directly involved in the case. "His mobilisation of local *madhise* people and people across the border was crucial for the headmaster's political survive", comments a local politicians of the headmaster's camp during the conflict. "Since he has long familial relationship with the people of Madhayapura District of Bihar, just across the border from the Gouriganj, mobilisation of these people in the crisis period was not a big thing for him and it was just a reciprocal obligation between relatives", adds the politician taking the case easily. He also informed me that the headmaster and his whole family have marriage relationships with the people across the border. "He himself married there, his two daughters are married there, and his son married from there and so on", said a neighbour of the headmaster (Fieldwork, 1999).

1.1   A Brief Conceptual Background of the Study

The event narrated in this little sketch brings out critical dimensions of the fields of problemfield I shall address in this thesis: the interplay of local level identifications and national level politics. I am studying in a village but following Geertz (1973:22) who asserts that "anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, town, neighbourhood....); they study in villages". What I study in the village is shaped by events and processes in interaction systems some of which are of much larger scale, and it is the interplay of these processes as they are manifested in the village which is my concern here. The sequences of events I have observed are of course not identical with what take place in other villages, but still I think it is possible to discover generalizable processes in the particular community I study.

As plays of a particular game of cards unfolds in different ways, so does life in a particular community unfolds in ways different from other communities. In order to understand why particular games unfold in different ways one has to grasp the rules of the game, the skills of the actors in the game and the card they have on their hands. Such understanding cannot be arrived at from any representative sampling of plays, it has to involve what Weber (1921[1968:8-9]) calls 'verstehen' - understanding or a leap of imagination from observed cases of cards being thrown to interpretation of what they mean as 'moves' with consequences for those who wins or looses. Likewise in our study of social life, what we understand depends on our skills in interpreting what the actors are up to. This again depends on our ability to 'put ourselves in their boots' - to see the conditions they have to cope with in dealing with matters which are of concern to them.

In the study of social life like this is tricky indeed - the conditions vary over time and in space, the actors are differently constituted and have different 'cards on their hands' and their concerns may differ. Particular sequences of behaviour like the one described above is not representative - in the sense similar to - other sequences of behaviour taking place at other times and places, but it may be representative in the sense that it may reflect conditions and concerns which people cope with in much larger social universes than the small community of Gouriganj. Although the particular way these conditions and concerns unfolded in the case described may be unique, this does not prevent us as anthropologists from discovering their general relevance for how people cope with their life situation in our country and for the consequences their coping have on larger issues of belonging and nation building.

Let's look back at the sequence of events narrated above. I don't really know what really triggered the conflict between the students and the teacher. The 'move' they made to win their case is however clear - with the help of local youth they submitted a claim to the guardian meeting of the Gouriganj High School accusing him of corruption and requesting his removal from office. This looks like a straightforward issue, which the guardian meeting could settle bureaucratically according to evidence brought in support of the claim. The students and the teacher can be seen as the competing actors in this game and the guardian meeting as the referee. However, the further moves the students and the teachers made soon showed that as 'players' they brought in 'cards' which belonged to 'games' of much larger scale.

First of all, the students and the teacher belonged to different sides in the *pahade* - *madhise* division. The teacher's counter-move to the students' accusation was to play on this contrast by mobilising other *madhise* people even from across the Indian border to bring the conflict into a much wider political arena where he also solicited the support of the Nepali Congress party. The students countered by going on strike and they even assaulted the teacher. Most importantly they mobilised support from the other party dominant in Nepalese politics, namely the Communists which contained important leaders of *pahade* background. Through such moves a petty local conflict was drawn into national politics even up to the Central Government, which at that time was formed by an alliance dominated by the Communists.

It looked like this 'move' would win the day for the students, but events at the central level of Government leading to the break up of the communist lead alliance changed the situation

in the teacher's favour. His local Congress party allies now had the support from a newly formed Congress Party Government. The case shows how competing actors in the small arena (the guardian meeting) make 'moves' which involve new actors (political parties) with different concerns operating on much wider arenas. The moves of these new actors have to be understood in relationship to one of their basic concerns, namely winning votes in next election. In the local game of aggregating votes the candidates have to articulate and even actively create interests in the electorate. In a socially and culturally plural state, competition for votes can easily encourage local politicians to play on socio-cultural differences - vote for 'me' because 'we' are 'the same' as opposed to 'him' because he represents 'them' who are different from 'us'.

These are big issues, which as in the case presented above are played out in the local context of Gouriganj and any other villages of Nepal. In order to explore the way they are played out I find it necessary to present some macro-level descriptive features of natural and social environment within which they are played out. I shall start by a short account of the natural differences between the Hills and Terai and its consequences for human adaptations. This will be followed by an historical account of central level politics and its consequences for social differentiation in Nepal as a whole but with particular reference to the division between *pahade* and *madhise*. I shall then present some major morphological features characterising Gouriganj village, before I go to a more detailed analysis of my field material. Methodological and theoretical considerations will be brought in when I find it necessary for my argument like I have done in this introduction. But, before going to the next chapter, I want to discuss briefly the statement of the problem, objectives, theoretical orientations, and fieldwork procedures of this study.

1.2   Research Problem and Objectives

In the school conflict we saw how both the contestants tried to move their conflict to a higher political arena where the 'card' of assumed similarity of identity was certainly made relevant. The political system may open up for moves which may serve to articulate and strengthen concepts of 'imagined communities' based on some kinds of assumed shared social and cultural identity (Anderson, 1983; Barth, 1983). This state of affairs therefore raises the possibility that 'ethnicity' (projected upon the old bases of identity in terms of language, religion, place of origin) as a basis for mobilisation for political action has challenged and is challenging the primacy for the class based mobilisation on the one hand and nation state on the other (Tambiah, 1989). This study is an attempt to understand in

what manner 'ethnicity' has impacted on the aims and activities of nation-making and national integration which are considered to be the 'principal task of newly emerged third world nation-states'(Geertz, 1963)

Anthropologist McKim Marriott (1963) has expressed an important dimension of this very clearly: "No state, not even an infant one, is willing to appear before the world as a bare political frame. Each would be clothed in a cultural garb symbolic of its aims and legal being. --- What elements of culture will be worn by all citizens as the common core of decency in the new national way of life, what elements will be used to distinguish the new national identity, what elements will be officially put forward as that state's special claim to respect in the eyes of mankind"(p 27)? The presence of modern devices of mass communication opens up new potentialities for the manipulation of culture in the sense of values, loyalties, knowledge, and belonging. "The possibility of educating their citizens to a newly chosen way of life, of mobilising them in support of deliberately cultivated values, of representing them to the world according to a consciously created image - all these are open to the elite of the new states" (Ibid.:28) Cultural management is thus an issue that the leadership of new nations cannot avoid. "New states of elder or younger civilisations alike seek continuity with respectable pasts promising future unity and success. As the recent historic pasts of nearly all-new states are troubled, the cloudier glories apparent through ancient history, archaeology, or mythology are everywhere-preferred"(Marriott, 1963:55).

It is thus a state concerns to foster an 'imagined community' around shared nationhood. This indicates to a possible contradiction in the political system. On the one hand the system may stimulate politicians to play a so-called 'ethnic card' in order to mobiles votes and thus foster the development of concept of 'imagined communities' of much smaller scale than the state, while on the other hand on Government level the integrity of the state require them to counteract such moves towards dominance of small scale identifications. Governments cannot avoid the issue of cultural management in order to balance these conflicting claims to primary 'community loyalty'. The problem is what objects or past events are convincing as symbols of shared nationhood. This is not so easy - what is one group's past victory may be another group's defeat, what is one group's cultural glory may be another group's lack of achievement, what is one groups cultural competence, e.g. command of a widespread language, is another group's cultural handicap.

The process by which Nepal is trying to become a nation-state is clearly a homogenisation project. The mainstream or hill domination at the centre has tried to construct an imagined

national community in contrast to ethnic, sub-national (e.g. Kipatiya Limbus) or subculture (e.g. Newari, Terai) communities. While ethnic or subnational or subculture groups claimed to be distinct cultural identity groups, the state on the other hand considers them as a part of homogenous civil society that epitomised the nation. The history of nation building in Nepal appears to be a history of imposing uniformity rather than embracing diversity (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1997, 1999).

In the extreme complexity of ongoing cultural processes in Nepal, the extent of assimilation to the dominant culture varies among the different local societies, and some forms of resistance are already started (e.g. Caplan, 1970, Gaige, 1975). Most recently, people from eastern hills, mostly of *kiranti*(Rai, Limbu and Sunuwar) backgrounds, have already started to boycott national festivals such as *Dasain* and *Tihar,* condemning that these festivals were imposed to them forcefully by Hindu majority. It is thus necessary to undertake a scientific study to find out how the cultural and national integration is possible without undermining constituent identities of the different groups of people residing within the country. Keeping in mind the problems discussed above, this study focuses on the organisations of cultural pluralism and different social life forms in a village of eastern Terai. More specifically, this study discusses the problems of national integration of the people of study area and their identity making in a wider national perspective. In other words, this study seeks to understand how the people of the study area are imagining themselves as members of Nepali national communities despite of their own other identities and cultural proximity to India rather than Nepali cultural mainstream.

1.3   Theoretical Framework

The nature of my research topic guided me to adopt a plurality of theoretical orientations in this study. I have tried to link theories while presenting my data and developing my argument in the subsequent chapters. Basically, I have employed concepts and frameworks like cultural pluralism (Barth, 1983), art of impression management, definition of situation (Goffman, 1959), imagined communities (Anderson, 1983), theories of nationalism (Gellener, 1983), integrative revolution (Geertz, 1963), and cultural management (Marriot, 1963).

Among anthropologists, especially those who have been working with complex societies (e.g. Barth, 1993; Eriksen, 1992; Smith, 1969 and Kupper, 1974), the concept of cultural pluralism has stimulated considerable theoretical discussion. A fundamental issue, however,

is whether or not the plural model, when compared to other theories of society, offers any particular advantage for examining the problems of social and cultural diversity and their production and reproduction. In this study, I have attempted to employ this framework to analyse the forms of cultural pluralism within the study area.

Anthropologists (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Hannertz, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Barth, 1983, 1989 & 1993; Eriksen, 1992; and Anderson, 1983) have alerted us that the conditions under which society and culture exists today can not be adequately understood by the traditional anthropological perspective based on totalizing philosophies of Radcliffe-Brownian and Durkheimian traditions. These perspectives were developed in order to understand the working of discrete social units. This tends to be totalizing in nature, in that it attempts to conceptualise societal wholes. The contemporary world, on the contrary is made up of socio-cultural units that are complex and unbounded systems of never ending processes- i.e. it is always in flux.

They have pointed out that we have tended to see the world as a 'cultural mosaic, of separate pieces with hard, well-defined edges and that anthropologists have in the past been concerned largely with 'drawing the map of cultures as a mosaic'. It is thus claimed that this requires anthropologists to find new ways of thinking about culture.

I have assumed here, following Barth (1983), that culture is part of a person and has to be enacted, not only comprehended. This means that the ideas that make up a culture develop in each individual person as result of continuous experience throughout life. People with similar experiences will therefore develop similarities in their outlook on the world. The common cult of *thakur maharaj pooja* among the people of plain origin in Gouriganj irrespective of their *jat* and *jati* backgrounds is an example of the outcome of sharing similar experiences throughout the life.

In order to understand the emergence and maintenance of cultural difference of people within Gouriganj, we should therefore look at the processes affecting the social identities among them. This opens the way for an analysis of how the difference in exposure of various groups within Gouriganj to the external world, create differences in their outlook on the world. Different groups of Gouriganj will confer different meanings on to their existence, given the differences in their relations to the external worlds. For example, we can see that educated young people do things differently from older men; in a similar way there are differences between younger and older women, between people believing in

traditional Hinduism and new followers of different *gurus* like *Anukul Chandra Thakur, Maharsi Meinhi* and sects like *Ramanadis, Brahma Kumari* of 'modern' Hinduism.

The ways such meanings are conferred on the world can be observed in social encounters and we can observe how various types of signs are used to express such variation among the people. The analysis of such encounters, may lead us on to the process that forms the basis for the development of new notions about the world. By comparing description of such encounters, we may uncover important dynamics in the reproduction of traditional elements of cultures of the people.

I have assumed in this study that society and culture are collections of practices, symbols, and codes that are made use of in situations of interaction. People take up new practices and leave others, new signs are created as old one go out of use, not so much as part of a planned process but as a result of the situations within which people operate in wider social contexts. The starting point for my analysis is therefore to look at the participation of the people within Gouriganj in various arenas and situations and try to identify the activities and symbols they make use of and the cultural codes and values they refer to, to justify their position and arguments. This point is similar to the way Keesing used the term 'political economy of meaning' (Keesing, 1982) to say that those symbols and meanings that make of a culture are certainly situated in individual minds, but they are realised in social and political contexts of everyday life. Barth (1982, 1983, and 1987) takes a similar view, emphasising that cultural traditions are shared, embraced, and transmitted by persons with a common social identity. But again, this does not mean that new values and outlooks on life are totally shared by everybody. Values may not be coherent, even if they are shared. But still, such values affect people's choices and actions, as they function as conceptual underpinnings that enhance or generate socially desirable behaviour. This will vary in different cultures at different times and such changes can be recognized.

However, this doesn't mean that we can reduce culture to a study of individuals. Reproduction of cultural traditions obviously depends on collective social processes. My argument is, however, that individuals are carriers of culture and through their activities they reproduce culture. What individuals do and think is, therefore, is an important starting point for this line of thinking.

There is a distinction between *pahade*, *adhivasi, and madhise* in terms of their ways of life and traditions of knowledge and so on. We could do the same by focusing on gender, *Jat*,

jati, religion, and wealth. Similarly, how difference in outlook on life differ between men and women, among upper and lower *jats* and *jatis*, and among rich and poor people. We could then establish a pattern in which culture is seen as being distributed among members of a society. The way such people participate, and make use of their cultural creativity or inventories in specific situations for specific purposes, provides important information for understanding reproduction of cultural tradition

In order to sketch the basic elements that define unity and solidarity among the different groups of people, we need to find out those shared cultural characteristics which serves to bind together society, particularly those 'shared symbols and symbolic acts which represent and give recognition to existing social units and the shared understandings and countless similar behaviour which characterise a people' (Orans, 1965:4-5, Cited in Manger, 1994). The case in Gouriganj might be different in the sense that there is a great deal of variation among the people and I have doubt that represents the totality of the cultural traditions within Gouriganj or that such an entity exists at all. What I am trying to do is to combine different types of data to establish some interconnections that may lead to an understanding of some basic premises of life situations within Gouriganj, thus, indicating the ways through which the different cultural traditions are practised and transmitted and how separate cultural tradition are brought into play. As I noted earlier the reproduction of culture is also a collective process and we are faced with the problems of explaining how the new symbols become shared, that is, socially significant, whereas other die out. To do this we need to discuss how social interaction may work to convey meanings, that is, to look into '*communicative effects of events'* (Barth: 1987:78).

In the past, Nepal had managed to integrate different groups of people into a single framework. Prithivi Narayan Shah, the founder of modern Nepal and those after him tried to unify the plural country on four key ideas: the unquestioning power and authority of the Hindu King; the supremacy of Hindu ethos in national life; social integration through Hindu social system of caste division; and recognition of Nepali as an official language and, in more recent times, as a medium of education (Sharma, 1992). After the revolution of 1990 in Nepal, people began to polarise into several groups according to different 'grid' principles. There is an apparent transition from the politics of nation-state to politics of ethnic pluralism which more or less resembles Anderson's (1983) argument that the politics of newly independent state, initially framed in terms of 'nation state' ideologies and policies, have by virtue of various internal dialectics and differences led to a new phase of politics dominated

by the competition and conflicts of 'ethnic collectivists', who question nationalism and 'nation state' dogmas.

Geertz's statement is also similar in some respect. For Greetz (1963), the array of ethnic groups that exist in any society and cultural baggage they carry with them are 'given'. Ethnic identities are relatively fixed from birth or early life, are rooted in the non- rational foundations of the human personality, and therefore readily available for political mobilisation by elites who wish to use or misuse them for political purposes. Such politics of ethnicity brings different ethnic groups into conflict with each other and also creates a 'tension between primordial and civil politics' that can be resolved ultimately only through an 'integrative revolution'. Though he never made clear how such an integrative revolution was to be brought, I assume inter-group associations and the creation of shared institution in the modern state might modify the political consequences of cultural pluralism.

McKim Marriott (1963) has proposed a solution to similar situations through an appropriate policy of cultural management. He argued that each newly emerging nation-state should be 'clothed in a cultural grab symbolic of its aims and ideal being' that could anchor different cultural groups into a single national frame with mutual respect and dignity. Choosing of an appropriate level of culture, dealing with cultural verity within the state, finding a suitable orientation of time, and relating to internal to external cultures are the major issues of cultural management that any country should take into account to enforce a cultural policy.

1.4   Selection of Study Area and Fieldwork

This section discusses the empirical features of the study area and the ways how I conducted the fieldwork in order to collect necessary data for this study.

1.4.1   The Selection of Study Area

Only fragments of information are available relating to Tarai people. This has been so because anthropologists specifically, foreigners are not interested in doing research on the Terai people. They mostly prefer hill and mountain environments.

In contrast to the hills and mountains of Nepal, the Terai region, probably being too hot, dusty and geographically unattractive, and received comparatively little attention of the

Nepalese as well as foreign anthropologists. The present study is an attempt to break the tradition by studying some organisations of cultural pluralism in a village of Eastern Terai. Eastern Terai including the study area provides a suitable case for the analysis of cultural pluralism and related issues for following reasons:

1. It is a luminous mosaic of hill, plain and indigenous people and it can be further differentiated on linguistic, ethnic, caste and religious grounds (Bista, 1972; Gaige, 1975; and Dahal, 1995). Even each category is clearly heterogeneous and according to their own criteria, there certainly are a number of internal boundaries, mostly in case of caste rather than ethnic and other grounds.

2. Even among the caste Hindus, there are some fundamental differences among the Hill people and their Terai counter part.

3. Hinduism dominates the eastern Terai population, but Hindus live together with a number of Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and followers of shamanism as mixed religious communities.

4. There are some minority groups such as the Satars who follow their own tribal religion with their own language and life style. They practice highly discrepant local cults, which are quite different from the dominant Hindu and other religion like Buddhism and Muslim.

Thus the area includes truly complex societies with diverse cultural traditions, the structure of which can certainly not be represented in terms of common village prototypes. The study area also provides a unique example of local variation. Any one who observes the area with care will find diversity in terms of formal features of village organisation, marriage and family institutions, gender relation and so on. Islamic communities are located next to a Hindu village; in some villages hierarchical notions are emphasised, where as among *adhivasi* and Muslim villages egalitarian ideology dominates.

However, it should be mentioned here that anthropological studies of complex communities like Gouriganj, which are larger both in population and spatial distribution, present a series of practical and methodological problems. The situation is further complicated by the fact that within the community under study, we have several cultural traits and traditions. Besides, in addition to certain dominant values of Hinduism there are divergent subsidiary

values of Christianism, Muslims and shamanism. The community has established norms and value orientations but the range of variation in behavioural patterns is also considerable.

These and other factors like time and budget limitation made it difficult to have first-hand contact with more or less the entire communities. In this situation, even at my best, I could have effective acquaintance within only a small territory. Therefore, though I worked only in a few segments of the community, I assume that it has been sufficiently handled to generate many important generalizable results.

1.4.2   Fieldwork

The fieldwork on which this dissertation is based was undertaken in between August to December, 1999. The main approach of my fieldwork was participant observation. When in the field, I generally focused most of my attention on the current events and concerns that engaged people and about which they wished to speak about among themselves, rather than imposing my own agenda of question and themes. In this way I could get to know people and do research at the same time. In addition, small census of households, formal and informal meetings, and discussions with people of different backgrounds and social identities and more formal types of interview with key informants helped me to understand the underlying processes that have shaped the life circumstances of the people in the plural setting of the study area. Through these formal and informal methods I mapped the communities out in terms of households, kinship, sources or level of income, *jat, jati* and religious membership, political parties and the history of the area.

1.5   Disposition of the Report

Following the present introduction, in Chapter two I begin the discussion of the natural environment of Nepal. It mainly focuses on the differences in natural condition and human adaptation between different regions of the country.

Chapter three sketches the cultural/historical formation of Nepali society and culture. The chapter shows the connections between Tibeto-Burmes and Indian in the emergence of Nepali society and culture, and discusses a historical anecdote of their interaction and interconnection.

Chapter four deals with Nepal's struggles of being a nation-state and discusses the emergence of the Nepali state and its relation to the Terai Region in different historical epochs. It also covers the various aspects of identity problems in Terai in a national perspective and reviews past policies of cultural management to integrate Terai into the national mainstream.

In Chapter five, I discuss the social morphology of the study area. This chapter contains geographical location, village history, demographic features, development infrastructure, and social ecology of the study area.

Chapter six goes on to present an analysis of the organisation of households and kinships in the study area. It primarily discusses the concept of household, household composition, separation and inheritance, and its role in organising and reproducing the cultural traditions. It also presents an account of marriage patterns and kinship relationship in the study area. The chapter concludes discussing the emerging patterns of household organisation and its direction of changes.

In Chapter seven, I discuss the cultural pluralism and its reproduction within the study area. The chapter primarily deals with the categories of cultural diversity as expressed by the local people and their various contextual meaning, and analyses the forms of pluralism. The chapter concludes discussing the processes of reproduction of cultural traditions.

Chapter eight focuses on the everyday life and discusses how it has been shaping the society and culture in the study area. It discusses the behavioural patterns of the people and the various ways of presenting self in daily life. It goes on to present different modes of behaviours and their normative principles. It discusses on Hinduism and its resultant effect in shaping the hierarchic social behaviour and its manifestation in daily life. The chapter concludes presenting a numbers of case materials to show the different forms of factions in the village and their effect on social, political, and economic life of the villagers.

Finally, Chapter nine concludes the study discussing the contexts and processes of national identity making of Terai people presenting some account of style of imagining the nation. The chapter shows some inadequacies in the past efforts of national integration of Terai people and concludes proposing a new model of national integration.

Chapter: Two
Natural Environment

Nepal embraces one of the most diverse climatic ranges and physical environments of the world within a short span of 26°22' and 30°27' of the northern latitude.

Bista

(1991:11)

2.1   Location and Geography

Nepal is a small landlocked country between China and India and its geographical position has been traditionally characterised as being analogous to *duie dunga bichako tarul*, a yam caught between two rocks (Shrestha, 1990:5). Situated in the lap of Himalayas, the kingdom of Nepal is an elongated rectangular country of area 147181 sq.km with the population of about 22 millions. The country borders with India in the east, south, west and China in the north. Geographically, it is located in between the latitude 26°22' N to 30°27' North and longitude 80° 4' E to 88°12' East and elevation ranges from 90m. to 8848m. with the average length of 885 km east to west and average breadth about 193 km north to south (CBS, 1998).

Map 2.1 Nepal and her Neighbours

2. 2   Natural Regions and Human Adaptations

Nepal is commonly divided into three major natural regions based on elevation changes and ecological variation. They are: 1. the *madhes* (Tarai) region, 2. the *pahad* (Hill) region, and 3. the *himal* (Mountain or Himalayan) region. Although these divisions have mainly to do with altitude, they are equally different in the physical terrain and human adaptation as well.

Geographically, three parallel ranges sweep northwest to southeast across the country. First come the low foothill ridges of the Siwalik range (also known as the sub-Himalaya and the Churia hills), which rise abruptly from the plains (Tarai) to attain elevations of 1,000- 1,500 meters. Just to the north, some times so close as to merge with the foothills and otherwise only separated from them by the narrow longitudinal valleys of Inner Tarai, are the higher ridges of the Lesser Himalaya.

Here the crest of the Mahabharat Lekh, the leading edge of the Himalaya proper, sometimes surmounts 3,000 meters altitude. Beyond it is a 70-110 kilometres wide band of hill country known in Nepali as *pahad* or *pahar*, the hills, and which is often also called the middle hills

or the Nepal midlands. This hill country is the geographic, historical, and demographic heartland of Nepal. To the north, beyond the verdant, terraced slopes of the Nepal midlands, towers the massive upthrust of the Great Himalaya. In Nepali this range is known as the *himal*, the mountain, and the word has come to signify a realm distinct from rest of the country in its height, raggedness, climate, vegetation, and populace (Stevens, 1993:21-22)
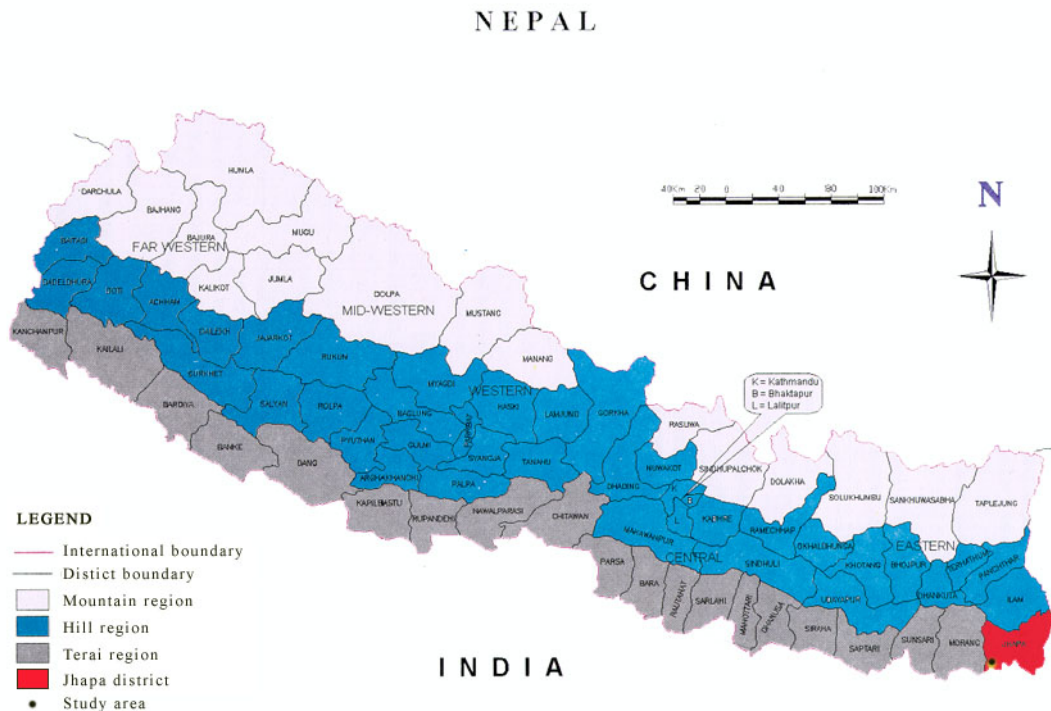
Map2.2 Natural Regions and Location of the Study Area

2.2.1   **Natural and Cultural Diversity**

This geographical multiplicity makes Nepal a country of diversity at multiple levels and of many kinds. Within its small physical framework several climatic zones on the earth are represented. Thus, there is northern range *himal* (Himalaya) covered with snow over the year where Nepal juts out at places into the Trans-Himalayan plateau. The middle range *pahad* (Hill) consists of the high fertile valleys and sharp mountain ridges. The southern range *madhes* (Tarai) is the part of Gangetic plain of alluvial soil and consists of dense forest and swamp areas. Accordingly climate ranges from the tropical heat of the lowlands to the arctic cold of higher altitude. The landscape too changes from paddy fields, grasslands, and jungles in the plain land of the Indian boundary to the Mount Everest, the highest peak of the world.

Despite its miniscule size, Nepal possesses innumerable places of breathtaking scenic beauty and an abundant variety of life. There are, in all, 6500 species of plant life, which include hundreds of indigenous orchids, rhododendrons and the beautiful Himalayan blue poppy (Chaudary, 1999). Over 900 species of birds have been sighted - that is one-tenth of all birds found in the world. The elusive snow leopard up in the high Himalaya and the ferocious three-tonne rhino of the Tarai are among the more than 180 species of mammals that inhabit the wilder side of the country (Ibid.).

The diversity of this natural setting is equally matched by ethnic, linguistic, religious, and other social variety. More than thirty languages (see linguistic map) and innumerable dialects are spoken belonging to distinct groups of Indo-European, Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Asiatic language families. In addition, more than 60 distinct *jats* and *jatis (*see ethnographic map*)* inhabit in the country (Gurung, 1998). The southern range is populated with the people of Indian origin and indigenous background. In terms of language, religion, social organisation and physical features, a different pattern appears in the mountain villages of the north and east where the Tibetan linguistic, cultural, and religious connections and Mongoloid physical type of the inhabitants are distinct traits.
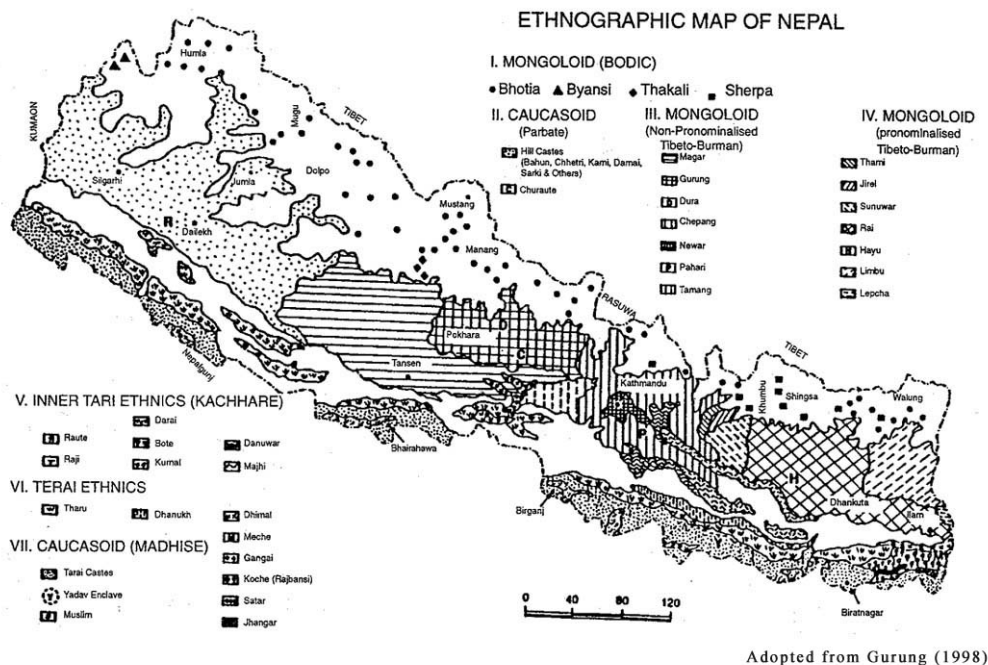
Map 2.3 Map of Nepal Showing Different Jats and Jatis

16
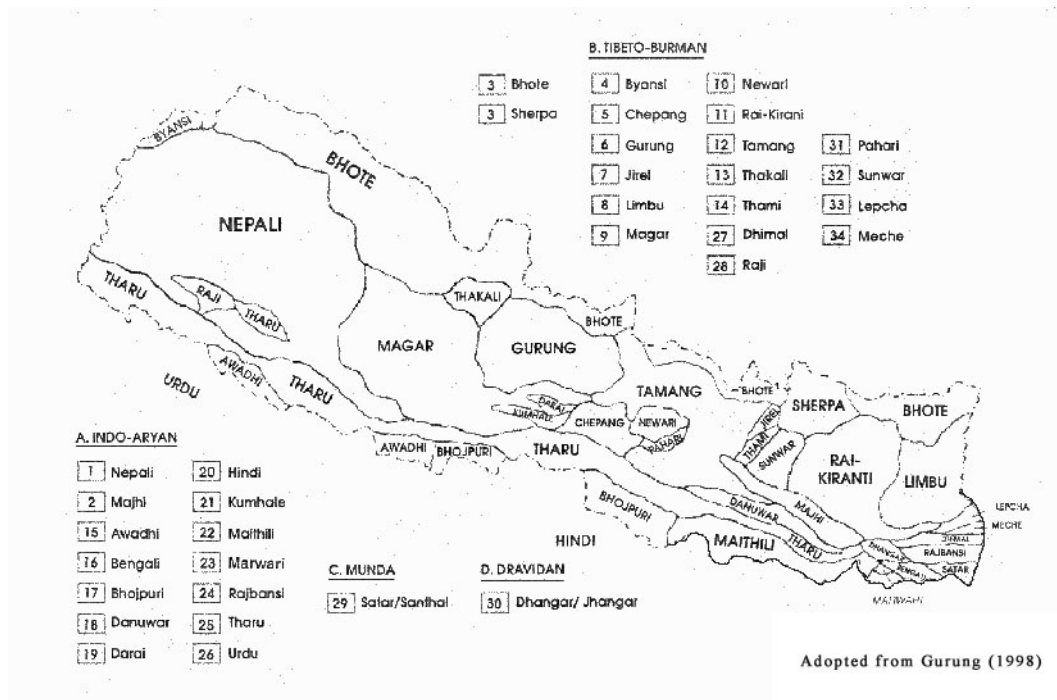
Map 2.4 Map of Nepal Showing Different Linguistic Groups

The symbiotic character of the relationship between biodiversity and cultural diversity has not been adequately explored as yet; the fact remains that a critical and dynamic relationship did exist between the local community, its natural surroundings, and its cultural identities.   Levine (1987: 75) has also observed Nepal in this line and writes:

> ''Nepal conventionally is divided into three zones of habitation, each occupied by a distinctive set of ethnic groups. These include a northern, high altitude zone people by groups of Tibetan language and culture; a middle altitude zone inhabited by, as Gerald Berreman puts it, 'the distinctively Nepalese people who combine Tibetan, Indian and probably certain aboriginal elements common to neither and deriving from cultures that may have preceded by both' (1963:297); and *pahade* in the valleys and a low land zone occupied by Hindu, Muslim, and certain long-resident populations, such as Tharu''.

Though this scheme seems to be oversimplified, it does serve as a general guide to understand the relationship among altitude, zone of habitation and distribution of types and socio-cultural system in Nepal. The model might mislead only if it is assumed in Kroberian tradition of 'cultural area' that cultural similarity is diagnostic of common origins and that populations sharing a common culture tend to be demographically closed and biologically perpetuating (Barth, 1969-9-11). However, though there is a wide variation within these three main regions, people usually identify and attach themselves with either of the regions.

The people who customarily lived or culturally adapted upon the territory distinguished traditionally with natural regions. For example, the eastern hills beyond river Sunkoshi were called *Kirant Pradesh*, the *Kirant* region. The regions in the west of Kathmandu Valley all the way to river Kali Gandaki was traditionally known as the *Gandaki Pradesh*. Similarly, the area west of this, to the river Karnali, was called *Magarat*, the region of the Magars and the region along the Karnali and beyond was called *Khasan*, the land of the *Khas*. In similar fashion, the high-altitude area, inhabited by people speaking dialects of Tibetan language, was traditionally known as *Bhot Pradesh*. The lower region is called the *Madhes, Tharuwan*, the land of the Tharus (Bista, 1991:12-13). To the east of the Khasan, lay "*Nepal*", inhabited by the Newari speaking people (Burghart, 1983:107).

This study discusses the cultural pluralism, one important dimension of social life in Nepal. It focuses on the dynamic low land region: the Tarai, specifically the easternmost part of Nepal Tarai. In this study, however, the Tarai or *madhes* refers to the plain land lying within the political boundary of Nepal. Likewise, the words *madhises* and *pahades* refer collectively to the people of Indian and hill origin inhabiting in Tarai respectively. And the word *adhibasi* is used to refer to the autochthonous inhabitants of Tarai. The word *taraibasi*, on the other hand, refers to the all inhabitants of Nepal Tarai irrespective of their origin. I will now describe some features of major regions in relation to human adaptation.

2.2.2   The Tarai Region

In the south of Nepal, lies a zone that stands much in contrast with the rest of the country, the Tarai plains. Stretching through almost the entire southern fringe of Nepal, the Tarai in some cases enters as much as 40 kilometres inland (see map).

The word Tarai, meaning as marshy ground or a meadow, is of relatively recent origin and only lately has appeared in public discourse in Nepal. The zone is also called *madhes* which is derived from the Sanskrit word *madhyadesh*[1]. The people inhabiting in this region have been collectively called *madhises* or *madheshiyas*. Since it has been mentioned in *mausmriti* and *vinayak pitak*, the famous Hindu and Buddhist treatise respectively, it has also been attached to the ancient historical traditions (Jha, 1993:1).

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[1] The plain country, referring to the Gangetic plain which lies between the Himalayas and Vindhya Mountains of classical Aryavart (Burghart, 1984:107).

Ecologically and culturally Tarai has been a zone of transition: from the Indo-Gangetic plain to the Himalayan foothills and from the plain culture to the hill culture. Beginning from the foothills of the Siwalik or *Churia* range of Himalayas, it stretches out up to the plain region of Indian States- Bangal, Bihar, and Utter Pradesh. This area between the Mechi River in the east and Mahakai River in the west makes up about 23 percent of the total land area of the country. With an average elevation of less than 100 meters, the average length and breadth of the Tarai are about 900km and 70km respectively.

Earlier, the entire Tarai used to be covered by thick forests. Malaria used to be rampant in this area. This acted as a natural barrier and assisted in the more than century-long isolation that was imposed on the country by the Rana rulers. Only few ethnic groups, Tharus throughout and Rajbanshis, Meches, Tahpuriyas, and Gangais in the far-eastern Tarai were the permanent inhabitants of this region (Gaige, 1975:59). Since the hill people were reluctant to settle in Tarai due to unfavourable malarial and climatic conditions, the Nepalese government between the 1860s and 1951 encouraged Indian people to settle in this region in order to increase revenue. Until the 1950s, culturally different from the hill people and geographically isolated from Kathmandu, plains people living in the Tarai were considered at least quasi-foreigners.

But after the introduction of quinine and DDT to eradicate malaria in the 1950s, the Tarai became a new frontier and huge tracts of jungles were cleared for settlement for the land-hungry hill people. It was to the Tarai, that the people migrated as population pressure pushed them out of their limited land holdings in the hill (Ojha, 1983).

Today, the Tarai in general has become a mosaic of different population groups. There are about 2.9 million caste Hindus of the both hills and plains, 1.4 million of ethnic groups of both the hills and plains and 1.3 million of 'others'. The 'others' includes three religious groups (Jain, Sikh and Muslim), one language group (Bengali), and people unspecified in the census (Gurung, 1998). The 34,019 square kilometres of the Tarai makes up 23 percent of the country's total area and it is resided by 46 percent of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 1991). Most of them are farmers and very few are involved in trade and business. Region of origin is still a strong element of identification among them. Thus, people employ terms like *pahade* (hill origin people), *madhise* (plain people of Indian origin) and *adhivasi* (indigenous ethnic group) to categorise the population of present day Tarai.

Now, no wonder that this region is the geographical zone with the highest concentration of people in the country. Until the 1960 it was known to be *kalapani* jungle (malarial rain forest) area with wild tigers, elephants, bears, and snakes. Today Tarai has become not only

a homeland for nearly half of the total population of the country, but also the bread basket of the country (Gurung, 1989; Shrestha, 1990). But it has been changed drastically over last 30-40 years, both ecologically and regarding its culture and population composition (Dahal, 1995).

Most of the Tarai's towns and cities evolved either as bases for agriculture, industry, or simply as bus terminals after the clearing up of forests. And except for the wildlife sanctuaries, and quintessential cultural heritage of the few plains people, this region has remained unattractive for tourists and academicians, without any rational reasons. There are, however, two places that the Tarai can be proud of - the pilgrimage sites of Janakpur and Lumbini. Janakpur is the birthplace of Sita, wife of the Hindu warrior-god Ram, while Lumbini is the birthplace of the Buddha.

2.2.3   The Hill Region

The hill region commonly called the *pahar* or *pahad* in Nepali, lies mostly between 600 and 3000 meters in altitude and includes the Kathmandu valley, the most fertile and urbanised area of the country. This area is where most Nepalese, regardless of whether they live in the country or elsewhere, can trace their ancestry from and hence can be called the Nepali heartland. Rivers criss-cross the hills in every direction and the people of diverse cultural and physical backgrounds inhabit almost the entire stretch of this hilly region. The Rais, Gurungs, Newars, Magars, Tamangs, Thakuris, Chhetris, Brahmin along a numbers of occupational castes and other ethnic groups are the inhabitants of this region. Agriculture supplemented with livestock husbandry is the predominant economic activities, but the region has food-deficit in production.

The hills have historically supported a large number of populations in Nepal. Despite of heavy out-migration, the hill region still comprises the second largest (46%) share of Nepal's total population (CBS, 1991). The hill landscape is both a natural and cultural mosaic; shaped by both geological force and human activity. Sculptured by human hands into massive complex of terraces, the region as a whole is extensively cultivated (Shrestha, 1990:7).

Despite of its remoteness and limited economic potential, the region has historically always been the political as well as cultural hearth of Nepal, with decision making power centralised to certain group especially hill high caste people in Kathmandu. Until 1950s "the Nepalese" were the 'hill folk' who spoke Nepali or hill languages such as Newari, Magar, Gurung (Gaige, 1975:88).

1.2.4   The Mountain Region

Running parallel to the Mahabharat Range on the northern side of the zone of hills and valley is 885 kilometres of the Himalayan mountain range. The mountain region, which is popularly known as *himal* or *bhot prades* among Nepalese, is situated above 4850 meters from sea level (Shrestha, 1990:5). The Himalaya forms the border with Tibet/China in the eastern part of Nepal but somewhere near central Nepal, this chain moves resolutely inland. There are seven other peaks in this region besides Everest that soar above 8000 meters.

Although the Himalayas have always attracted adventures and mystics, until recently they have offered little more than subsistence level living condition for most mountain people. Because it is naturally characterised by inclement and cold climatic and rocky topographic conditions, extensive human habitation, and economic activities are extremely arduous. Consequently, the region is very sparsely populated. Though it comprises 35 percent of the total land, it supports only 7 percent of the total population of the country (CBS, 1991). Only low lying valleys and river basins in this region are suitable sites for farming activities. Trans-humance pastoralism and trans-Himalayan trading (Furer- Hamendrof, 1975) and recently mountaineering and tourism (Stevens, 1993) are the major strategies of human adaptation in this region.

Chapter: Three
Formation of Nepali Society and Culture

Nepal's history is one of the syncretism of different cultures, religions, languages and people. .... This was a land of transition between the northern highland and southern low land as well as the occidental khasa[1] and oriental kirant[2].

Bista (1982: 6-9)

3.1   Background

Historically Nepal has always remained a meeting ground for diverse groups of different cultural traditions. Occasionally there have been attempts to formalise the diversity under the socio-cultural structure and hierarchy of one social and cultural group. But the composition and the nature of Nepali society has been such that ultimately each of those attempts has only been partially accepted (Bista, 1983). Nepali culture and society today is composite of several traditions, belief practices, and standards. It should be seen not as a monolithic culture but rather a mosaic of different intermixed cultural traditions. From its inception, it should be understood in pluralistic rather than monolithic form.

Nepali society and culture in a broad sense is the conglomeration of ideas, knowledge, values and practices of Tibeto-Burman speaking people of the north and Indo-Aryan speaking people of the south, who migrated to the hills and valleys of Nepal in different times of the ancient and medieval period from different areas of the two neighbouring countries China and India. Indo-Aryan speaking people are socially and politically dominant in most parts of Nepal. They inhabit the more fertile lower hills, river valleys, and plains. The second major group consists communities of Tibeto-Burman speaking people which inhabit the higher hills. A third and comparatively smaller stratum comprises a number of tribal communities such as the Tharus, the Dhimals, the Tajpuriyas, and Gangais and many other inhabitants of the Terai whose habitation preceded the advent of Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman elements.

Indo-Aryan speakers are basically the followers of Hindu or Islamic faith while the Tibeto-Burman speakers follow the Buddhism and shamanism. Again, the people are divided into a multitudes of clans and sub-clans, castes and sub-castes and groupings so numerous that

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[1] The autochthonous *kshatriyas* of the Himalayas, whose land extended from Kumaon (India) in the west to Nuwakot (west to Kathmandu Valley) in the east (Hitchcock, 1978).

[2] Traditionally, they were the inhabitants of the area east to Kathmandu valley who called themselves *khwambo* and *limbu*, but whom the *khas*, following Sanskrit usage called *kirant* (Burghart, 1984). According to Bista (1982:6) the Kirant people were connected with the people all along the eastern Himalayas and beyond it into China

Giuseppe Tucci, a French anthropologist once said that the ethnographic study of Nepal, despite the many researches undertaken, is still one of the most complex in the world (Tucci in Pradhan, 1991).

3.1   Tibeto- Burmese Connections

The ancient migration of the nomadic Tibeto-Burman speaking people from Tibet began during the unrecorded period of Nepal's history. Available oral narration, legends, and linguistic data, however, suggest that there were at least three distinct wave of migration into the country from the north (Rana and Malla, 1973 cited in Shrestha, 1990:70-71). The first wave came from the eastern and central part of Mongolia, especially ancestors of the present day groups such as the Rais, Limbus and other Kiranti groups who are concentrated in the eastern hills. The second wave according to these scholars, most probably comprised the Gurungs and Magers whose geographical domain is found in the central hill of present day Nepal. Finally, the third wave, a fairly recent one, brought the distinctly 'Tibeto-Himalayan' people such as the Dolpos in the western hills and Sherpas and Lepchas in the eastern hills (Ibid.). It is believed that these different groups entered into the hills and valleys of Nepal from the cold and dry inner Himalayan region of Tibet through a natural process of migration seeking economic benefits and suitable climatic condition for their traditional occupation (Gaige, 1975).

The Tibeto-Burman people were basically nomadic pastoralists and had primitive knowledge of semi-permanent agricultural practices in the early days of settlement in Nepal. All the groups probably were practising some slash-and- burn agriculture when they first settled in different parts of Nepal. Their economy, however, was more dependent upon pastoralism, with yaks, sheep, goat, and cattle being their main source of subsistence. The cultivation was probably limited to dry open lands near pasture grass lands, with millet and potato being their main staple food, supplemented with selected forest products (Stevens, 1993; Caplan, 1970; Mcdougal, 1979).

The northward migration of the Hindus of southern plains had major effects on the Nepalese's socio-economic transformation. Though the Tibeto-Burman speaking people were already settled in the different parts of hill areas of Nepal much earlier than the Hindus from the south, they were technologically primitive and their mode of production was communal. The production system of Tibeto-Burman people was generally characterised by pastoral and swidden types of economic activities. The production relations were based on kinship relations and communal alliances rather that class and occupational specialisation (Caplan, 1970). The property relations were characterised by communal land ownership, known as the

kipat system. The Hindu immigrants with the advanced technology of farming and class-structured social institution of the south increasingly asserted their socio-economic, cultural, and political dominance over the northern immigrants. For example, during a century and half since their first migration to *Limbuan*, eastern hills of present days Nepal, members of high caste Hindus had not only succeeded in establishing their ritual superiority, but their economic, social and political dominance as well (Ibid.).

The Kathmandu valley, which was the home of the Newars, a group who spoke a Tibeto-Burman language, was an exception to this pattern of Indo-Aryan domination of the hills, because Newari society had become stratified on the basis of Hindu caste hierarchy long before the less developed hill society (Brown, 1996:2). Hinduism had already begun to spread into the valley as early as the fifth century, and it gradually merged with and to a significant extent displaced the Newari people's previous devotion to Buddhism and shamanism (Gellener, 1992). But during the later part of fourteenth century, King Jayasthitiraj Malla tried to purify religious practice in Kathmandu Valley by introducing strict and compulsory caste principles and conduct according to the *Manusmriti* code of Hindus (Bista, 1991). He made many caste specific rules regarding food, dresses, house types, and social interaction, but they were not so successful. People were ready to abandon wearing sacred threads and their higher rank in the new caste hierarchy. But they did not agree to renounce traditional practices and continued their old habit of eating buffalo meat and drinking alcohol, as required by their traditional festivals and worship practices (Ibid.) However, the Newars of Kathmandu Valley were exposed with a caste system of their own, separate from hill caste system and that of the Indian plains.

Since the Newari culture was notably urban, and since they had a high degree of specialisation of labour, one can assume that the caste scheme based on profession provided some modernising measures to the economy of Kathmandu Valley. Even today one can enumerate a numbers of active professions according to caste: e.g. priest, astrologer, and painter, brazen worker, copper worker, silver, and gold smith, gardener, washer man, tailor, butcher, sweeper, and many others. Bista (1983:12), however, has argued that with this development the Malla kings had made their society weaker and vulnerable to the influence of much stronger and aggressive thrusts of the *khas* language and its speakers.

3.2   Indo-Aryan Connections

The first Indo-Aryan peoples, known as *khas,* migrated from the west and south into what is now west Nepal, around two thousand years ago (Bista, 1991:15). Later on, somewhat less than thousand years ago (Gaige, 1975) a similar wave of Indo-Aryan people entered into

Nepal from Indian border districts. These migrants were mostly Brahmins and Rajputs, fleeing from the religious crusade of invading Muslims and their subsequent tyranny against the Hindus (Shrestha, 1990). These migrants were clearly of two types. One kind of migrants was the defeated rulers of the Indian state and their adherents. They migrated into Nepal to seek a safe place for their political asylum. The another type of migrants were the plains Hindus of India who migrated into Nepal to keep up their religion, caste and other cultural practices. When the Muslim rulers established their rules over the defeated Indian states these people felt their religion and caste system threatened and migrated to Nepal. These types of migrants generally settled down in the Terai districts of Nepal. In addition to these earlier migrants, there are relatively recent migrants of this category who were encouraged by the government of Nepal or its agents to move into the Terai for settlement.

But those who had migrated into Nepal to seek political asylum they entered into the hider land of Nepal. In the course of time they evolved as the (petty) rulers of the different petty states of Nepal during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The *basi rajya* (twenty-two kingdom) of Karnali region and *choubishi rajya*(twenty-four kingdoms) of Gandaki region gradually came under the rule of the *khas/thakuri* people, the descendants of the early Indo-Aryan migrants of Indian plains. The Indo-Aryan hill group, commonly known as *parbate* or *pahade* or simply *khas* adopted a simple model of Hindu caste hierarchy, suitable to hill economy and social structure: Brahmins were at the top, *thakuri* and *chhhetri* at the middle, and a few artesian or occupational castes were placed at the bottom.

The *khas* elite, which later formed the nucleus of the traditional Nepali elite, included three main elements. First, there was the *thakuri* (clan of ruling present monarch) aristocracy. Second, there was the priestly Brahmin caste whose members were known in Nepal as *bahun*. Third, there was the *chhetri* caste whose members held the ritual status of warriors (Bista, 1967:4 cited in Brown, 1996). The *khus kura*, which was the language of this elite (Burghart, 1984) and which is now commonly known as Nepali, was to become the official language of the Nepali state.

The caste model-which had state backing, was based on the principle of ritual supremacy of Brahmins not only in religious matter but also as legitimisers of social order within its division of labour and Rajput/*thakuri* rulership. The last historic incident according to Bista (1991:37) was when the Brahmins had Jung Bahadur Kunwar, a *khas*; adopt the title of Rana, developing a fictitious ancestry of Rajput origin from the southern plains. However, the ultimate decision on caste matters always remained on the sovereign ruler, not on the Brahmins (Hofer, 1978).

As mentioned earlier, high caste Indo-Aryan people migrated from their power base in the west of modern-day Nepal to eastward through the hills, establishing control over Tibeto-Burman communities (Pradhan 1991:162). The eastern Tibeto-Burman communities were subjugated partly as a result of conquest and partly as result of intermarriages between Hindu and tribal elites. Under the various pressure of hegemonic political culture of Hindus and through a desire to integrate themselves, Tibeto-Burman groups then adopted many of the values and practices of the high caste Indo-Aryans. They thereby became enmeshed in a social structure which legitimised the rule of the Indo-Aryan elites by placing them at the top of a religious and political hierarchy (Sharma, 1978). This expansion of political and economic power of the high caste Hindus, and the contemporary penetration of subject cultures by the Hindu religion, forms one of the majors dynamic processes in Nepali history and is sometimes refereed to as 'hinduization' and 'sanskritization'(Sharma, 1975), 'nepalization'(Bista, 1983) and 'internal colonization' (Bhattachan, 1998).

3.3   Emergence of Nepali Society and Culture

In the course of time, however, the people of both connections influenced each other in many aspects of their ways of life. They also shared some cultural traits from their co-inhabitants, although they were culturally different in many respects. Through the long lasting contact both groups lost some of their old tenets of culture and ways of life and adopted some new ones. As a result of long interaction, a new cultural tradition evolved. This new cultural stream can be called as Nepali culture (Bista, 1982; Chauhan, 1989). The Nepali culture was not exactly the prototype of the culture prevailing of southern Hindus or northern Tibeto-Burman people of India and Tibet, respectively. Rather it was the blending of both. Hill Hindus of Nepal equally recognised the descendants of a high caste Hindu and his Tibeto-Burman wife granting him the sacred thread and providing *khatri chhetri* caste status. In this regard, Sharma, 1978:10) writes

> ''Today Nepal has inherited a people of mixed race. Its Hindus carry a great deal of tribal blood
> in their ethnic make-up. This is but one form of syncretism that has taken place in Nepal, the other
> being the religious syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism. The significance of a socially
> accepted racial intermingling like this would probably not mean much for people in other regions
> of India, but it does bestow a distinct ethnic character to the Nepalese, giving them a further basis
> for asserting their independent national identity''.

However, this was not the case for the migrants who settled down in parts of Nepal from where it was easy for them to maintain regular contact with their former native lands and their former relatives and collaterals, such migrants remain culturally akin to their old native people. For instance, one can look at the relatively isolated cultural tradition of Sherpas and

Doplo people of Himalaya and the relatively unaffected ancient cultural traditions of the Terai inhabitants of Nepal. They could constantly maintain their contacts with their old kin across the borders and were able to preserve their old cultural practices without notable changes. Gellner (1992: 11) has appropriately written that 'the northernmost valleys, though politically within Nepal, are ethnically and culturally Tibetan. Similarly, at the other end of the country it is equally true that a political and cultural boundary fails to coincide'.

Thus, Nepal presents a multiplicity of social and cultural life forms within its comparatively small geographical boundaries. These life forms display enormous variation in terms of race/caste and ethnicity, language, religion, region/ecology, and economy. Such differences make Nepal a small world itself. The huge cultural diversity both in terms of socio-cultural practice and structure that has characterised Nepal from the very beginning of her existence helped to raise a plural society and culture.

Chapter: Four
Nepal: From a Nascent State to a Nation-State in the Making

4.1   Emergence of the Nepali State

The demographic history of Nepal, as discussed in earlier chapters was the creation of two main populations of Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman origin. Roughly speaking, the earliest inhabitants were the Tibeto-Burman speaking groups, who entered particular regions of the Himalayan range and remained distinctive communities (Caplan, 1991:308). They were followed much later by Hindu immigrants, many of them fleeing the Muslim invasions of north India. The latter, who migrated in small groups, settled in a number of principalities mainly in the hills west of Kathmandu under nominal chieftains claiming Rajput descent. During the first half of 18th century, the area was divided into more than eighty petty states of floating political boundaries and sovereignty often referred as 'principalities' (Stiller, 1973). At the later decade of that century the ruler of one of these principalities, Gorkha, grew powerful enough to undertake the conquest and unification of all those territories and communities which today comprise the kingdom (Stiller, 1975). Thus, emergence of Nepal as a modern political state is of relatively recent historical episode, when the Gorkha kings politically unified Nepal by all means; through marriage, alliance, diplomacy, agreement and military assault (Ibid.). The following chapter focuses on the emergence of Nepal as a modern nation-state and its relation to conquested regions and communities with special reference to Tarai region.

4.1.1   Early Days of Unification

The conquest of Nepal's valley kingdoms, which took a total of 25 years of planning, siege, and diplomacy, was the highlight of this conquest. The conquest of Kathmandu Valley and its surrounding tiny states, creating a larger Gorkh Kingdom, was the consolidate efforts of the Khas, Bahuns, Gurungs and Magars under the leadership of Prithvi Narayan Shah (1722-1775), the king of Gorkha (Bista, 1991:26). He was the architect of this conquering project and campaigned restlessly to unite the various kingdoms that dotted the geographical area defined by modern Nepal.

At the time of the consolidation of the country the king recognised and respected the different traditions of tribal groups which he bought under the authority of Gorkha. For instance, he authorised to continue the local *kipat* system of land tenure even after the conquest of *Limbuwan* (Limbu country) of eastern Nepal. Furthermore, he treated all the

religious realms as being equivalent universes and respected the tutelary deities of each conquered realm. After conquering the Kathmandu Valley kingdoms King Prithivi Narayan received the blessing of *Taleju*, the tutelary deity of the Malla rulers, and provided state patronage. Similarly, he accepted the divine power of the *Kumari*, the Newar living goddess and continued to state patronage to celebrate the *jatra* of the *Kumari* in each year.

The work begun by King Prithvi Narayan was continued by his descendants. At the greatest extent (between 1806 and 1815) the Nepali (then known as the Gorkhali) Empire covered an area at least a third more than its present confines. However, the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 with British India confined the boundaries of present day Nepal.

4.1.2   The Rana Rule

In 1847, General Jung Bahadur Kunwar secured a position of power and became the prime minister. He took the title of Rana for himself and his family, imitating the Indian Rajput style. He then arrogated the right of his family to rule by decree as prime ministers and relegated the monarchy to the backstage. The post of prime minister was transferred from brother to brother. This oligarchy of the Ranas lasted for 104 years, until 1950.

The oligarchy organised trading monopolies and state enterprises and they treated the country as their private property, exploiting the resources mainly for their own personal benefits. They spent a lot of state revenue on unproductive purposes, for example on building ostentatious palaces of foreign (especially English) design in order to dominate Newar architecture and their unique styles of the Valley. In addition, the Ranas were the principle recipients of vast land grants from the state. Jung Bahadur and those after him used the existing exploitative land holding system to amass fortunes and to give themselves unquestionable political control over the country (Regmi, 1976). On the other hands, the general public remained under the chain of poverty, illiteracy, and political marginalization.

Anyone with a concern for the society at large and the future of the country had to be the enemy of the ruling Ranas. Little effort was made to promote real patriotism and loyalty towards the state of the Nepal. In fact, an enlightened patriotism was punished by the ruling Ranas as they felt threatened by it. National pride and sentiment were very much diluted and essentially centred around very narrow and limited local areas kin groups.

The oligarchy ended in 1950 when a democratic movement with the help of a popular armed revolt forced the Ranas to give up their power. King Tribhuwan (the present king's grandfather) was also an active actor of that movement. Political parties based on different

ideologies then openly entered the Nepali political scene. The first post-1950 government was a coalition between the Ranas and the Nepali Congress, the party which had led the revolt. The coalition floundered in no time due to a split in the Nepali Congress.

Then followed a period of political instability were governments successively were formed and fell. It needs to be noted here that none of the governments constituted in this period had a popular mandate; their formation was purely a matter of the leader's loyalty to the palace and the king's pleasure. In order to end this uncertainty in the political scene, general elections were held in 1958. The Nepali Congress came to power with an overwhelming majority.

4.1.3   The Panchayat Regime

But in 1960 King Mahendra, the present king's father, engineered what has been called a 'palace coup'. Moving swiftly he banned all political parties. The leaders- ruling as well as opposition- were thrown into prison; power was consolidated into his own hands; and a political system called the partyless *panchayat* system was adopted.

Panchayat was a system of government that was composed of king (absolute monarchy) and four tires of elected councils (*panchayats*) on village, district, zonal and national levels of government. Nonetheless, the principal characteristics of Nepal's political order in the *panchayat* period were inherited unchanged from the Rana era (Brown, 1996:51). As with the Ranas, the political culture of the *panchayat* regime was characterised by hierarchy, *chahari*, and corruption in a variety of disguises (Ibid.) Though it was considered as *muluk ko hawapani anukul ko baybastha* (a political system suitable to the soil and climate prevailing in the country) by its apologists, it sustained only for three decades. However, its campaign of *desh nirman* (national building), *desh bikas* (development of the country) and *desh anubhawa* (feeling of the nation), and its efforts to establish international relations of early sixties was a remarkable stage in the making of Nepal as a nation-state.

4.1.4   The Multiparty Democracy

In 1990 the Nepali Congress and the Communists joined hands for the first time, trying to overthrow the Panchayat system. During a campaign, at times bloody, that lasted for a month and a half, it became evident that the Panchayat system could not last long. King Birendra, recognising this fact, bowed to popular will and lifted the ban on political parties. The present multiparty democratic system of government was established.

Despite the 1990 revolution there has been no clear break with the past. Instead, democracy has disguised the continued influence of Nepal's traditional elites and has re-legitimised their power because the inegalitarain social and economic system is now sanctioned through the ballot box (Brown, 1996:211). And it has failed to alter it precisely because the architects of Nepali democracy never intended the new political system to restructure the social and economic order.

Comparatively better education, and increased means of transportation and communication of the *panchayat* era, has contributed to rising levels of political and cultural consciousness among the various groups of Nepal. Democratisation since 1990 speeded this process and, since the transition to democracy, *janajatis* from the hills and the people of Tarai have found a new voice. The official concept of 'Nepaliness' constructed during Rana and Panchayat periods ignored many dimensions of socio-cultural forms of the country, and bore little resemblance to the reality of democratic Nepali society. But in the whole 10 years of democratic Nepal those arguing in favour of a democratic regime to improve the situation, increasingly are astonished by observing the same content into another bottle.

4.1.5   The Question of Nepali Nationality

While the political entity called Nepal has existed all these years, the preoccupation with the national question that Nepal is a country of Nepalese people dates only from the early 1930s in the Rana period. Prior to that time the 'Kingdom of Nepal' was an outsider's[1] designation for what the so-called Nepalese people referred to as the *gorhka sarkar* (Gorkha Government). After that time, the kingdom began to refer to itself officially as Kingdom of Nepal, thereby bringing state and territory, people and language together as a single politico-cultural entity (Burghart, 1994:3-4). However, for many years, and even today, being Nepali means different things to different Nepalese. We need to be constantly aware of the gap that may exist between official discourse and actual feelings of a population divided along ethnic, caste, and regional lines. For instance, a Tarai woman, though she is a Nepali citizen, used 'Nepali' to designate only *pahadiya* people while discussing with me during my fieldwork. For some people of the old generation from hills and mountains, even today 'Nepal' retains its old meaning of Kathmandu Valley, not the country of which they are citizens.

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[1] The present word ''Nepali'' for the language of people of Nepal is derived from British usage based on their appellation of the Kingdom of Gurkha as the Kingdom of Nepal in the nineteenth century. But it became official from 1930, when the Gorkha Government began to refer to its kingdom as the ' realm of Nepal' (rather than the 'entire possessions of the Gorkha king'), and also began to refer to its official language as Nepali (Burghart; 1984:118-119). However, the first use of 'Nepali' as a name of language was probably made by J.A. Aryton, Assistant Professor of Fort William Collage in Calcutta, whose first grammar of Nepali language was published in 1820 (Pradhan, 1991:203)

It means, at the zenith of the Gorkha conquests in the early nineteenth century, Nepal had become a unified kingdom. It was territorially integrated in the sense that it was ruled from the Kathmandu valley. But it was merely a state, not a unified society or nation-state, in a real sense. A 'state' requires only a central government, people, territory, and political sovereignty. In the slightly more abstract notion of 'nation-state', a people sees a common destiny of remaining together, despite differences in language, culture, religion and political ideology (Sharma;1992). This study is an attempt to search for elements or constituents of the 'common destiny of remaining together', with special reference to the people of eastern Tarai who, in addition to being Nepali, have their own distinct language, culture, religion and ways of life rather different from the mainstream Nepalese.

4. 2 The Tarai and its Identity Problem in a National Perspective

Dahal (1999) has asserted that Tarai or *madesh* has no space for national identity despite the fact that the it covers a physical area equal to Israel, contributes nearly two-thirds to the national GDP, elects 43 percent of the total parliamentarians and supports nearly half of the total population. This section presents a brief history of Tarai and reviews the policies of different regimes toward this region. In particular I will discuss why Tarai was populated by Indian immigrants while hill people migrated to India rather than to Tarai in the Rana and post- Rand periods.

4.2.1   Early History of Tarai

Principalities like Vijaypur and Makawanpur of the pre-unification period had controlled the territories in the Tarai, but it was then covered with dense forest and sparsely populated. The political identity of Nepalese Tarai until the mid 19th century was not permanently confined to any particular state. In the 16th century, the Sen Kings of Makawanpur in the central hill region of Nepal conquered the eastern Tarai from kings of plains origin whose locus of power was in what is now Bihar (Stiller, 1973). During the mid 18th century it was under the administrative control of the kings of Makawanpur, Vijayapur, and the *chubise rajya*[2] (Burghart, 1984: 107). King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the unifier of modern Nepal annexed the eastern as well as central region of Tarai to Nepal in 1774.

The Tarai region, whether in control of Sen or Shah Kings, was under the suzerainty of the '*Sultanate*' of Moughul emperors and the East India Company of India. Therefore they had to pay rent for utilising the resources of this region. Accordingly, the Gurkha rulers had to

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[2] League or lordship of twenty- four kingdoms of central Nepal during that period.

pay large sized elephants to the British Government of India as a tribute for these lands annually. However, the provision of paying tribute was annulled by article 7 of the Treaty of 1801 (Jha, 1993: 4-5).

After the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1816), under the provision of Treaty of Sugauli, December 1816, the British took over the entire Tarai, Mechi River in the east and Mahakali River in the west were fixed as Nepal's boundaries. A year later the eastern and central Tarai from the Mechi River to the western Rapti River was returned to Nepal. In 1858, when Nepal under the leadership of Janga Bahadur Rana helped the British during the Indian Mutiny, the western Tarai called *naya muluk* was returned (Gaige, 1975: 24-25). Thus, from that very time, the Tarai Region has been under the absolute sovereignty of the Kingdom of Nepal and has undergone the various stages of political isolation, economic stagnation, and the problem of making identity and being integrated in a national framework.

4.2.2   Policy of Isolation

Hami madhesh basi haru lai kahile kainhi Nepal ma Indian ra Bharat ma Nepali bhanine hunda dohoro vedvao ko mar ma pareka chhainu (We plains people sometimes find ourselves in a vulnerable state of being seen as Indians in Nepal and Nepalis in India, thereby facing double discrimination) says a *madhise* school teacher of Gouriganj. His narration is partly due to the existence of a wide gap between the hills, or *pahad*, and the lowlands, or *madhes* in the south during the Rana period. For a long time after its annexation the rulers of Kathmandu treated the *madhes* as a colonial possession and they never really considered it to be culturally a part of Nepal. Since there were few trade links between the plains and the hills, connection between the two regions was difficult during much of the nineteenth century. The unofficial routes between them were banded or blocked even within the same country. Such attitudes towards the Tarai among the rulers in Kathmandu developed when Nepal lost most of her Tarai regions during Anglo-Nepali wars and received back certain territory in later years. Then the plains began to be considered essential for defence and as buffer between the homeland of the *parbatiya* elite and the British in India (Brown, 1996:8-9).

The policy of 'closed state' or we may call it the 'policy of isolation' adopted by Rana rulers by the end of 20th century, became an anachronism damaging to the development of national integration (Rana, 1998). The failure of the Rana regime to develop a national network of transport and communication relating to the British programme of expanding railway lines to the south of Nepal meant that the effective economics links between western

and eastern Tarai were merged directly with the Indian economy. And the regions already in isolated from mainstream remained more isolated economically, too.

Even though the economic conditions of hill people were not good and were rapidly deteriorating because of an exploitative land tenure system and compulsory labour obligation associated with it (Stiller, 1976). Hill men did not migrate to the Tarai. They rather joined the army of Ranjit Singh in the Indian Punjab as mercenaries (Bruce, 1928 cited in Ojha, 1983). The migration of Nepali hill people to the Indian state of Assam and other Northeast proveniences for land reclamation, which also had malarial climate, raises the question: why did they migrate to these areas in India rather to settle in Tarai? Obviously, the policies of the Kathmandu government towards *madhes* - rather than malaria and other climatic factors - were determinant against settlement of hill people in the Tarai. Though several regulations and acts were enacted to encourage cultivation of land in Tarai, one law interestingly reflects government policies towards *madhesh*. It was promulgated at the time of King Surendra Birbikram Shah (1847-1881)[3], and states:

> *Raitis* are to be invited from all sectors (irrespective of whether it be Nepal or India) to cultivate the land in Morang[4] district. Necessary items needed (bhoto potadi) for agriculture is to be facilitated and land should be given to him for cultivation. Any *rait*i, if he has arrears of payment to government or loans repayable to other individuals, if he settles in the area (cultivates the land) or up to that period when he cultivates the land, neither the government nor his creditors shall force him to pay the arrears or the loans. Property earned by him should be given for his livelihood and if there is surplus income, the office of that region or the *amal* should prepare a document for his land revenue and loans. A slave, who had already settled in one year in Muglan (India), but returns in Morang district and cultivates land, the creditors should not hold him for loans. But if a slave of Gorkha Raj has settled in Morang due to the similar situation, he could be hold by the creditors and they could sell him, there is no penalty (P.36)

This document clearly shows that during the Rana period the government tried to attract settlers to Tarai from different areas and particularly from India. While the hill people were reluctant to settle there and wanted to migrate to India, all the lands opened were occupied by the Indian immigrants. Economist Durga Ojha (1983:22) argued despite of liberal polices of land grand like those mentioned above- that the hostile climate and endemic malaria could be the major causes but not only the factors limiting settlement of the Tarai by the hill people; the extremely exploitative land tenure system in the country and the economic opportunities available in India were more important factors. He further argued that if the

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[3] *Shri Pancha Surendra Birbikram Shah Devaka Sahsan Kalma Baneko Muluki Ain* (Legal Code enacted during the regin of King Surendra Birbikram Shah Dev), Ministry of law and Justice, Kathmandu, 2022 (1965), Cited in Dahal (1983)

[4] It was a large district of eastern Tarai including the present districts of Jhapa and Morang.

opportunities outside the country had not been available, continued population pressure and decreasing economic opportunities in the hills would have inevitably increased their settlements in the Tarai.

On the other hand, geographer Harka Gurung (1999:188) has seen the phenomena differently and argued that such migration trajectory had both ecological rationale and political acquiescence. He agreed that Tarai used to be an inhospitable land for hill migrants due to endemic malaria. And here was no restriction on border crossing for livelihood as each state encouraged outside settlers due to the open border between these countries. Accordingly, Nepal invited yeoman farmers from the Company territory to its Tarai, while the British welcomed Nepalese migrants in their hill domains.

However, both scholars did not answer properly why Nepalese highlanders migrated to the similar area of India rather than turning to the nearby Tarai within Nepal. My argument in this context is that the ruling people in Kathmandu always regarded the Tarai as "different" and set a policy of isolation rather than integration. They encouraged the hill people to join British and Indian armies rather than providing facilities for them to settle into Tarai.

For instance, many observers have noted that the policies and hidden attitudes towards Tarai (in relation to land, revenue collection, language culture and other administrative purposes) in the Rana and to some extent the post Rana period were segregative in nature rather than encouraging national unity (Stiller, 1976; Regmi, 1971; Whelpton, 1997; Dahal, 1983; Gaige, 1975; Hoftun and et. al, 1999 and Jha, 1994). Concrete evidence is that until 1950 it was even necessary to have a passport to travel from the Tarai into the Kathmandu Valley (Gaige, 1975; Brown, 1996). As the result of the policy of isolation, the identification of the Tarai with this fledgling nation-state remained glaringly incomplete. This was the major integration problem handed down from the Rana period to post 1950 Nepal.

The Tarai was divided from the hill both administratively and socially. Even the ethnic composition of the two areas differed in many respects. Different administrative units called *madhesh bandobasta adda (*Tarai land administrative office) were established to administer the Tarai (Ojha: 1983; Dahal, 1983). This led to little or no interaction between Tarai people and hill people. It was during the Panchayat period that the country was divided into zonal and regional administrative units combining the neighbouring areas of hill and Tarai. But its formulation was soon manipulated in favour of hill people. Since administrative and constituency boundaries coincides, Tarai politicians were unsatisfied on the allocation of electoral constituencies in the new divisions. They claimed that constituencies were drawn to ensure that the hill people were in the majority in as many constituencies as possible.

The physical geography itself was also hostile to development integration between these two regions. Due to the harsh landscape, intercepted by north -south river system, there was little Tarai- to- Tarai or hill-to-Tarai exchange (either interns of commodities or labour) to link hill people with Tarai. Nonetheless, it was the policy of isolation rather than geographical location that prevented people of the Tarai from asserting Nepali national identity. Even today the elite in Kathmandu still views the Tarai as something of a hinterland, though they are well aware that the main part of Nepal's agricultural and industrial wealth is coming from there. Furthermore, as the result of century-long isolation, the majority of Tarai people has retained strong cultural and social link with India, even after the steady immigration from the hill regions in the 1970's and 80's. There is a continual free flow of people back and forth, and inter-marriage between Nepalese and Indians is common due to the open border between the two countries.

The Panchayat government recognised Nepali as the national language and the *pahade* culture was actively promoted as a dominant symbol of Nepali identity. Nepalese citizens from the Tarai were suspected in their loyalties of really being Indian. Accordingly, people from the Tarai were discriminated against when they applied for certain government jobs like in army and police (Burghart, 1984:4-5). It is clear that Nepalese citizens were not to be entrusted with matter of national security. An Orwellian view on 20th century communism is seems to be appropriate to describe the case here: 'All persons are Nepali, but some are more so than others'.

4.2.3   Policy of Exploitation

Rulers in Kathmandu in that period always regarded the Tarai as an area where the exploitation of resources could provide the means to run the state, the military machine and provide for the well-being of the ruling elite. But they relied on Indian immigrants rather than Nepali hill people to provide the man power with which to exploit the Tarai resources. First they invited people from India to settle and many Indian peasants from Bihar - for instance, the Yatav[5]- settled and cleared the forest in the eastern part of the Tarai (Ghimire, 1992).

These two policies made the Tarai inhabitants adopt a more Indian orientation in social and cultural life. The economic links built by the railways, and the accessibility of Indian educational institutions across the border, strengthened the ties between Tarai inhabitants and their neighbours across the border, especially in the absence of educational and

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[5]A politically and numerically very important caste in the politics of Indian state of Bihar. Even today a Yadav- supported party is in the state government of Bihar.

economic opportunities in Nepal. It also made the Tarai a more sophisticated and aware region than the hills apart from the Kathmandu Valley. This awareness, nonetheless, made the Tarai alive against much discrimination.

Large amounts of lands including forest products were granted to the supporters of Rana rulers when the strategic significance of the Tarai began to decline due to changing world order. An active policy of encouraging Indian immigrants rather than Nepali hill people was followed when it opened as a new settlement area of the Nepali state. In other words, the Tarai land granted to the loyalties of Rana rulers was settled and cultivated, not by Nepalese, but by Indians (Rose 1971:19). Such policy clearly indicates that Rana ruler's intention was not to integrate but to isolate the Tarai from the hills. In addition, local administrators were encouraged to attract Indian settlers, and revenue collectors were often obligated to settle a specified numbers of immigrants every year (Regmi, 1971: 143 Cited in Ojha, 1983). Over the decades this policy lead to the creation of an unassimilated, Indian ethnic minority within Nepali territory, which came to be feared by the elite as a fifth column preparing the ground for India's domination of Nepal (Brown, 1996:10).

However, when the economic potential of the Tarai was expanded development activities like malaria eradication and construction of the east-west highway, Tarai became safety a valve to transfer the overpopulation of *pahad* (hill) through a government sponsored land settlement program, and it became a desirable destination for spontaneous migration from the *pahad*. By 1980s the 'typical hill country with a classical mountain economy was in the road of transforming into a predominantly plain, subtropical and urban nation state' (Goldstein et al, 1983:62). Such phenomena provide enough grounds to study the formation of complex society in Tarai which directly or indirectly are threatening the different traditions of Tarai people and have created problems in making their identities.

4.3   Past Efforts of Cultural Management and Integration of Tarai

1. '*yo asali hindusthan ho''*(this is the pure land of Hindus)[6].
   - Prithivi Narayan Shah, the unifier of Nepal.

2. Nepali language should be the medium of instruction.... No other language should be taught, even optionally in the primary school.... If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as basic language then other language will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will result[7].
   - National Education Planning Commission, Nepal, 1956.

3. All *panchas* (Panchayat workers) are Nepalese and all Nepalese are *panchas*.
   - A widely stated political narration of Panchayat era.

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[6] Cited in Gurung (1998:188).
[7] Cited in Gaige (1975: 108).

The national process during Rana and Panchayat period was aimed at homogenising heterogeneity through state backed policies. Elements of heterogeneity - ideas, objects, languages, cultures, and religions were to be assimilated while the link between these elements and their usefulness for the nation was devaluated and denied.

4.3.1   Hinduization

Sanskritization or *hinduization* was the approach of integration of Nepali societies and cultures until the downfall of Panchayat regime. This process was a state priority already during the early days of unification, when King Prithivi Narayan Shah declared his kingdom as pure *hindusthan*. National integration in that period was more or less equated with the standardisation of religious and social practices specifically of hill high caste groups. A common perception of social values and attitudes as well as a limited degree of upward social and economic mobility was provided to the rest of the population of the country. Consequently, some high caste Hindu groups - noticeably Brahmin and Chhetri of the hills have succeeded to maintain cultural hegemony in every spheres of life. In the words of Bhattachan (1998:117) ''they have internally ''colonised'' the indigenous peoples of Nepal, and want to continue to do so in future''. He adds ''Bahuns and Chhetris have used the instruments of unification, the 104-year old autocratic Rana regime, the 30-years autocratic partyless Panchayat political system and multi-party democracy of the present to monopolise political, economic, cultural, linguistic and religious power and resources''.

It is equally true that the formation of Nepalese history and interpretation of Nepalese culture have been very much the construct of the dominant caste, specifically the hill Brahmins, Chhetris and Newars. Since the creation of a national identity above all requires the demarcation of national boundaries, the *khasa-bahun* hegemony in politics and *sharma-shrestha* (*bahun-newar*) supremacy in intellectual pursuits right after the unification helped them to construct an image of Nepali national identity (Gurung, 1998) which was not, however, embraced equally by all hills and plains people.

Nepali language, hill Hinduism, monarchy, and the *bir* (brave) history of the Nepali nation constituted the themes of official Nepali nationalism during the latter half of the Rana regime and the whole Panchayat period (Onta, 1996; Burghart, 1994; Shah, 1993; and Sharma, 1992). These symbols of Nepali nationalism were both elaborated and disseminated through print, radio and visual media as well as educational resource materials backed by the state apparatus during the Panchayat period (Onta, 1996:214). The intention of such nationalism project of the pre-Panchayat regime was to create a dominant hill or *parbate* culture, subsuming diversity with social stratification to consolidate and centralise power. In

other words, the intention of the Panchayat period was rastra *nirmana* or *desh banaune* (nation building) in addition to maintaining hegemony of the *parbatiya* culture in all sphere of life throughout Nepal (Burghart, 1994:2).

The first step in this endeavour was the promulgation of the *muluki ain* (Civil Code) of 1854 to consolidate or homogenise the culturally, socially, and politically heterogeneous societies within the country. The *muluki ain* was a civil or religious code that ordered the diverse social groups into a single *parbate* Hindu framework based on the hierarchical caste system. Its main purposes were to emphasise Nepal's political identity, to strengthen Hinduism, to establish national legal system and to unify the country by integrating previously independent social system (Hofer, 1979: 40-47 cited in Brown, 1996). Each group, despite its own internal divisions, was assigned a *jat* and then allotted a specific ranking within the Hindu caste hierarchy. The high caste *parbatiyas* (Indo-Aryan people of the hill) were at the top and called *tagadhari* (the wearer of sacred thread), the various groups of Tibeto-Burman people were in the middle and called *matawali* (the alcohol drinkers), and the Indo-Aryan untouchables were at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Before 1854, in Tarai, a similar but not identical hierarchic system based on classical Hinduism was already in existence. Maithil Brahmins were at the top, Rajputs and some merchant class people were in the middle, and untouchables like Dom and Chhamar were at the bottom. A large number of groups outside this classical caste fold of Tarai were then assigned into *jats* and were drawn within the Hindu ritual hierarchy after the enforcement of the *muluki ain.* Most of them were lumped together as *matwali* (alcohol drinker) and their national identities were converted into various *jats*.

As a result such groups previously defined by the territory in which they resided were, henceforth, defined according to their *jat* (Burghart: 1984: 116-117). In a similar way, the Tarai caste system was merged into a single hill caste framework of high caste *parbatiya* domination. Not only were the Tarai Brahmins ranked in a lower position than the *parbatiya chhetri*, the hill caste system had provisions for cooption through miscegenation by legitimising hypergamy (Sharma, 1993). Nonetheless, the main significance of the *muluki ain* was its scope, encompassing all people irrespective of their social, cultural, and political backgrounds in the Nepali State.

4.3.2   Nepalization

Many observers have noted that the *hinduisation* promoted by the *muluki ain* during the Rana period was synonymous with the integration of Nepal and was considered a crucial

milestone in the process of national integration (Gaige, 1975; Hofer, 1979; Sharma, 1993; Regmi, 1988; Brown, 1996). Scholars like Brown (1996); Bista (1983); and Gaige (1975) equate the process of *hinduization* with the one of *nepalization*. Nepalization, in its turn, as argued by Brown (1996:8), enshrined by law the cultural, political, and religious dominance of the *bahuns*, *thakuris* and *chhetris* of the hill country. Utilising this position of power they were able to determine the nature of all that was to be regarded as authentically Nepali (Burghart, 1984: 121). They led the process of *nepalization* and defined it by creating the myth that their own political culture was representative of that of all people living within the Nepali territory (Brown, 1996:8). In fact, it was a conscious method of controlling *non-parbatiya* people.

Rana government also liberalised the regulation related to crime, slavery, and indebtedness. Criminals and runaway slaves were entitled to freedom if they settled and started to clear land in Tarai. This settlement strategy can be taken as one of the firsts attempt to "Nepalize" the Tarai region through the "ethnic engineering" policy. It was in some respect, however, related to the government's concern to secure Nepal's independence from British India (Odegaard, 1997:31).

From the middle of the 20th century the post-Rana regime tried to integrate Nepal into the world economy, seeking to modernise the country. The Tarai, with its immense agricultural potential and reserve of land, became an inevitable target of these efforts. For this purpose, malaria was eradicated, some infrastructure development projects such as road and irrigation were implemented, and a new Land Reform Act (1964) was introduced.

In a similar vein, to integrate the Tarai people into the monarchy-led Panchayat system, a government-implemented program of resettling the Tarai with Nepali speaking people was started. The result was large-scale migration from the neighbouring hill district to Tarai. This soon changed Tarai into Nepal's breadbasket. The massive population increase in the Tarai is therefore partly a state-implemented process. Many peasant cultivators were settled on government organised settlement projects, but a far greater number set up spontaneous *sukumbasi* (squatters) settlements encroaching on state land and clearing forests (Ghimire, 1992; Shrestha, 1990)

However, the state's intention was to transform Tarai culturally and ethnically through a systematic resettlement of hill people into the region (Ojha, 1984). This we may call a process of ethnic engineering. From the point of view of the state, developing Tarai and opening it to settlement would simultaneously serve two purposes for elite in Kathmandu. It

would bring economic growth in the one hand, and it would culturally stabilise the border region on the other (Shrestha, 1990:167.71).

In contrast to the hills, the Tarai is culturally an extension of northern India. The dominant symbols that organise the identity of most of Tarai people (e.g. caste, language, and religious ritual, style of dressing, eating and living) are almost identical to those of their Indian neighbours. This physical proximity and cultural similarities of the Tarai people with India always keep the Nepalese government in a state of fear of loosing authority in Tarai. The idea of "cultural stabilisation" must be seen against this background.

The process of *nepalization* in Tarai is a relatively recent phenomenon in comparison to other parts of the country. In real sense, it only began in the early sixties, when hill people started to settle in the region. Some plain group like Dhimals and Tajpuriyas have undergone changes and adopted many traits of the hill Hindu culture as they proved unable to withstand the economic, political, and cultural pressures of hill people (Bhattarai, 1994). However, it must be noted that Tarai people are simultaneously intermingling into the of north Indian plains as a result of huge migration from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. On the other hand, some plain groups like the Rajbanshis- living closed to settlements of caste Hindus of plains origin have been undergoing assimilation into the north Indian plain culture for many centuries.

One major issue of *nepalization* of Tarai was the language policy adopted after the 1950s. Although there was more or less broad agreement in the late 1950s for the perpetuation of Nepali as the official language of the kingdom, there was a sharp debate on the role of regional languages in public life, especially in education and mass communication (Gaige, 1975: 124). Both the leading political parties of that time were in favour of regional languages. King Mahendra, a proponent of the idea of *rastra nirman* (nation building), however, favoured Nepali. Shortly after the abolition of parliamentary government his views became policy (Burghart, 1994:4).

An education act was enacted in 1962 which confirmed that the medium of instruction in all government schools was to be Nepali. In 1965 Hindi and Newari news broadcasts were terminated on Radio Nepal (Gaige, 1975: 124-5). In Tarai, the language of instruction in schools and in mass communication like newspapers had been Hindi. Even after the Educational Act of 1962, many schools in Tarai continued to teach in Hindi. For example, Gouriganj High School was established in 1965 and the medium of instruction and books were in Hindi for many years. ''It was partly due to shortage of teachers and teaching materials that we had to teach in Hindi rather than in Nepali'' said an old school teacher of Gouriganj. He was the only teacher of Nepali speaking at that time. All the teachers were

from India and their knowledge of Nepali was almost zero, so naturally they favoured to teach in Hindi. ''But later on, when teaching materials and teachers were available, we started teaching in Nepali'', he said remembering the early days of his teaching.

Another important factor of the *nepalization* process in Tarai was the introduction of *nepali mudhra* (currency) in daily circulation and internal transactions. The unrestricted entry of *bharu* (Indian Currency) into Nepal and its use, particularly in the Tarai, as the currency of daily commercial transactions, had prevented the Nepalese government from exercising monetary control over much of the national economy. Accordingly, the government legally banded *bharu* for internal transactions through an act called Nepalese Currency Circulation Expansion Act 1957[8] to replace it by Nepali Rupee. In addition, the building-up of a modern administrative structure, and investment in transportation and communication links between *pahad* and *madhesh,* contributed to spreading the sense of *nepalization* among the people of plains. But the introduction of a standard national educational system in the early 1960s was the most important foundation for the process of *nepalization* and the emergence of Nepali nationhood throughout the country.

The ideology of Panchayat and immediately proceeding periods followed the same line: homogenisation according to *parbate* Hindu culture with some modernising imperatives. Monolithic ideology like *Ek bhasa, ek bhesa; ek dharama, ek desh*[9] (one language, one custom; one religion, one country) was the guiding principle of national integration during the Panchayat period. The Panchayat slogan of 'all Nepalese are *panchas* and all *panchas* are Nepalese' was dominant, undermining and banning other political parties and ideologies.

But, despite various governmental efforts, the caste Hindus of the plains could not assimilate to Nepali mainstream, because they could not find any symbolic "glue" to attach themselves with the hill dominated Nepalese cultural tradition. Furthermore, the Tarai region remained isolated from the hill for more than one and half century because of its strategic importance for ruling elites of the Rana period even after the unification. This lead the Tarai people to establish firmer relationships with the people across the border than with hill people. Nonetheless, my field experiences suggest that some assimilation in terms of dress, language, music and ritual practices have been taking place as hill people are migrating and interacting more and more with plains people in Tarai.

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[8] It was first published in Nepal *Gazette,*vol. VII. No. 15. July 20, 1957.

[9] This slogan was, however, adopted from the national narratives of Balakrisna Sam, a famous literary figure at that time. His original text is as- *Hamro raja, hamro desh; hamro bhasa, hamro bhesh* (our king, our country; our language, our custom). In fact, the present form of the slogan is a politically articulated version from his original text by Panchayat Pundits- a representative from Lalitpur District in the First Buddhijibi Sammelan (Intellectual's Conference) called by King Mahendra in 1962 (Shah, 1993).

From this discussion we may conclude that Nepal is a nation-state in the making, through what Foster (1991) has called a comprehensive state's project of 'documentation and certification'. Documentation and certification involves, above all, the constitution of categorical identifies, both collective and singular (ibid: 144-45). The state's project is, in Foucault's (1979, cited in Foster, 1991) sense, both totalling and individualising: ''on the one hand -- to use a conventional formula -- they (individuals) are related to a focus of loyalty which entails a territory, a people and a legitimised system of rule; on the other, they are quite specifically identified in terms of gender, race, age, residential, occupational, religious, and linguistic categories''. This means -- as we can also sense from the present discussion – that the state by using several mechanisms directs the formation of both groups and individual identities—i.e. nationality and personality- through the demarcation and maintenance of classificatory boundaries (Ibid.).

4.4   Politics of Cultural Difference

''There is not much in the Nepali state with which the madhesiya can be identified with and only a federal constitution granting extensive autonomy to regional aspirations will work in the long run. If regional grievances are not resolve in time, a Sri Lanka like situation cannot be ruled out and the eventual outcome will be determined by the relative strength of conflicting forces[10]*''*

- Hiradayesh Tripathi, a central level leader of NSP.

With the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990, people paradoxically began to imagine Nepalese communities in different level and scale. The Government tries to project an image of the people of Nepal as one 'nation' and moves towards dominance of small-scale identification, whereas politicians involved in the electoral game create a line of cultural difference between people and use concepts of much smaller scale (e.g. *jat/jati, dharma* (religion), *chhetra*(region) in order to win the game. During the past regimes the state always fostered the image of a large-scale community in the name of national integration. It was not allowed for the public to focus on local communities and to express cultural difference like it is today. This section presents some accounts of politics of imagined communities and cultural difference at different levels and scales.

4.4.1   The Event of 1990

The politics of cultural difference became more apparent right after the restoration of *bahudaliya prajatantra*, multi-party democracy in 1990, though it existed also during the Rana and Panchayat periods in different forms and for different purposes. The constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990), that declares Nepal to be a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural

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[10] Cited in Shah (1993).

and lingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and constitutional monarchical kingdom, was itself a drastic departure from the government measures aimed at homogenisation of the Nepalese societies and cultures during the preceding regime. The government authority before 1990 always undermined the pluralism of the country, particularly because it was interpreted to threaten "nationalism".

In addition, the authoritarian Panchayat system before 1990 had managed to submerge rather than resolve the regional and ethnic animosities. The new-founded political freedom in post-1990 Nepal appeared as a forum for politics of cultural difference where political leaders are seeking political identities outside the political space, particularly in terms of ethnicity, caste, and regionalism.

If I have grasped the phenomena correctly, it can be argued that the politics of difference provide a source of "values" that can be converted into political assets; internally as bases of group solidarity and mobilisation, and externally as claims on support of other social groups, governments, and wider international public. The regional politics of Nepal Sadvabana Party (NSP) and the Maoist movement run directly or indirectly with Indian sympathy,[11] are some of the examples. It is not only deharmonizing the caste/ ethnic, regional relations and the process of national building within the country, but jeopardising economic and political relations between the countries as well (Dahal, 1995:148) The present days' cold relation, though unofficial, between India and Nepal indicates the situation.

The political event of 1990 brought sentiments long suppressed to the surface. It certainly became clear that Nepal with its thirty major ethnic groups and more than seventy languages might not remain satisfied with one national language (Nepali) and one national religion (Hinduism). An array of organisations have been formed on the basis of cultural, ethnic, regional, and linguistic backgrounds as well as on the basis of left, ultra-left and ultra-liberal political ideology demanding preservation of culture and language rights to federal government on ethnic, linguistic and regional bases. Communists naturally wanted a secular and republican Nepal and started to demand that, directly or indirectly. The Maoist insurgency in present-day Nepal is an example of such a radical demand. Minority religious groups such as Christians and Muslims suddenly became visible in public life and called for

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[11] Some people and politicians think that Indian land is being used to train Maoist guerrillas and to import the modern weapons to fight against Nepalese police force. Without Indian support how can it be possible for Maoist leaders to run the so-called jana*yudha* (the People's War)? On the other hands, Hoftun, et al (1999:332) mentioned that many Nepalese still were worried and suspect about the patriotic loyalty of NSP and its supreme leaders. Are they really working for Nepal or for India? Similar views were found among the *adhivasis* local youth workers in Gouriganj who were involved in NSP movement during last few years and now associated with political parties other than NSP because of this dubious image of NSP in patriotic front.

rights in the light of the new democratic freedom. These various organisations represented a spectrum of opinions ranging from the extreme to the moderate.

4.4.2   Expressions of Cultural Difference

The public expressions of cultural difference lead to emerge 'imagined communities'[12] on different levels and in different forms. On the regional level, people of the plain raised the question of *madhesiya* identity and hegemony of the hill, saying that there is not much 'space' in the Nepali State which the *madhesiya* could identify with. The Tarai can never be integrated in the hill mainstream on cultural and linguistic terms unless *madhesiya* people get due representation in the political processes and decision-making, and their regional aspirations are satisfied institutionally (Shah, 1993). On the hill ethnic front, the *Limbuwan Mukti Morcha*, *Khambuwan National Front, Mongol Libration Organization, Rastriya Janamukti Party*, and a host of smaller ethnic organisations, have to varying degrees asserted political, linguistic and religious separateness from the *parbatiya* hegemony (Ibid.).

The situation seems to be worsening in the sense that the political parties are articulating cultural differences in order to mobilise votes during election as well as for other political purposes. The consequence is that some groups of Tarai such as the Tajpuriyas, Rajbanshis, the Hindu low castes and underprivileged groups which had never been politically active before - now made their demands heard (Hoftun and et al, 1999: 330). Furthermore, Sharma (1997: 489) has nicely depicted the trends of the politics of cultural difference after 1990. He writes ''the leader of ethnic organisations in Nepal have shown a preference for presenting their case in terms of two sets of opposing ideas, cultures, values, or situations, or even unfortunately, in racial terms. This can be seen in the use of contrasts such as Hindu verses *janajati*, indigenous verses non- indigenous, *pahari* verses *madhise*, Mangol verses Aryan, or *chuchhe* verses *thepchhe*, (the point nose verses the flat noses)''.

Box 4.1 Twelve Federal Provinces Proposed by Nepal Janajati Party	
Khasan	Jadan
Magart	Tambuwan
Tambasailing	Limbuwan
Khambuwan	Nepal
Bojpori	Maithil
Kochila	Abadhi

However, it seems to me that all these newly formed organisations have more or less similar demands related to equal representation along caste, ethnic groups, language, and regional basis. These demands include job reservations and a quota system in appointments, political representation on a proportional basis, and teaching in the mother tongue

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[12] Benedict Anderson (1983), in a fascinating study, defined a national community as an 'imagined community'. According to him, it is *imagined* because member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion

in all multiplicity of language spoken in the country. And, above all, there is a proposal by the Janajati Parties to divide Nepal into 12 federal provinces[13], along ethnic and linguistic lines. They are presented in Box 4.1.

Since my focus is on the Tarai, let me illustrate some issues of cultural difference and styles of imagining Tarai. ''We have neither been treated as Hindus nor as Nepalese. We have always been called *madhisehs* and treated as second class citizens'', said Gajendre Narayan Singh, president of Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) in an interview with a local newspaper published in Kathmandu. In addition, he holds a notion that the present political parties have also not been instrumental to integrate the *madhiseh* and other hill ethnic groups to the national mainstream.

The party was formed to represent the interest of Tarai people of Indian origin right after the mass movement of 1990. It has been demanding a liberal policy on citizenship for new immigrants, official status of Hindi language, employment quota for *madhise* in civil service and army, and a federal system of government. These demands indicate a separate identity for Tarai based on regionalism. It is apparent that plain Hindus lead NSP and Hinduism was the dominant nationalist ideology during the Panchayat period. The designation as a Hindu kingdom even in the new democratic constitution (1990) is a clear evidence of strong dominance of Hinduism. But the crisis of having a national identity among these people is quite paradoxical.

There is a fundamental difference between Hindus of the hills and the Hindus of the plains. They do not have marriage relationship, though they belong to the same strata of the traditional caste hierarchy. But *muluki ain* of 1854 placed the high caste of plains even below the hill Chhetri in actual caste ranking (Sharma, 1975). Since the *muluki ain* became a legitimate source of power accumulation by monopolising such privileges, the hill high caste people created Nepali national symbols putting themselves in the centre. Accordingly, high caste hill people dominated the royal court, political arenas, and other public life undermining the high caste people from Tarai.

Furthermore, support of British India by the people of plains during the Anglo-Nepali war of 1814-16 (Jha, 1994:36) was an event that could made the ruling people in Kathmandu question their patriotic loyalty. Their contribution in making a unified Nepal during the period of territorial unification in the 18th and early 19th century was insignificant in comparison to other hill people. As a result, Hindus of plains could not develop their distinct

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[13]   According to this federal scheme Gouriganj (the study area of this study) belongs to Kochila or Kock Pradesh and it is claimed that the area was inhabited by the Koch majority in a distant past.

image or identity in the Nepali national discourse. In other words, their marginal involvement in the national adventures of unification has created them a problem of identification in psychological terms.

Again, there is really a lack of identity markers among the people of the plains. It is evident that Hinduism has little relevance in making their national identity. Using territoriality as an ethnic marker, one can speak of the 'Tarai Ethnicity'- a term that emphasises distinctions between the *pahadiyas* and *madhesiya* people. In doing so one has to furnish a detailed analysis between the *adhibasis* (indigenous ethnic groups) such as the Tharus, the Rajbanshis, the Gangais and the Satars and between the *adhibasis* and caste Hindus of the plains. But it is not justifiable to discuss all the groups of Tarai under the rubric Tarai Ethnicity without paying sufficient attention to the socio-cultural differences among *adhibasis* and between *adhibasis* and caste Hindus of the plains. It also not justifiable to develop a typology of the Tarai groups along the line of *muluki ain* of 1854.

If we take language as an element of identity making, there is no one dominant language that people of Tarai can speak all together. Politicians related to NSP and intellectuals like Hari Bansh Jha (1994) claimed that Hindi is a link language among Tarai groups like Nepali tends to link the hill groups. But recently many observers have noted that only nine out of 20 districts of Nepal Tarai have some groups of caste Hindus who want to speak Hindi. Most of them, however, have their own mother tongue languages. Maithili, Bajika, Bhojpuri and Awadhi are some examples (Dahal, 1992). Rajbanshi is the mother tongue of the majority of the plain people in Jhapa district. It is not that Hindi comes to the tongue of Bjojpuri or Maithili or Rajbanshi speakers easier than Nepali. Linguistically, both Nepali and Hindi belong to the Indo-Aryan tongue.

In fact, my observations and discussions with the plains people of Gouriganj show that Hindi is just as foreign to the speakers of the Rajbanshi as it is to Nepali speakers to the hill like myself. My acquaintances with plain people of Gouriganj show that their problems of communication with me were equal in Hindi as well as in Nepali. Though the medium of instruction in government school is Nepali, there are a few schools in some villages of Gouriganj where the teacher usually teaches in the student's mother tongue, because the students do not understand Nepali properly. Hindi is not the mother tongue of the majority of high caste Hindu groups of Gouriganj and it is certainly the first language of neither the substantial population of *adhibasi* nor the now significant hill population of the area.

However, the inhabitants of the Tarai has a tradition of regionalism, starting in the early 50s with the emergence of Tarai Congress which had led a campaign to retain Hindi as the

medium of instruction and had more or less the similar agendas (Gaige, 1975) that NSP has raised nowadays. NSP under the Leadership of Gagendra Narayan Singh has demanded a federal type of government, dividing the country into five provinces viz. Eastern Tarai, Western Tarai, Eastern Hill, Central Hill, and Western Hill (Box 4.2). Despite the attempt of communal and regional parties to focus on particularist and separatist issue, the people in the last general elections voted overwhelmingly in favour of national parties. For example, the majority of the voters in constituency no.6 of Jhapa District are the plain people but they have elected a UML candidate for the last three general elections and a NC candidate won in the BI-election of 1999.

Box 4.2 Five Federal Provinces Proposed by Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP)

Eastern Tarai
Eastern Hill
Central Hill
Western Tarai
Western Hill

This feeling of regionalism, however, is the outcome of the distinct geographical location of the Tarai. Tarai regionalism is one of the reactions to increasing influence of hill people in political discourse specifically in electoral politics. Increasing hill dominance is obvious due to the change in Tarai social demographic equation through in migration from the hill.

My field impressions suggest that the politics of cultural difference that demand autonomy on regional, ethnic and linguistic bases have not evolved from the political grass root but are coming from political elite classes. But it has a prospect in long run, if government could not address the problem properly. The probable solution based on my field experiences might be to search for a socio-cultural model of nation-state that can generate awareness and create pride in all social and cultural life forms, highlighting their traditions, heritage, and personalities. In the case of Tarai, where there is no common marker of pan Tarai identity, the nationalisation of local customs, heritage and other cultural creation of local people so that every one can feel pride might be the solution.

Presenting some case materials in the coming chapters that both the notion of cultural homogeneity or hegemony of hill culture, and politics of cultural difference, no longer hold as a model of integration of plain people into a national framework. We need to search for a single cultural identity that would be equally acceptable and respectful to all cultures of the country. This can be achieved by learning to take pride in the remarkable history of the cultures and in the process of *nepalization* through which a cultural and religious syncretism has emerged.

My point is that the notion of cultural pluralism can provide such model of national integration: distinct cultural and social groups coexist within the national boundary and

share a common economic system that makes them interdependent, yet the groups maintain a greater or lesser degree of autonomy in other spheres of social life without any imposition from government and external agencies The model of cultural pluralism here embraces the idea that the historic cultural difference among the people should be both admitted and respected socially or culturally but also legally by assuring the groups equal rights within the national society. In order to consolidate this argument, the next chapter deals with the social morphology of the study area, describing its constituent entities in the appropriate context.

Chapter: Five
Social Morphology of the Study Area

This chapter presents a brief introduction of the studied village, depicting some dimensions of social reality in order to contextualize the village social life. The chapter describes geographical location, village history, population, *jat* and *jati* distribution, settlement patterns and some aspect of development infrastructure and village social ecology.

5.1   Geographical Location and Environment

Gouriganj -- the focal area of this study-- comprises of the two neighbouring VDCs called Gouriganj and Khajurgachhi of Jhapa District. Before 1960 the whole area was commonly known as Gouriganj. Afterward, it was divided into two village administrative units[1] for administrative and political purposes. The famous river called Gouriya, from which the name--Gouriganj[2] was derived, now separates them. Though it is officially divided into two VDCs, the whole area even today is famous in its original name - Gouriganj. In this study Gouriganj includes both Khajurgachhi and Gouriganj VDCs unless they are mentioned separately.

Gouriganj is situated in the south-western part of Jhapa district. It is a village town or bazaar 22 kilometre south of Padajungi of Mahendra (East-West) Highway. It lies in between 87° 40' 00" to 87° 45' 00" of east longitude and 26°25'00" to 26°30'00" north latitude and borders with Indian State of Bihar to the south, and Morang district to the west, Baigundhura and Korobari VDCs to the east and Kohabara and Juropani VDCs to the north (see map). The study area nowadays has access to a partially paved feeder road system of the country.

Gouriganj has a total area of 8564 *Bigha*, 11 *Katha* and 6 *Dhu*r (i.e. 5525 ha.). Of the total land, 6702 *Bigha*, 1 *Katha* and 7 *Dhur* (i.e. 4325 ha.) is cultivated, public and barren land make up 852 *Bigha* and 10 *Katha* (i.e. 550 ha.). The remaining 109 *Bigha*, 9 *Katha* and 10 *Dhur* (i.e. 35 ha.) is residential land, road etc. There is no forest land in real sense (VDC Offices, 1999).

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[1] The unit refers to Gaun Panchayat during Panchayat period and Gaun Bikas Samiti (Village Development Committee or VDC) after the restoration of democracy in 1990. VDC is further divided into nine small units called wards. Each ward contains one or several *Tol* or *Basti* (village).

[2] Local people informed me that the term Gouriganj refers to a village or small town at the adjoin of the river Gouriya.
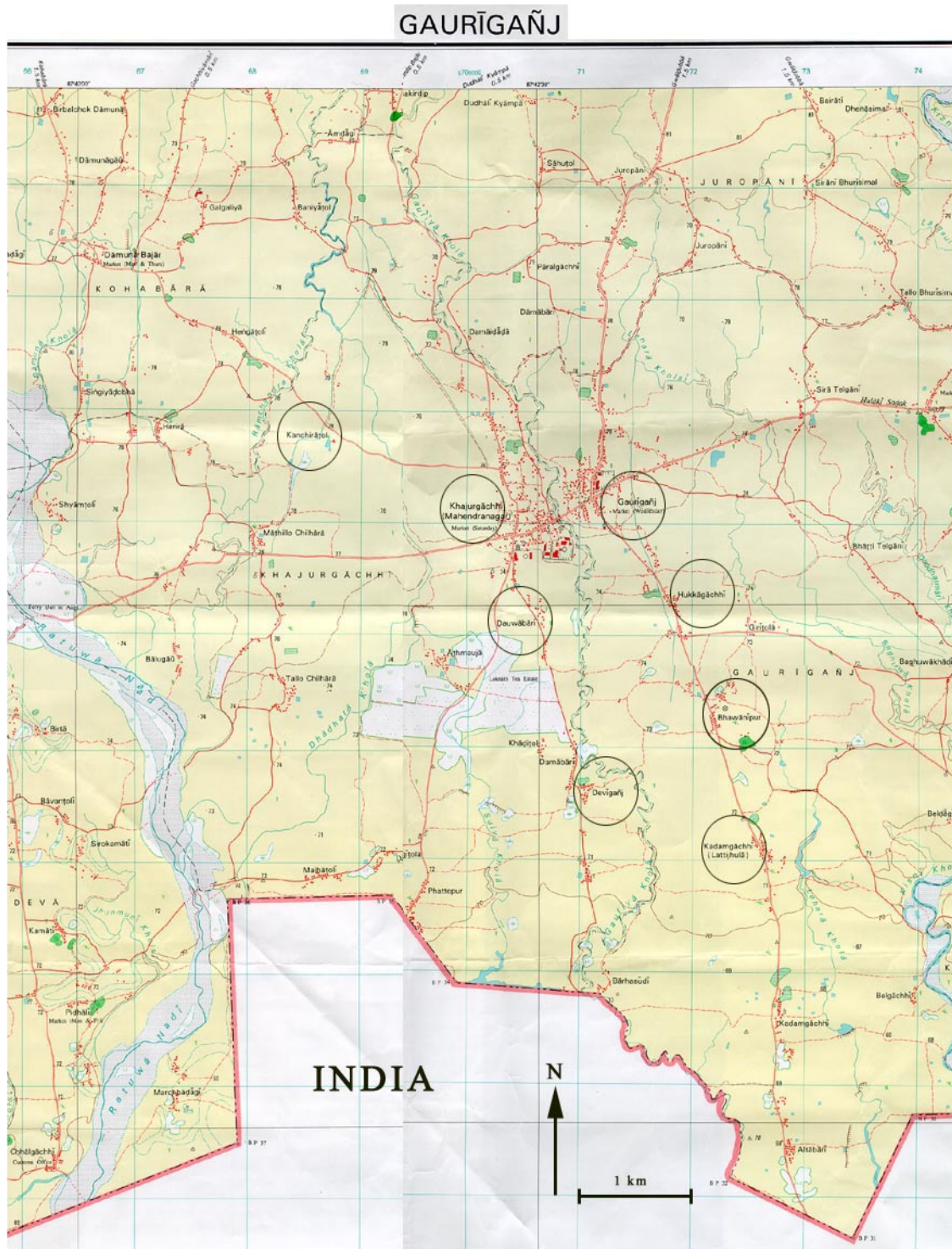
Map 5.1: Map of Study Area

It comprises a fertile alluvial plain geographically similar to the land across the border in India. The latitude is only about 77 meter above the sea level. The climate is sub-tropical with high humidity; it is hot (35-40°c) in summer and moderately cold (15-25°c) in winter. Rainfall -- mostly from the south-western monsoon which originates from the bay of Bengal-- starts in the end of May and lasts for 3 or 4 months till August and some years till September.

Gouriganj receives approximately 234 mm of rainfall annually (Meteorological section, Jhapa 1999).

5.2   Village History

No written record of the village history could be traced. However, by following up the genealogical tree of the *adhibasis* (Rajbanshis, Tajpuriyas and Gangais) who are recognised as the earliest inhabitants of this village, a ten-generation chain, going more than two hundred years back, has been traced. Some Rajbanshi elders give some accounts of the early history of this region. Their narrations are based on the stories told by village elders of their father's and forefather's journeys through the wilderness to seek new opportunities. Despite the problems with oral history caused by the limitation of memory and the distortion of time, some valuable generalisation can be drawn from that source.

According to the oral narration of local people, Aathmouja, Khajurgachi, Hukaagachi and Gouriganj were the earliest settlements of the region. Among these villages Aathmouja was the oldest settlement from which the name of the *Parganna*[3] was kept. Aathmouja Parganna consisted of the area between Kankai River in the east, Ratuwa River in the west, the borderland in the south, and the Siwaliks in the north. Gouriganj Bazaar was, however, established in 1934 (1991B.S) by Tika Lal Tajpuriya, an influential person and *Jimidar*[4] (land lord) of 22 *Moujas*[5] of the area at that time. During the early sixties, Gouriganj was already established as one of the leading trade/or market centre in the Jhapa district. During that period, it had a wide business linkage covering a large area up to India in the south, *Pahada(* Damak-Madhumalla) in the north, Jhapa-Bhadrapur(district head quarter) in the east and Rangeli-Biratnagar in the west. People from all direction came here for marketing their goods and other business purposes.

Since the famous *Hulaki Marga*(Postal Road) of Rana Regime passes through Gouriganj, people claim that it had a prosperous economy in the past before the construction of East-West Highway via Damak- Birtamood. *Hulaki Marga* linked the area with the trade routes of Bhadrapur(district head quarter of Jhapa) to Biratnagar, one of the largest trading centre of Nepal Tarai, flourished when the Indian railheads were connected in Farbisgung (a distance of 20 kilometres away from Biratnagar) in 1914(Dahal, 1983:8).

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[3] An administrative unit smaller than district of that time.

[4] A Jimidar is nonofficial tax-collecting functionary, and a Jimindari is the land holding of such a functionary.

[5] Particular area of land under the supervision of a Jimidar during Rana Period and the system was abolished in 1964

Establishment of two large-scale rice and flour mills and Jute collection and trade centres by Golchha and Dugardh, the leading industrial organisations of the country indicates the economic importance of Gouriganj. In addition to this, Gouriganj was the main trading centre for people up to Damak and around hills during that period. When the highway was constructed on different routes rather than the existing routes of *Hulaki Marga*, economic and business significance of Gouriganj began to decline with increasing economic stagnation and political marginalization. On the other hand, as transportation and communication facilities extended, Damak and Birtamood Bazaars boomed from a small village Bazaar to the leading trading centres of Jhapa district.

The majority of the inhabitants of Jhapa district were the Rajbanshis, the Gangais, and the Tajpuriyas in the south and Dhimals in the north and there were some settlements of the Meches in the east. Budha Singh, my key informants and a local elder claim that they were the *adhibasi* (the first settlers) of the study area. These people were living in this area since the time immemorial. The Rajbanshis were the numerically as well as culturally dominant group among these people.

Budha Singh proudly expresses that people of the study area spoke the same language as of the Rajbanshis and followed the similar cultural practices, though there were (and still are) some differences among the different groups. He claimed that they were Hindus but their social system was not totally based on hierarchy. There were some egalitarian traits among them. They followed their own types of cultural practices. They worshipped *Thakur*, *Brahman*i or *Bisohari* and *Hanuman* and keep a deep faith on *Mahanraj Than* (Gram shrine).

In the early days of settlement, they practised slash-and-burn type of cultivation, shifting their location every three or four year when the land lost its fertility. Although the land fell into barren, it was not reclaimed by the forest because of the continual grazing by herds of cattle driven north from India during dry season by *Guwalas*(Yadavs/Ahirs) and other groups. However, in the due course they started the permanent types of cultivation under the *Jamindari* system of land tenure.

The first plains caste people to settle in the area often were *Guwalas* who were cowherds by occupation. They grazed cattle in the area during dry season and gradually turned seasonal huts into permanent dwellings. Deviganj is an example of such Guwalas settlement in the area. They were followed by Halwai, confectioners by occupation, whose business was based on livestock product of Guwalas. Then, came the Telis, oil presser by occupation, who provided oil for Halwai for confectionery business and to other people for domestic purposes.

Budha Singh recalls many stories told by his grand father about the severe drought and calamities occurred in Northern India that resulted flood of migration to the area. Other early arrivals, according to Budha Singh were yeoman- farmer groups such as Kurmis and similar quasi-caste groups among the Muslims. Lower caste agricultural people also arrived early, followed by occupational and business-caste people after the agricultural economy had flourished and market and trade centre was established in Gouriganj.

Budha Singh amusingly recalls that the first hill migrant was a Karki family who came at Gouriganj before a half century ago from eastern hill. Then came few Rijal (Brahmin) families from Kathmandu. Some Brahmins like Bista, Shrama and Pandey *thars* followed them from Lamjung, Tanahu and Kathmandu districts respectively. There were some Newars family who came from Kathmandu, Baglung, and Saptari districts. After the eradication of malaria in the sixties, a large number of hill-origin people with different caste and ethnic backgrounds came to the area and settled permanently. Now hill-origin people are in the key position of the village life.

5.3   Demographic Characteristics

This section presents the demographic features of Gouriganj. It includes population, *jat* and *jati* composition and their physical distribution in the village.

5.3.1   Population

There are altogether 18,783 inhabitants residing in 3224 households of which 9,371 and 9372 is the male and female population respectively (VDC Office, 1999). The overall sex ratio[6] of population of the study area is 99.9. This means there are 999 males in every thousand female population. This figure is slightly greater than that of national average, which is 99.5. However, it is more or less in between the sex ratio of hill and Tarai people which is above 100 for groups whose origin is in the Tarai and below 100 for those whose origin is in the Hill region (Niroula, 1998, p17-19). The reason is obvious that both the hill and Tarai people inhabit the study area.

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[6] In general sex ratio is defined as number of males per hundred female populations. That is,

$$\text{Sex Ratio} = \frac{\text{Number of Males}}{\text{Number of Female}} \times 100$$

5.3.2   *Jat*[7] and *Jati* Composition

Today, the study area is a unique amalgam of hills and plain-origin people. There is a great diversity of cultural traditions and heritage among the people. Although the caste system is legally abolished almost three decade ago, it is still alive in practices in different social and cultural contexts.

Jat and *jati* are the basic units of recognition for the people of the study area. They themselves put into different *jat* and *jati* status and ranking. The Maithili Brahmins, Bhumihar Brahmins, *Kantha* or '*Mahapatra*' Brahmin, the Rajputs and the Kayasthas wear the *janai* (sacred thread), commonly known as *tagadhari*, and enjoy high status irrespective of their numbers due to their ranking as *uchha jat* (upper *jat*) in the caste system, their education and their access to the resources through various means (Bhattarai, 1994).

The Maithili Bramins and Kantha Brahmins are priests whose live are filled with rite and rituals. Most of them still engage in their occupation as priests. The Bhumihar Brahmins, in contrast, generally subsist on the land, though they do not actually till. The Rajputs of the Tarai are 'Kshetriyas' who wear the *janai*. The Kayasthas formally look after the financial matter of principalities and estates, but are now found mostly in government service and in profession such as teaching.

The merchant or commercial class comes next. In the study area, they are among others, the Teli, Kaspatiya Saha, Rauniyar, Sonar, Baniyas, Saha, Haluwai. Though attitudes are changing, many upper caste people still do not interdine nor eat the food touched by these castes saying it a 'contaminated' one.

The people of the study area categorised themselves as the Yadavs, Kurmis, Dhanuk, Kewats, Koerees, and other who were traditionally farmer though many of them are landless labourers now. Below them are the skilled occupational castes such as Hajam (barber), Lohar (iron worker), Badhaee (carpenter), Tatma, Barahee (betel sellers), Mushar (farmer), Dhobi (washer folk), Mallaha (seller of fish), Chammar(tanner), Dom (cremators) and others.

There are some castes in the study area, collectively known as 'Marwaris', who belong to the affluent commercial groups. It is believed that they were migrated to Nepal from

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[7] The word *jat* can be used in different ways; it means in essence "species" or "kind," and has been variously rendered by English writers as "tribe," "caste," "ethnic group," and "nation". Following Gurung (1998) I have used Hindu caste people as *jat* and non-caste people as *janajati* or simply *jati* as equivalent to ethnic groups.

Rajastan, India. They typically used to sell textile goods, but have recently started to run large scale commercial enterprises and have set up factories and own a sizeable share of industries and trade not only in the study area but all over the country.

There are few villages of Muslims population, belonging to groups such as Sunnis, Seikhas, Dhunias, tailor master, Hajams, and Bhatiyar. They are further divided into different clan names such as Khatun, Mahammadh, and Aalam. Though Islam has no caste hierarchy, there are some differentiations that really resemble castes. The concept of untouchability, however is not found among the Muslims and all of them worship at the mosque together. Most of are poor with little education, and eke out a living as labourers, tailors, masons or butcher.

The Rajbanshis, Gangai, and Tajpuriya have been recognised as the original inhabitants of the area. The Satar is an ethnic group of the area migrated from India at the beginning of the 19th century. They are primarily farmer and work in the fields. They are usually not well educated and often become victims of exploitative landlords of *Pahade* origin.

Besides, there are some households of Christians with their own separate community's prayer house locally known as 'Church'. They said that they follow the Christian sect of EL-SA-BOTH. The pastor is a hill Brahmin and the other followers are also from hill people. They have regular prayer meetings and voluntary services. Except two Satars boys from Tarai background, there are no other followers of plain backgrounds of this sect. However, there exist few households of Christian Satar but they are not so much aware about different sects of Christianity. They simply identify themselves as Christian and take part in activities organised by outsider missionaries.

The people of hill origin, *pahade* or *pahadiya* also are categorised themselves into different *jats* and *jatis*. Among the *pahade* people the Brahmins and the Chhetris commonly known as *tagadhari* are at the top of the caste hierarchy and many untouchable castes such as *Damai, Kami* and *Sarki* commonly known as *achhut* or *dalit* belong to the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Besides, there are hill *jatis* such as Newar, Rai, Limbu, Magar, and Gurung, commonly known as *matwali* (alcohol consumers). Again, there are number of sub-groups within a single category. For example, the Brahmin community has been divided into two groups, *purbiya* and *kumai*. They are further divided into two divisions such as *upadhaya* and *jaisi*. Both these groups are further divided into many sub-groups called *thars*. In similar fashion, other *jats* and *jatis* are also divided into many groups, and sub-groups.

Among these various *jatis* of Gouriganj, Rajbanshi, Tajpuriya and Gangai are recognized as the *aadhibasi* (indigenous inhabitants) whereas most of the Brahmin/ Chhetri, hill Matwalis and hill occupational *jats* are the migrants from the hill into the area in different phases of time during the last fifty years. The remaining plain caste Hindu people like Saha, Kalwar, Malaha, Thakur, Halwai, Yadav, Sahu, Dom, Chammar, Marwari and Muslim are Indian originated groups who were either invited to settle in the area to increase revenue and to facilitate trade or spontaneous migrants from India during the last century. The following table presents the *Jats* and *Jatis* composition of the study area.

Table 5.1   Percentage Distribution of Major Jats and Jatis of the Study Area.

No	*Jats* and *Jatis* Groups	Population	Percentage of the Total
1	Rajbanshi	7915	42.13
2	Tajpuriya	1417	7.54
3	Gangai	1750	9.32
4	Yadav	1358	7.22
5	Halwai	601	3.19
6	Mahato	714	3.80
7	Muslims	426	2.26
8	Shahu	206	1.38
9	Shaha	191	1.01
10	Hill Brahmin/Chhetri	2069	11.01
11	Others (*Madhise*)	1489	7.92
12	Others(*Pahade*)	647	3.44
	Total	**18783**	**100**

Source: VDC Office, Gouriganj and Khajurgachhi, 1999

The table 5.1 shows the population of major *jats* and *jatis* and their corresponding percentage of the study area. All the *jats* and *jatis* whose number of population is less than 100 are grouped in 'Others' categories. However, they are further grouped as *madhise* (plain) and *pahade* (hill) separately, which includes *madhise jats* and *jatis* and hill *jats* and *jatis* including occupational *jats* of both hill and plain respectively.

The Rajbanshis are both numerically and culturally dominant *jatis* of the study area. A little less than half (42%) of the total population belongs to this group. Then the Gangais, and Tajpuriyas come among the *madhise jatis*. Their percentage shares in the population are 9.32 and 7.50 respectively. The Satars are the next group among the plain *jatis* whose population is less than hundred.

Yadav, Mahato, Halwai, Shahu (Teli) and Shaha (Baniya) are the major *madhise jats* of the study area. Numerically Yadav are the dominant *jat* who comprises slightly more than 7% of the total population. The percentage share in the total population of the remaining major *jats* belongs less than three. The Muslims are the religious group who contribute slightly more than 2% in the total population of the area. Likewise, a small numbers of Bangali (3 households), Marwaris (7 households) and Christians (2 households) are also residing in Gouriganj.

The hill Brahmins and Chhetris are the second largest group after the Rajbanshis. Though they are numerically small (11% of the total population), they are the key actors of social, economic and political life of the village.

The "others" in *pahade* category, whose parentage share is more than 3%, includes hill jati groups such as Newar, Rai, Limbu and few households of Magar and Gurung and hill occupational *jats* like Damai and Kami. Similarly, there are numerous *jats* of Hindus such as Maithili Brahmin, Jha Brahmin, Rajput, Kayastha, Dom, Chhmar, Musahar, Dhobi, Hajam and few plain *jatis* groups such as Dhimal, Tharu and Dhanuk among the "others" *madhie* categories. This category collectively consists of about 8% of the total population.

It was difficult to enumerate accurately all the *jats* and *jatis* groups residing in the study area due to the time constraint and its extension of large geographical space. However, I have tried to enumerate all the *jats, jatis*, language, and religious groups residing in some selected settlements of the study area called Gouriganj Bazaar. The following boxes (Box 5.2- 5.13) present the list of *jats* and *jatis* groups under the different categories classified by the people themselves. It is very difficult to classify the fifty *jats* and *jatis* enumerated in Gouriganj village according to the traditional caste hierarchy. And it must be pointed out that the outline of this status- wise grouping is only a tentative attempt to show the position of different castes, as they view themselves. The great deals of regional variation in caste hierarchy are also worth to mention here.

Box 5.2 *Plains Jats of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Brahmin	16. Lohar
02. Rajput	17. Dhobi
03. Kayastha	18. Majhi
04. Saha(Baniya)	19. Bhagat
05. Yadav	20. Sardar
06. Kewat	21. Shiva
07. Mahato	22. Paswan
08. Halwai	23. Chhamar
09. Koeree	24. Dom
10. Kurmi	25. Dusad
11. Malaha	26 Khatway
12. Kumhar	27. Mushar
13. Thakur	28. Bantar
14. Barhee	29. Sarbariya
15. Shahu	

Box 5.4 *Hill Jats of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Bahun
02. Chhetri
03. Bhujel
04. Sanyasi(Sadhu)
05. Kami
06. Damai

Box 5.6 *Plain Sudha (pure) Jats of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Yadav
02. Kewat
03. Mahato
04. Halwai
05. Koeree
06. Kurmi
07. Malaha
08. Kumhar
09. Thakur
10. Barhee

Box 5.8 *Plain Impure but Touchable Jats of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Lohar
02. Shahu
03. Majhi
04. Bhagat
05. Sardar
06. Kewat
07. Shiva
08. Giri
09. Dhobi

Box 5.3 *Plains Jatis of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Rajbanshi
02. Tajpuriya
03. Gangai
04. Tharu(Choudhari)
05. Dhanuk
06. Satars

Box 5.5 *Hill Jatis of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Newar
02. Rai
03. Sherpa
04. Limbu

Box 5.7 *Plain Untouchable Jats of Gouriganj*

01. Chhamar
02. Dom
03. Dusad
04 Khatway
06. Mushar
07. Bantar

Box 5.9 *Hill Untouchable Jats of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Kami
02. Damai

Box 5.10 Hill *Middle (sudha) Jat of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Sanyasi
02. Bhujel

Box 5.11 *Plain Uchha Jats of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Brahmin
02. Rajput
03. Kayastha
04. Saha(Baniya)

Box 5.12 *Hill Uchha Jats of Gouriganj Bazaar*

01. Bahun
02. Chhetri

The boxes presented above show a complex social and cultural picture of Gouriganj where there are fifty different *jats* and *jatis* of both the hill and plain origin are residing within a single village boundary. There are 30 plain Hindu *jats*, 6 hill Hindu *jats*, 6 plain *jatis* and 4 hill *jatis*. Besides, there are some religious groups excluding Hindu and Buddhist, and one language group with their distinct social and cultural identities and traditions.

Box 5. 13 Hill Bahun and Chhetri of Gouriganj Bazaar

01. Adhikari	19. Goutam
02. Khatiwada	20. Bhandai
03. Rijal	21. Nepal
04. Ghimire	22. Sedain
05. Poudel	23. Koiral
06. Bhattarai	24. Niroula
07. Bhurtel	25. Chapagain
08. Katuwal	26. Dahal
09. Thapa	27. Acharya
10. Siwakoti	28. Mishra
11. Ghadatoula	29. Pokharal
12. Kharel	30. Karki
13. Pandey	31. Khatri
14. Dotel	32. Khadka
15. Rawat	33. Bastola
16. Lamichhane	34. Timsena
17. Dhakal	35. Bista
18. Parajuli	36. Kunwar

In addition, there are a number of groups and sub-groups within one *jat* and *jati*. For example, I have enumerated 30 different exogamous thars (box 5.13) among the hill Brahmin and Chhetris of Gouriganj village. They can be further grouped as *bahun* and *chhetri* separately. Among *bahuns*, there are three distinct divisions viz. *updhaya*, *jaisi* and *kumai*. The *chhetris* are also divided into two groups such as pure or *sudhha chhetri* and *jarra chherti*. Jharra chhetris are those who become *chhetri* by falling (*jarra*) from *bahun jats*. Usually they are the offspring of *upadhaya bahun* and *chhetri* woman. But there are numbers of ways to become *chhetri* falling from *bahun jat* in second generation. This is the reason why the population of *bahun* is becoming less and *chhetris* are growing up. The census data 1991 is also supports this argument.

5.3.3   Profession and Occupation

The people of the study area, like those of other areas of Nepal, adopt cultivation as the main occupation followed by trade and business, wage labour, and *jagir* (governmental and non-governmental services in organised sector, teaching etc.) and seasonal migration. Agriculture provides employment for more than 85% of the total population of the study area. The people of the study area pursue such a variety of occupations that it would have been very time consuming to make a complete inventory of occupations and tiresome to present a listing of them all. Involvement of a single household into a variety of occupations creates another problem to differentiate the occupations of people of the study area. A schoolteacher, for example, in addition to his teaching profession, either run a stationary shop or involved in family farming. Similarly, a farmer in his free time also works as labourer in tea estate or rice mill and his son runs a teashop in the village. Yet, his other son might have been working in police station. However, to a certain extent, it is possible to

compose a list of major traditional occupations and professions practised in Gouriganj. The 5.14 illustrates the occupational distribution of the population of the study area.

Table 5.14 Occupational Distribution of Households in the Study Area.

S.N	Occupations	No. Households	Percentage
1	Farming	2435	75.52
2	Wage labour	417	12.93
3	Trade and business	226	7.00
4	Jagire(Service holder)	67	2.07
5	Seasonal Migrants and Others	79	2.45
	Total	**3224**	**100**

Source: V.D.C Office, Gouriganj and Khajurgachhi, 1999

Most of the households which do not have their own land or have small plot but not sufficient for feeding whole year earn their living through wage labour in agriculture or in other areas. Wage labour in agriculture includes ploughing of the field, transplanting of paddy, wedding, harvesting of other plants in the peak agricultural seasons.

A local tea estate and its processing mill, a large scale rice mill, jute collection and trade centre and other few small scale agro-based industries are the organised sectors which have been providing employment for local people. The tea estate alone has been providing job for 200 people per day. Nearly equal numbers of people are working as labourers in the remaining industries. Similarly local groceries, garment stores run by affluent merchants in Gouriganj Bazaar have also been providing employment opportunities for few people. A numbers of *adhibasi* women are engaged in weaving small sized jute carpet locally known a *jhalla* and other similar garment in their free time which they sale to earn cash. Gouriganj is famous for such jute handicraft product since a long back. Few people are found engaged as middlemen for selling jute and agricultural product.

Besides, about five percent of the total population is reported to have been involved in trade and business and traditional occupations such as carpentry, haircut and tailoring as their main occupation. Running *kirana dokan*(grocery), operating small rice and flat rice mills, furniture industries, running medical clinic, garment shops, hotel business, sweet shops, restaurant, pharmacy, cinema hall, gold and silver shop, petty contractor, patrol pump, cycle repairing workshops, water pumps repairing workshops and shoes shops are the examples of such trade and business. In addition, five more percentage of the total population of the study area are reported to have been engaged in business in addition to farming as their main

occupation. There are more than 200 such shops, trade and service centres around the study area.

Few landless and marginal holders of the area are found to be engaged in petty business which includes the trade of paddy, jute and other farm product as middlemen. Some are involved in the trade of seasonal vegetables and fruits collecting from Madhumalla and Letang[8] of Morang district and sale them in the local markets of Gouriganj in profit. Some Yadav and Gangai women are engaged in the business of producing *chiura*(bitten rice) and *muri* (pup rice) in their traditional ways and sale them securing some profit. Collection of local fruits and vegetables in the house of farmer and sale them in to *gouthrihat*(daily bazaar of local vegetable) is another way of earning living for poor plain caste Hindus and ethnic groups of Gouriganj. Especially women are found to be engaged in such business.

A small segment of population (about 2-3% of the total) with adequate educational background are working as civil servants, school teachers, police men, army personnel, bankers and as employee of private business organisations, NGOs and INGOs all over the country. In addition, about 2% of the total population of Gouriganj came under seasonal migrants who usually migrated to Indian State of Punjab and Hariyana in searching employment opportunities. Most of them belong to plain caste Hindus and ethnic groups.

5.3.4   Education and Literacy

Usually data on literacy status pertain to the population aged six years and over. According to VDC documentation (1999), population of this age is in the study area is 15402. The first school in Gouriganj was established in 1951. Now altogether there are five high schools, one middle school and eleven primary schools in addition to a Bachelors level public campus in operation. Despite this fact, significant number of population i.e. 7085 (46%) out of the total population of aged six and over are yet illiterate. Similarly out of the total population of aged six and over of the study area, 8317 (54%) are reported as literate[9] which is, however, to some extent can be taken as fairly good in comparison to 39.3 % literacy rate of national average. Table 5.16 presents the educational overview of the study area.

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[8] These are the hill station market centres at a distance of about 27 km and 42 km respectively where green vegetables and seasonal fruits are available around the whole year.
[9] The 1991 census has defined literacy as ability to read and write with understanding and to do simple arithmetic calculations.

Table 5.15 Distribution of Population by Educational Status in the Study Area

Educational Status	No. Population	Percentage
Illiterate	7085	46.00
Simple Literate	1821	11.82
Primary Education	2056	13.34
Secondary Education	2335	15.16
S.L.C	1395	9.05
Intermediate	410	2.66
Bachelors	240	1.55
Masters	60	0.38
Total	**15402**	**100**

Source: VDC Office, Gouriganj and Khajurgachhi, 1999

The lower literacy rate among these people is mainly due to their ignorance on education. Many people still believe on *bhagya (*luck or fate) rather than their own effort on being illiterate. It will perhaps take more time to make people aware that literacy is the most important means of achieving social and economic development, and opening for the individual, the door to innovative ideas and action (Shrestha, 1995 in Gurung, 1998) But, on the other hand, their state of poverty, specially among low caste people, can also be seen as the major constraint in schooling their children meeting the expenses on school dress, fees, books and other stationery supplies. In addition, the economic importance of children in household activity plays an important role not to attend the school, even though government freely provides the primary school education. However, in comparison to other similar villages of the country, the people of the study area have fairly good access to educational institutions. Still, literacy is not uniformly distributed among the various caste and ethnic groups.

More agonising scenario will appear, if we appraise the literacy status of some low plain caste Hindus and ethnic groups of the study area. My chance sampling of these people for this purpose clearly shows that lower caste groups, namely the Chammars, Doms, Mushars and ethnic group like Satar have their literacy rate less than 10 percent. Among them the Mushars of Barasudi village of Gouriganj are found to be the least literate group, their literacy rate being less than 5 percent of their total population in the village. The case will be more panicking if we appraise the distribution of literacy rate between gender. Almost all of the women of lower caste people are reported as completely illiterate. There is comparatively better literacy rate among higher caste women but the situation is not satisfactory however.

On the other hand, most of the upper *jats* and *jatis* have literacy rate more than 70 percent and have more share to higher education. Among them, hill Brahmin and Chhetri and Baniya have higher literacy rate than the others. The Hill Brahmins and Chhetris are reported to be the owner of most of higher degree education. Most of the Newars and Marwaris are reported as fairly literate and shared equally in the higher education. The Rajbanshis among plain ethnic groups have better literacy rate than the rest. But this group has little share in higher education irrespective of their population. Only few not more than 10 persons are reported to having Masters Degree among the Rajbanshis. No one is reported to having Masters Degree among the Tajpuriys and Gangais. However, some Yadav and Halwai families, in exception, have acquired higher education up to Masters Degree.

Such a discrepancy in literacy among various groups not only raise question towards the rationality of educational policy and planning but also indicates the functioning of traditional social structure. Traditionally, there has been the division of work for different groups, the Brahmins are supposed to perform religious functions and rituals, and the Newars, Baniya and other merchant caste are expected to be literate to run their business. Until 1950, education was thought to be a privilege and was mostly attended by selected few groups. As privileged groups they were naturally motivated to acquire education. In addition, their access to power and resource through caste position also helped them to get higher education. As a result, the high-caste groups and a few families of ethnic groups are located in the upper literacy-ranges while the lowest-caste groups were relegated to the bottom of the literacy hierarchy. Expanding this tradition of knowledge, Brahmin and other high caste people were able to reserve position in every sphere of life- from priest to politician, and bureaucrats to diplomats and so on.

5.4   Settlement and House Types

Social and cultural diversities are distinctly reflected through the pattern, types, and form of the settlement and houses. Plain *jats* and *jatis* have their houses in compact settlement i.e. they live together within a settlement with their own groups or *jats* and *jatis*. A cluster of 20 to 30 houses in a compact form is quite common in each settlement. Hill people, on the other hand, prefer to live in a loose settlement and their houses are usually found scattered over a part of the village.

There are more than 30 small villages called *tol* or *basti* in local language in the study area. Among them Gouriganj, Mahendranagar, Deviganj, Kanchira, Dangitola, Harira, Athmauja, Chilhara, Malhatol, Hukkagachhi, Bhawanipur, Giritola, Kadamgachhi, Altabari, Telkani, Thekitola, Barhasudi and Phattepur are the major villages in the area. Usually a particular

group or caste people reside in a particular Basti or Tol. For example, Deviganja is a Yadav Basti, where as in Kanchira most of the villagers are Muslims. Harira, Athmauja, Chilhara, Khajurgachhi and Altabari are mostly inhabited by the Rajbanshis. The Tajpuriyas are mostly concentrated in Kadamgachhi. Malhatol, Giritola and Barhasudi are the settlements of the area where fishermen, Giri/Jogi and Musahar are the major inhabitants respectively. Most of the hill people are residing around the Telkani and Thekitola villages. Hukagachhi is a village where majorities of the villagers are Mahato. The Gangais are mostly concentrated in Dangitola and Phattepur.

Gouriganj and Mahendranagar are the market centres or bazaars of the area and are mostly inhabited by merchant and occupational *jats* of both the hill and plain people. They are Saha(Baniya), Shahu/Teli(oil-pressers), Halwai(confectioners), Dom(cremators/basket-makers), Chamer(leather-worker), Hajam(barber), Lohar(iron-worker), Barhee(carpenter), Dhobi(washer-folk), Muslims(tailor-master), Damai(hill-tailor) Newars, and Marwaris. Few hill Bhaun/Chherti and other caste people are also residing around the bazaar area.

The houses of Halwai and Baniya, the dominant *jats* in Bazaar area, are clustered together in a circular form. Some of the hill Brahmins and Newars are also situated in the area among the Halwai and Baniya families. Most of the other castes are located in the outskirts. However, there are some Yadav, Teli and Mahato families residing in the periphery of the bazaar. The Chamars make up a solid block in the middle of southern section and the Dom forms a block in the west corner of the bazaar. Other occupational castes of either one or two families are scattered all over the bazaar area. However, the overall pattern of settlements in the study area is found to be determined by the following three factors:

1. Cultural affinities (in relation to jats, religion and value systems e.g. hill Brahmin/Chhetri *gauon* or *basti* is different and separate from a gauon or *basti* of Gangai or Tajpuriya. A Chhamar *gauon* or *tol* is different from that of Rajbanshi. A Yadav *gauon* or *basti* is different and separate from a Muslim *tol* and so on);

2.   Availability of resource-base (in relation of easy access to market and other facilities, farm lands, forest, water sources, grazing/pasture land, and so on e.g. mixed settlement pattern is observed near the market place where many facilities are available and similar pattern is observed near the other resources) and;

3.   Land form (in relation to topography e. g. *Pahade tol* is usually found in relatively open, flat, and upper land whereas Rajbanshi or Gangai *tol* is relatively a compact dwelling in a close space).

The houses of plain Hindu *jats* and *jatis* are generally made up of bamboo latticed wall which are plastered with cow dung and mud. The roofs are thatched and a few are tiled and roofed by tin sheets. These houses are usually rectangular in shape and gabled with a country yard, which is completely enclosed. Some houses have triangular gabled roof and it is believed that such structure helps to protect the house from storms.

However, some rich people have concrete houses. Few houses in the bazaar area are also made up of brick, stone, cement, and sand with concrete roof called *pakki* or *munda ghar*. The Rajbanshis, Tajpuriyas and Gangais and must of the plain caste Hindus are famous for drawing pictures on walls and pillars of their houses by carving into the mud with various colours. The wall decoration in most of the cases is about the simple geometrical designs or human or animals figures. They decorate them with great care and are famous for keeping the houses neat and clean. Cheap prints of Hindu gods and goddess or large posters of Indian and Nepali film stars or family photographs taken by street photographers in the city are the materials of wall decoration in some of the houses. Some houses possess wall clocks, but these are generally out of order and are used as a means of decoration instead of time keeper.

Generally three types of dwellings (compact, medium, and multiple*)* are observed in the study area. The compact dwelling is called *jhuparpatti* in local language. It is a single house which shelters both family members and livestock. The medium dwelling known as *bhuintalla ghar* has separate cow-sheds, and pens and are usually spacious than compact dwelling. Multiple dwelling or *domalla ghar* are large houses with fully equipped in local standard. Hence, the house types and designs reflect not only its economic status but also demonstrate the culture of a particular *jat* and *jatis*.

Some well- to- do people of plain *jats* and *jatis* have two story house called *domalla ghar*. They are made up of either wood or bamboo or brick and cement. The house generally stands in its own compound, which is surrounded by a wall of either brick or *tati* (bamboo lattice) having *bahari darwaja* (an entrance gate). There is a separate small hut type house called *bahari ghar* just outside the compound wall as a living room for visitors and outsiders. When we enter the gate in the compound wall we will see an open space which constitutes the courtyard of the house called *bahari agna*. On the one side of this courtyard there is a *guwali ghar*(cattle-shed), the end of which is partition off as a store room for fuel wood and other purposes.

Tube-well or wells are located on the other side of courtyard. Opposite the gate across the courtyard is a *vitari agna*(veranda) running the whole length of the house. *Mul darwaja* (the

main door) of the house leads into an inner court where different rooms are used for different purposes such as kitchen, dining and store room for grains and other household materials. Sleeping rooms are usually located in upstairs in *domalla ghar*. There is no separate room or place for gods and deities inside the main house among the plain ethnic groups. Every house has backyard for kitchen gardening

In one corner, usually on the north-east side of the compound wall, there is a sacred place called *thakurar ghar* where three separate *thans*[10] (abode) of *thakur, brahmani* and *kali* are located. Just in front of *thakur than,* we can see a standing bamboo branch tied with red *pataka* (banner) at its top is called *hanuman than*. The elder most person of the household daily worships these shrines. Marriage, death and Dasain or Dasahra festivals are the occasions when these *thans* get intensive poojs and sacrifice with great care and devotion.

Though some small variations are sometimes seen in the internal arrangement of the dwellings, the principle of construction are more or less the same. The walls are made of local brick or wood or bamboo lattice; the windows and doors and their frames are fashioned by local carpenter and are often decorated on the outside with carvings of geometrical designs and occasionally human and animal figures. If the walls are made of brick and bamboo lattice, it is plastered with cement and sand and washed with white *chun* (calcium) in some cases. For wooden wall no plaster is needed. Similarly floors are made of either mud or wood or concrete, accordingly roofs are usually tiled, tined, and concrete. Only few such houses, which are located in bazaar area, have pit-latrines in the backyards.

Bhandabartan (household utensils) are generally made by the local potter. But shining brassware, including a few large coppers puts for storing water, are a mark of respectability. Food is served on brass, bell-betel, or steel plates. Water is drunk from metal mugs or brass beakers but steel glasses are being used popularly nowadays.

There are middle sized one storey houses called *bhuintalla ghar* built by average cultivator and businessman with small land holding, who are neither rich nor poor according to village standard. These houses also have a courtyard, *thakur ghar*, separate cattle-shed, *bahari ghar* with small portion of backyard; a veranda and two or three rooms, which are used for various purposes. The walls are of bamboo lattice with mud plaster, the floor of mud and the roof is thatched and in some cases tiled. Latrine is not found in most of the houses. People use open field and riverbanks for latrine purposes.

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[10] Small house like structure roofed with tin sheets without any image.

In such houses furniture are regarded as a luxury; there may be a few bedsteads, some small wooden stools possibly a few crude chairs. These types of house are also decorated with carvings on the doors, and designs are printed on the walls. People with city contact decorate the walls of their houses with commercial calendar or coloured magazine covers. Generally two different kinds of house structure of this type are observed in the village.   They are- *bgangla* g*har* (hut with two sloped roof) and c*howari* g*har* (hut with four sloped roof).

The compact or *jhuparpatti* are the commonest and numerous types of dwellings found in Gouriganj. The walls of these huts are either made of mud or they are made of branch lattice and plastered with mud. The roof is always thatched. The hut is built in a small enclosure and has generally a single room, from which the kitchen is partly partitioned. These huts have very little furniture and all household utensils are the wares of the local potter. The *jhuparpattis* are, however, a class by themselves. The small circular or rectangular huts made from sheets of weed-mating are about twenty feet in diameter or length and are often only six feet high. The interior is usually not partitioned and serves as bedroom, dining, living room, and kitchen.

More or less all the houses of plain *jats* and *jatis* in Gouriganj can be grouped into one of these three types. All the three types of village dwellings have some features in common. Almost all of them have some open space either at the front or at the back. In the back space, women take bath and in times of emergency, such as illness or other inability, it may be used as latrine. In winter, it is used for kitchen gardening. Similarly, in most of these houses the cattle shed is very close to the main living room. Hardly a dozen houses in the village have latrines; majorities of the people go out into the fields or riverbanks for answering the call of nature. Leaving some exception, the decorative design found in the entire house generally follows a well established pattern. The floors are swept several times a day in almost all the houses. The mud floor is periodically smeared with cow-dung mixed with water and walls are washed annually with lime or colour earth.

Houses of the hill people are made up of wood and bamboo with the support of wooden pillars called *khanbo*. Usually nine tall and six short *khanbos* are needed to build a medium sized house. Among these fifteen *khanbos*, one is regarded as *mul khanbo* (main pillar) which has a great ritual and symbolic significance. The *mul khanbo* symbolizes different things in different contexts. It is regarded as the ''protector'' of house and worshipped during various occasions. There is a strong belief that ancestors are part of the family and always come to the house in the form of invisible image called *atama* and usually dwell in the *mul khanbo*. This is why it is regarded as sacred in many families and outsiders are not allowed to touch it and enter in certain area inside the house where the *mul khanbo* is located. During Dasain, the

great festival of Nepal, the elder head of the household first offer *tika* and *jamara* to the *mul khanbo* as the representative of king, only then other family members get the *tika, jamara* and *asirbad* (blessing).

Houses of hill people are usually two storeyed. The ground floor is commonly used for keeping livestock and the first floor is used as apartment for family members. Walls of houses of middle class families are made of bamboo latticework and plastered with cement. Some houses are also made up of wooden wall called *patai*. A separate kitchen is commonly found among the middle class people but in some cases the ground floor is also used as kitchen. In poor families, who have one storey house and have no separate kitchen, all domestic activities are done in the same floor.

5.5   Religion, Language, and Dialects

The study area, like other parts of Nepal is multi-religious. Hinduism, Muslim, Buddhism Christianity, Jainism and Shamanism are the major religious traditions practised in Gouriganj. However, it is difficult to draw a boundary line to separate one religion from another in local context because of non-interference and amicable relationship with each another.

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Box 5.16 Religious
Groups of Gouriganj

01. Hindu
02. Buddhist
03. Muslims
04. Christians
05. Jain/Marwari
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Generally, the languages of Tibeto-Burman, Indo- Aryan, and Munda families are spoken in Gouriganj. Rai and Limbu languages belong to Tibeto- Burman family and Nepali and Rajbanshi languages belong to Indo-Aryan family, where as the Satar language belongs to Munda family. Nepali, as evolved from *khas kura* of Karnali region of west Nepal, is the main language of communication in the study area. Most of the groups like Rajbanshi and Satar in this area use Nepali language as lingua franca despite their own native language/dialects in their households.

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Box 5.17 Linguistic
Groups of Gouriganj

01. Nepali
02. Rajbanshi
03. Satar
04. Bangali
05. Rai
06. Limbu
07. Maithili
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Beside Nepali, the Rajbanshi language known locally as *Rajbanshi boli or dialect* is the dominant language of communication among the people of Gouriganj. All the other plain jat and jatis could speak this language to communicate each other. However, it has been greatly influenced by the other regional languages, such as Bengali and Maithili in addition to Nepali language, which has posed threat in the independent survival of this language.

5.6   Development Infrastructure

Gouriganj and its neighbouring villages even today are counted as backwater of Jhapa district. Once as a prosperous village, it was counted one of the leading regions of tax collection in the district. Latter, it became marginal due to lack of transportation and other infrastructural facilities. Nonetheless, nowadays it has been linked to a partially paved feeder road system of the country. Through this road, altogether eight buses have been providing daily transportation services. There is a daily direct bus link to major cities of the country such as Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bhadrapur, Dharan and Illam. But the physical condition of the road is vulnerable and is in urgently need of repair.

Gouriganj has recently received electrification, which has raised some hope for its future development as rural industrial area. It has already been linked with Mart System of Telecommunication having 40-lines capacity. But so far only 7 out of 40 have been distributed in the area. It has been providing both the STD and ISTD telephone facilities including local call services.

Ground water is the primary source of drinking water, which is procured in different ways. Most of *madhise* people including the a*dhibasis* prefer digging well but hill people prefer to drill tube-well. Most of the local people in the study area share drinking water sources (well, tube well) with poor maintenance and management. Approximately one-third of the households have water resources in their own compounds. The remaining two-third has to go out to fetch water either from neighbour's house or from open seasonal water sources near by. Recently UNICEF has provided tube well in some of the villages of the study area under community management.

Lokanath and Sons Tea Estate and Dhiraj Rice and Flour Mill are two big industries operating in Gouriganj besides a dozen and more small-scale agro-based industry. In addition to this, Golchha Jute Trading Centre and few big grocery stores in local standard indicate business and market potential of Gouriganj. There is a branch office of the leading commercial bank of country, which has been providing banking facilities to businessmen, government offices and other general public.

Twenty local level government and non-government offices are in operation there focusing different aspect of local development. There are three *Illaka* (a region of district) level government offices like Health Post, Police Station, and Post Office which have been providing services to people of Gouriganj. Besides, there are seven other government offices in order to provide government facilities to local people. They include VDC offices,

veterinary service centre, local co-operative office, branch offices of agricultural development, custom office, and border police station and so on. The remaining 10 offices, mostly non-governmental, are related to sports and music, community development, labour organisation, professional organisation on women and gender.

Thus, the overall infrastructure condition of Gouriganj indicates that there is a great potential for future development of the region. The basic infrastructure facilities are coming up to Gouriganj.

5.7   Social Ecology of the Village

The primary concern of social ecology is the inquiry into the process of continuous interaction among the human groups in their physical and socio-cultural environments. This perspective, nonetheless, has facilitated me to formulate some assumption about socio-cultural behaviour of the inhabitants in relation to the natural environment where they live. In addition, the description of people in a particular social space or setting gives an idea of the inherent features of organisation of *jats* and *jatis* and their distribution and variation in time and space. The description of settlement pattern and house type also gives an idea of daily life and provides a perspective how it has been shaping the society.

This chapter has presented the physical as well as social setting of the study area. The physical setting usually gives us an idea of environmental aspects of human settlement, population, and its variation over space (i.e. spatial distribution) in the context of man-environment relationship, and the social setting gives the idea of population, age and occupation groups, and ethnic composition of the area under the study. Both the social and physical settings reflect the social ecology of the study area. The village, thus, composes truly complex societies with diverse cultural traditions, the structure of which can certainly not be represented in terms of common village prototypes. The study area also provides a unique example of local variation. Any one who observes the area with care will find diversity in terms of formal features of village organisation, marriage and family institutions, gender relation and so on. Islamic communities are located next to a Hindu village; in some villages hierarchical notion is emphasised, where as in *adivasi* and Muslim villages egalitarian ideology widely dominates. A discussion of household organisation, marriage, and kinship relations provides another aspect of variation in social and cultural life forms. Organisations of households, patterns of marriages, and other kin relations are the themes of discussion for next chapter.

Chapter: Six
Organization of Household and Kinship

6.1   The Concept of Household

Ghar-paribar (households) in Gouriganj, as elsewhere in Nepal are basic residential units within which economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing, ritual activities and shelter are organized and carried out. *Ghar-paribar*, in this connection are regarded to be crucial to social identity, and are primary locations in which life cycle phases (childhood, family establishment, elder hood) are enacted, rites of passage celebrated or planned, inheritance decided and *pitri* or *purbaj* (ancestors, who may symbolically or physically underlie the household) be venerated. In most of the cases, households consist of families; or else their core members constitute families, even though some members of the household may not be relative of the family around which it is built. Nevertheless, households have their own cultural dimensions too, and these need to be examined separately from those of families, even when household and family personnel largely overlap.

Because the household combines the functions of production, reproduction, and consumption within an ideologically legitimised multigenerational time frame, social reproduction by households is intense, reaches well into the adulthood of its members, and outweighs, by far, the impact of other institutions of social reproduction. In other words, in all household regimes, the phenomena of development cycle occurs, meaning that a household may assume different form through time as members arrive and depart, and new household begin.

The concept of *ghar-paribar* also indicates a system of social security for aged and dependent. It provides a strong sense of safety within its regime for its members. In the absence or minimum level of social welfare service from government side, village tradition and ethics lay down fairly strict norms regarding the treatment of aged, dependent parents. A son failing in his duty of providing adequately for his old parents, and not caring sufficiently for their comforts, particularly during illness, invite strong social disapproval and comment. He is regarded as bad example. Elders, well wishers and friends are bound to remind him repeatedly about his obligations to his age parents and other dependants.

The political implication of household is becoming pervasive particularly after the restoration of multi-party democracy in the country. People from all social and cultural groups are more or less involved in party politics and are divided into the followers of different political

ideology and parties. There is no correlation between political party and social and cultural group. Though majority of the plain people support Terai based Sadvabana Party, recently in bi-election they voted for the Nepali Congress candidate, hill Brahmin by caste. In last general election, CPM-UML candidate, a hill Kumain Brahmin was the winner. This indicates a situation in which people in the study area could be mobilised for political and electoral purposes on the basis of households. Households can still be vital unit of mobilisation for developmental intervention and other similar purposes. Households can play more important role in present day's politics than the higher level social institution of caste and ethnic groups. Households are real entities and occupy a distinct physical, social and political space in public discourses. Caste, ethnic groups and other social identities are rather vague and difficult to locate into a specific political matrix.

Households, in most anthropological studies (Fricke, 1986; Zurick, 1986; Holmberg, 1989; Caplan, 1970; Seddon et. all; 1980.; Hictchcok, 1966) in Nepal have been conceptualised in three ways- as an item of material culture, as an object replete in symbolic meanings and as the locus of domestic domain and system of household production. In addition to these dimensions, household has been taken as a category and idea central to the conceptualisation and practice of social relation through out of this study.

Though there are variations, households in Gouriganj each occupy a distinct physical space, which is laid out in a relatively similar basic pattern. Households are either built in an open space in the middle of farmlands or in a little congested area nearer to bazaar centre. The number of houses in each village or settlement ranges from ten to fifty and sometimes more because people prefer to live in compact dwellings. Sharing of a common compound by more than one household is also observed in some settlement. Nevertheless, the distinctness of the unit is marked- both materially created and symbolically expressed-by a compound wall about five feet tall, with single gate that can be locked. In some specific cases there may be an imaginary boundary line along fruit or fodder trees or similar other physical things, which distinguish households compound from other physical space. Such wall or boundary line is usually considered as impenetrable without permission. If it is built of branch thatch or jute residue -as is most common-it is possible by putting one's eye to the crack to peep through; but to do so from the outside is considered as ill manners, whereas persons in side sometimes do peep to observe the public scene outside.

Generally, the compound area is square or rectangular in size, and divided into two parts: an outer portion with huts and yard and an inner portion with separate building or huts and yards. The outer yard is called *bhari agina* and used for business, sitting, gossiping, and receiving guests and paddy sun drying and for such other similar purposes. There is also usually a

veranda area or a raised sitting platform for outside living and is occasionally used as sleeping ground for guest. The inner yard is called *bhiter agina* and is connected with main building that provides distinct area for sleeping and inside living, for kitchen, and for bathroom and in few cases for toilet facilities. There is no latrine in the majority of the households in the area. People use riverbanks and open field or bamboo groves outside the village or settlement for latrine purposes. In the backyard of the main building, every household has a small kitchen garden within the compound.

People unequivocally identify the compound as a domestic unit with limited memberships. But it is somehow difficult to get single answer to the question: what a person must do to be considered as a member of a household. People generally answer this question in three different ways: a person must sleep there, or eat there, or make some economic contribution, whether or not they sleep or eat there. Accordingly, persons who are absent on labour migration and other similar purposes and domestic servants or business assistants are generally counted as a member of the household unit. This reflects both the absence of any other basis for identity of absent migrant and domestic servant and their continued economic and service contribution to the household.

Though people express the delimitation of each domestic unit in a definite way, no single criterion is entirely satisfactory to define its constitution. Its component members usually hold joint property but holding private property living in the same unit is not restricted. Members are jointly responsible to maintain the household, but substantial subsidies may also be provided from kinsmen outside, while some income of its members may be kept privately for themselves. Women, specifically unmarried girls keep some private property in the form of either money or cattle/goats/chicken as their private income called *pewa*. Joint cooking is likewise no sure indicator of membership, since neighbours both co-operate and redistribute dishes, and some time contribute persistently by providing for old or disable neighbours. Domestic servant and business assistant are not allowed eat together with rest of the household member if they belong to low caste, though they might get food from the same pot. Thus, if we take the occasional presence of houseguests as an exception, the clearest definition of membership of any household in Gouriganj could be provided by sleeping arrangements, expressed by the locking or barring of the gate at night when all are in.

Households as conceptualised above are clearly form the core of the social and cultural structure and constitute the key locus of cultural and social reproduction. As elsewhere, households are also the key mediators between individuals and the more encompassing levels of social interactions. The social identity of a person in Gouriganj is found to be largely built on the foundation of the identity of the household he or she belongs to and people in study

area usually judge its member in terms of his/her household backgrounds. Thus, family and household provide the ultimate basis for all social reproduction, and we may expect the patterns that are predominant in this field to have profound consequences, directly or indirectly for the organisation and maintenance of all the paradoxes that are found in Gouriganj.

6.1.1 Composition

The basic residential, social, religious and economic unit of the people of Gouriganj is the patrilineal nuclear household. This unit consists of a man, his wife, and their unmarried children, usually occupying a single dwelling. If I have grasped the pattern correctly, it is true to say that family and household in Gouriganj show markedly 'urban' or 'modern' structure, in that they are characterised by a pattern of relatively small and exclusive units.   In some cases, however, a household may consist of two or more married males, their wives and unmarried children, all working on the same undivided land or business enterprises. Such households are termed here as joint families, which may split into two or more residential units, regularly occupying outbuildings, away from the main house. Regardless of residence all the individuals share in the family occupation and eat from the same hearth in joint families of the study area. Therefore in joint families, residence does not necessarily indicate the basic economic unit of a household.

The society in Gouriganj is a patrilocal one and can be seen from the fact that after the death of the household head, the responsibility and authority are both transferred naturally to the eldest son, but eldest women of the household becomes titular head of the household upon her husband's death, if there are no sons or younger to take over. Small sample censuses were made of households of a mixed settlement of Gouriganj in order to find out the household composition. Based on these gathered data a classification of households in terms of their composition or residence pattern has been made in the following table in order to figure out some silent features of household organisations.

Table 6.1   Household Composition in a Settlement of Gouriganj

Household Type	No. of HHs	Percentage of the total HHs	Population	Percentage of the total population
A. SIMPLE: 1. Husband and wife (wives) and their children and husband's widow mothers.	13		89	
2. Brothers, one married with children and other unmarried.	3		16	
3. Husband and wife and their children.	38		228	
4. Husband and wife.	6		12	
5. Widow and her children	4		21	
6. Widow, her married daughter and house son- in-law and her grand son.	1		7	
7. Man/ woman living alone	3		3	
Total Simple Households	*68*	*82.92*	*376*	*76.11*
B. JOINT: 1. Husband and wife or widower and there/ his married son(s), spouse(s) and their/ his unmarried grandchildren.	14		118	
Total Joint Household	*14*	*17.0*	*118*	*23.88*
Grand Total	**82**	**100.00**	**494**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 1999

The table 6.1 shows us that 83 % of the households fall into "simple" category that includes 76 % of the total population in 68 small residential units. Nuclear family as defined by Haviland (1989) is the smallest conjugal unit of mother, father and their dependent children. Here, out of 68 households grouped as simple type, 'pure' nuclear families comprise 38 households, the remaining simple type which can loosely be grouped as nuclear family includes widow and her children (4 households), man and woman living alone (3 households), husband and wife (6 households) and brothers one married and his spouse and children (3 households) types of resident. Among the remaining simple type, 14 households can be classified as minimal extended types of family in which a widow mother of the husband or wife and his/her spouse and children are residing together.

Caplan (1970) defines joint households as those, which include a married couple or widower and at least one marred son and spouse and their children. Outs of 82 households of the area 17 % (14 households) are joint, which comprises of 118 individuals (24 % of the total population of the sampled households).

The table also clarifies that the central, constituting relationship in a household is that between spouses and then come parent-child and brothers. In few households, nevertheless, domestic servant and business assistant are also reported as family members. The three persons living alone were widowers. The households where married brother and other yet unmarried are residing together can be called as 'incomplete' and are said to be in transition phase of household breaking or separation. Men who become single will seek to remarry, or if they are old enough they may choose to move in with a married child or some other close relative. For women remarriage is not impossible but it is very rare in practice. They also prefer to move in with married child, preferably with son in their old age.

Women of marriageable age are not allowed to reside separately or remain single. Even a married woman if her husband is on labour migration is not allowed to live alone. Binod Tajpuriya, a matriculated young man, left his wife with his mother while he was on labour migration to Punjab, India. People, including Binod believe that woman must not be left alone and someone must be responsible for her if her husband is away. People always doubts on women that they can protect household and other property while their husbands are away from the household for a long period. But the more pervasive fear among men, if I understood correctly, arises from the possible sexual misdemeanour of their wives during their (husbands) absence. Obviously, the practice of joint household provides solution to such situation, whereby close relative take on supervisory functions for each other.

In most cases, an eldest active male or husband of the family is regarded as the head of the household. The wife of the eldest male, regardless of weather the latter is living is the head of household chores or 'domestic sphere' and of the female component, particularly in joint family. As the head of the household, husband should demand respect and obedience from his wife and children and other family members. He bears the final responsibility and sole authority for the family's well being and everyone is supposed to work and act according to his instruction. As guardian, he is fully responsible to protect his family and their interests, obtain news, information and judgement that needed to avoid unfortunate involvement and mobilise family and his personal networks and connections at appropriate time to choose good sons-in-low and obtain desirable brides and dowry for sons. However, in some households it is reported that all the major decisions are taken by the husband in consultation

with his wife and grown- up children, but the final say in all matters connected with the family is always remain with the husband.

However, in many cases the *de facto* head of the family may be a son under whose guidance and supervision the land is cultivated or the craft or profession of the family is practised. Parents dominate the scene in their youth and early middle age. With approaching old age they gradually recede to the background. Nominally they remain the heads of the family, but their sons are (usually the eldest one) left more or less free to conduct the management of the family property and profession as they like. As long as the father remains the real head of the family, the internal management of the family remains the responsibility of the mother. Sons are expected to obey her and daughters-in-law are expected to carry her instruction. Any failure or reluctance on the part of the daughter-in-law to carry out the wishes of her mother-in-law leads to a constant quarrels and complications and in many cases to ultimate separation.

As a manager of household, the husband has to work hard to maintain the family. The major share of the family's subsistence comes through his labour; in some cases the wife also assists him. In many families, basically among the poorer, the women contribute substantial amount of the family earnings. However, the main task of the women is to run the household and manage the domestic economy. As far as possible women are responsible to keep house neat and tidy, to look after the children and cattle and above all they are fully responsible to provide meals for the members of the family at fixed hours. Ordinarily a woman does not interfere with 'outside affairs' that is matters that do not directly concerned with domestic management are believed to be the responsibility of the husband. Similarly, the husband is not expected to interfere too much in the actual running of the household. Nevertheless, in many families, it is reported that major decisions connected with either of these spheres are arrived at after mutual consultation

From the above discussion, it can be argued that gender roles within household pursuits are complementary rather than being based on gender division of labour. Women normally do all household works and men are responsible for all work that relates the household to the outside, but most tasks can be done by either sex. For instance, cooking is women's work only to the extent that it is done in the home and for domestic use; for large feast such as marriage and all collective occasion like picnic, men are the cooks. During menstruation period, men must be involved in all the domestic cooking particularly among the high caste Hindus. If we take ploughing and thatching as an exception, even in agriculture, there is no fundamental difference in job assigned to men and women. I have seen men and women transplanting, wedding and harvesting paddy and similar other crops and doing farm jobs

equally. Ploughing field and thatching huts are, however, considered as men specialised work in Gouriganj, as elsewhere in Nepal. On the other hand, there are some courageous women who not only support themselves but also contribute a substantial portion of household income by running small business and working in tea estate. Still, it is equally true that women in domestic spheres hold more power and authority than their men folk and men dominate the outside affairs of the household.

The activities performed by husband and wife as their respective responsibilities in household pursuits make them participants in very different social worlds. Borrowing from Barth (1982:118-120) this phenomena can best be conceptualised by using the metaphor of ''social space'' for the persons, places, and occasions in which each is expected to be involved. As we have seen, though their roles may be complementary, the social spaces in which the husband and wife usually take part are different and there is little chance to overlap. In other words, husband and wife, in most of the cases, are involved in different social spaces. The household provides them a 'private space' for mutual action; otherwise, men must and do move in to the wider social networks, constantly confronting strangers and facing the option of whether to transfer these strangers into acquaintances and associates, whereas women have relatively small social world both physically and in terms of persons. Their interaction is limited and confined to close neighbours and relatives, largely outside the normal space of the husband.

Accordingly man and woman have different orientation from their early age. Women have been taught from an early age not to orient their behaviour toward a wider audience. Restrictions are placed on them at the age of nine or ten, and they cannot play with boys, must be in the company of women and grown-up girls. They are not allowed to go out of the house alone except when sent on an errand. They are taught at this early age to acquaint themselves with the various household duties that a woman has to perform. As a result women rarely participate in public function jointly with men, except in a few religious ceremonies like *Purans* in which the presence of man's wife is necessary. Thus, they are automatically constrained to operate within a world of a different character from that of men. Men, from their early training are encouraged to face outside world to earn an income for household management. They enter into a wider social world maintaining a number of social relationships that provide them a greatest range of options in business and career opportunity. They usually utilise a wider range of their social relations and connections in harvesting livelihood and family welfare. They have a great deal of social encouragement to participate in a wider social activities from local level party politics to religious congregation and school management committee to tea estate labour union.

Because of these family orientations and social backgrounds, people in the study area, look daughters as an unnecessary burden because of their uneconomic value and huge expenses as *tilak* (dowry) which have to be borne at their marriages. In addition, people think that girls are *arkako ghara jane jat* (a *jat* who eventually go to some other family) and care for a daughter is regarded as 'watering a neighbour's tree'; you take all the trouble with it but its fruit goes to someone else. Hence there is no great rejoicing at the birth of a girl. On the other hand, people regard a son as an asset and is looked upon both psychological and a ritual necessity.

Stereotyped attitudes towards husband and wife relation is still noticeable and people express publicly without any hesitation that wife should regard husband as her 'master' and should 'serve him faithfully'. It is the husband's responsibility to provide adequate supports for the maintenance of his 'dependants' and wife's duty is to 'run the household carefully and efficiently'. In addition, people believe that husband should 'watch the activities and ways of his wife, as well as 'take care of proper upbringing of their children'. The traditional convention that husband is 'superior' and wife is his 'subordinate' is still in common practice among people. As mark of the recognition of his superiority, the wife shows respect to her husband by touching his feet and, in some cases; she is forced to drink water after washing his feet. She washes the husband's clothes and eats the leftover in his plate. The husband, on the other hand, cannot do likewise and even think to do so.

When the wife does small err, the husband not only reprimands her but can easily abuse and beat her. I myself have seen a fearful event in Gouriganj where a *dhobi*, or washer man was beating his wife bringing her in an open street so inhumanely that the surrounding people had to intervene the matter and cleft them forcefully. The only fault she did was *mukha lagnu*, or to answer him back. When the public noticed that the *dhobi* was still troubling her, they cached him and submitted him to local police station. Whatsoever may be the personal relationship, the cultural pattern of husband's domination is publicly reflected in the lament of wife over her husband's death, when she cries, '*where is my lord? Where is my master? Now who will support me? The shield that protected me is gone; now I am helpless* (Dhan Bir Rajbanshi, in Personal communication, 1999).

Though everyone in the village verbalises the expected husband-wife relationship in similar words, it does not mean that every family within Gouriganj has similar dominant relationship. My acquaintance with some families and their close observation reveal a different reality. The husband is, without doubt, superior and has in most families, the upper hand; but in practice, he is not completely dominant, authoritarian and patriarchal figure. Moreover, the quality of inter-personal relations between husband and wife change as they leave one stages of life and enters another. Malbati Sahu, a middle aged Teli woman discloses her uneasy relation with

her husband before she gave births their children. Quarrel between them was frequent. She tells quite amazingly that her husband abused but also sometimes beat in simple reasons like not washing cloth in time, answers him back. But now they are quite happy couple and enjoying good life understanding each other.

The families in the study area may be organised in one or other forms as presented in table 9 due to a particular social, historical and ecological circumstance. Due to the lack of adequate land holding, and its poor soil fertility, and other reliable sources of livelihood, majority of the population prefers to live in nuclear family than in extended or joint family. The nuclear family, which has become ideal in North American and European society, is also popular among the people who live in harsh environment, such as Inuit (Haviland, 1989). In addition, in nuclear family the members are more free and independent to sell their labour power for the better earning and the earning may be used in proper way without dividing to other family members as in extended and joint family. However, some people, who are self -sufficient in grain production for their consumption and have enough sources of earning other than land, prefer to live in extended and joint family to fulfil the labour demand of agricultural activities as well as to look after the other business jointly. In subsistence agriculture, like in the study area, household members primarily fulfill labor demand themselves.

6.1.2 Separation

In general when a joint family gets crowded the question of either permanent or temporary separation arises. In most of the households even after the marriage of the eldest son he and his spouses remain in the same house, eating in the same kitchen without any change, though the *bahu* or *buhari* or *dulahi* (daughter-in law) being an addition to the household members. Those who can hold together for few years generally continue to live under the same roof peacefully for a much longer period. Domestic quarrels and dissension developed within this period can compel them to start thinking about separation. Generally, when all sons get married, a joint family starts to break and simultaneously nuclear families begin to emerge. Nevertheless, separation is known to have taken place in some cases even after ten to fifteen years of living together

A separation from the main household usually occurs when brothers and parent divide their *chal, achal paitrik sampati* (ancestral property in kind as well as in cash) equally among them. Generally, the eldest son leaves first, followed by his younger brothers as they get married and bring their wives to join them. It is always the youngest son who remains with parents after marriage, if the elder brothers have already separated. When the house gets crowded the parents, widower or widow may suggests sons (elder) to leave the main house

and live in an outbuilding looking after the harvest/ livestock, or business. Though they start to live separately, they continue to share the same sources of income. This kind of separation can be called *ghar sallaha ko bhagbanda*, that is, separation based on understanding.

Separation is usually rationalised in terms of the strained relation among brother's wives within the single house. It can also be due to tension between father and sons as the youth begin to assert independence. Tension between a mother-in-law and sister-in-law can further contribute to break up a household. If the married brothers managed to live together for a longer period in a single household, dispute between their children might also cause the household division. Many such cases were observed in the study area.

A young married man separating from his parents or brothers generally maintains close connections with their family or families. However, as the immediate cause of separation is often a quarrel or an acute difference of opinion, for some time the separating families continue to have strained relations. They may not even be on speaking terms. After sometimes, however, the bitterness of the dispute wears off and cordiality gradually returns and they start taking interest in each other's affairs and problem. Family ceremonies, feasts and festivals bring them all together. Rites connected with major crises of life are great occasions for family reunions. Particularly in the event of death old quarrel and misunderstanding are generally forgotten and all *gotiyar* (near- relation) assemble for the last rites. In the rituals of 13th day, the presence of all branch of family is regarded as obligatory and the absence of any one at such occasion is bound to be viewed very seriously. The following case gives some idea about the process of separation in Gouriganj.

Case 6.1 Fission of a Joint Household

R.P. Tajpuriya of age 36 years is a local primary school teacher. He lives happily with his wife Sarbari, and three children (two sons and one daughter) of school going age. He married with Sarbari in 1985. She is from an Indian village just across the border about four or five hours walk from Gouriganj. ''Though the marriage was simple and brief, I had received *tilak* according to my *khandan* (family background) and *izzat*(prestige, status). ''I received one bicycle, a pair of cloths some kitchen utensils, brass plates, a copper vessel, a calf and few thousand rupees'' he told me reluctantly. In addition, his parents received clothes and other near relatives also received 'some thing' as marriage prestation. Before and few more years after marriage he and his family lived in the joint family with his parents, brothers and their spouses and unmarried sisters.

One year after marriage his wife came home to live with him. For few years or so after his marriage he continued to live with his parents and brothers. His wife also lived with him. In the mean time he joined job in a local school as a schoolteacher and started to make some money. Domestic quarrels and dissension developed in the family within this period compelled him to start thinking about separation. When a tension aroused with his father and elder brother on the issues of using modern farming techniques in land cultivation, he publicly expressed his desire to be independent from main house.

''I had thought that marriage and my school job will end my tutelage under my father and established me as independent members of the community''. But, he found that the parents and rest of the family members were not agreed with his view. And consequently in the period that follows there was

considerable stress between him and his parents. '' I was then in a dilemma of loyalty between to my father and my new -fond desire for independence on the one hand; my affection for the mother generated by close association from the day of birth and off course, not less my attraction for the wife on the other''.

But suddenly, in the winter of 1989, his father decided to make him separate from main house. According to R.P, his father thought that he became schoolteacher and was clever enough than his other sons and if remained in the main house, he would deceived them and their future will be in trouble. Thinking on that line his father advised him to live in a small outbuilding hut.

At first he was not provided his full share of paitrik *sampati*. Only 10 *kathas* of land and a small hut without kitchen garden were given to him. ''I didn't get any kitchen utensils in real sense. No cattle and goats were given to my family. For many years, I relied on the assistance of my wife's parent for running household activities''.

''Since the immediate cause of separation was an acute difference of opinion, for some time me and my family had strained relations with main house. For some time I did not even speak with my parents. After sometimes, however, the bitterness of the dispute wear off and cordiality gradually returned and we started taking interest in each other's affairs and problem''.

''The networks of family ceremonies, feasts and festivals brought us all together again. Rites connected with major crises of life are great occasions for family reunions. Particularly in the event of death old quarrel and misunderstanding are generally forgotten and all *gotiyar* (near- relation) assemble for the last rites. In the rituals of 13th day, the presence of all branch of family is regarded as obligatory and the absence of any one at such occasion is bound to be viewed very seriously''.

He, however, received his full share of *paitrik sampati* that was about 3 *bighas* of land and 2 *kathas* of ghaderi (house land) with small patch of kitchen garden after his father died three years ago. Few cattle and goats and some kitchen vessels were also given to his family as a share of *paitrik sumpat*i..

Field Work in Gouriganj, 1999

Economic ranking does play a role in household fission. Generally, it is believed that those household with large land holding or business that might need working co-operatively, would remain together while poorer households which rely primarily on wage labour and derive little benefit from living together, would split first.

The creation of new household usually, but not invariably, implies its independence as a land owning or business owning unit. Once a son separates and possesses a share, which is equal for all brothers he can enjoy either by keeping it or disposing it, but if he wishes to sell, first right of purchase goes to *hakawala* or the nearest agnatic keen: brother, father's brother or father's brother's son and then to agnatic collateral keen brothers or their descendants. This inheritance right reiterates the holding of ancestor's property.

6.1.3 Inheritance

The exercise of inheritance rights by the people of Gouriganj always proceeds by stages. That is separation of a son from main household will not correspond final division of property (ref. box 6.1). Generally, the eldest son separates first. A temporary settlement might be managed

for him and in such case he takes only that amount of property necessary to provide an adequate living. The remaining ancestral property is left undivided under the supervision of the head of the main household who has the sole authority over the property. In this as in all stages of division, the kitchen and the budget of the new household are quite separate from the main household. All income remains the property of the household and its expenses and debates are its own responsibility. Usually, the final divisions of the property occur after all sons of a man get married, and establish separate households. But in most cases it is delayed until after their father's death. At this time, a written document is usually prepared called "*bandapatra*", setting out the terms of agreement, and it is then signed and witnessed by respected elders (*pancha valadmi*) of the community and is registered in the *mal adda* (district land revenue office) to get the legal recognition of separation.

The rule of inheritance are based on the "principle of ownership by birth", that is it stresses virilocality and patrilineal inheritance except in the case of involving an adopted son or a son-in-law. Property is normally passed down with the patrilocal extended family. When a man dies, his property goes to his son as a group. If his wife is living the property remains in her custody until her death or remarriage, in later case it goes to the sons. If the widow is remarried and the son is too young to look after the business or farmstead, either the mother takes him with her or some other relatives take care of him until he becomes an adult. The nearest kin of the boy enjoys his share of land. If he wants to come to his farm after maturity of age he may do so.

In partition, a debt is always repaid or at least the promise of payment is given. A share of land or money for the payment of debt may be kept aside. Then, the remaining land and other property is equally divided among sons leaving a similar sized portion for the parents to maintain themselves in their old age called *jiuni* (maintenance property of parents). Usually, the son who lives with the parents and supports them in their old age and bears the expenses for their funeral rites will get the entire *jiuni* after their death, otherwise it is divided equally amongst the sons.

If there is no son, an adopted son or *dharam putra* can be designated to substitute for son both in the inheritance of property and the performance of parent's death rites. In case of inheritance by a *ghargiea* or *gharjuwai,* or son -in-law, the right to land and property remains in the hand of his wife and ultimately passes on to their sons or lacking son, to her lineage males unless, bequest has been made to her husband. However, the husband can use the property during his lifetime.

Though rare and the practice is dying nowadays, some occupational groups such as *Thakur*, *Brahmin* do inherit their religious and occupational role as the clients of other cast/ethnic group in the area.

6.2   Marriage and Other Kinship Relations

A brief description of kinship and marriages pattern within Gouriganj will be discussed in this section of the chapter. Though there are variations, we can depict some salient features of social organisations, taking into account of marriage and kinship relation that are central to shape the societies and cultures in the study area.

6.2.1   Kinship Relations

Societies in Gouriganj are the networks of two types of kinship relations. The *gotiyars* or *bansaj* are the relationships of blood. All the kin relations in this type are defined with blood relation and the principle of inheritance follows through this line only. The *gotiars* or *bansajs* are usually belonging to a same clan and worship a common ancestor spirits and common house deities. For hill people, the *common dewali or kul pooja (lineage or clan worship)* which is carried out either annually or once a three years period generally distinguishes the *bansaj* kin groups. Usually all the bansaj people are present in such pooja and show great respect to their ancestor. Among *gotiyar* or *bansaj* all are invited on all life cycle ceremonies and their presence is more or less obligatory in life crisis ceremony.

"Ragat pani bhanda rato hunshha" (blood is red than water) is the common saying among the *gotiyars* of a group in Gouriganj. That is a biological link of consanguinity, is a powerful bond of solidarity, mutual help, and reciprocity usually stronger than most other links. But there is a great deal of feeling of jealousy, unholy competition and fragmentation among the people of same *gotiyar* and *bansaj* in practice. People again equally say that "*satru ko anuhar hernu chha bhane dajubhai ko here pugchha"*, that is, if you want to see the faces of an enemy, just go and see the faces of your brothers. These are the examples of paradoxes that have been shaping the societies and cultures within Gouriganj.

The *kutumbha* are the relationships of affinity by marriage. Marriages are the central institution to define and distinguish the *kutumbha* relationships. A relationship of *kutumbha* may exist when a marriage between two households occurs such that all the consanguine members of the spouse' may be deemed affinities. These relationships of *kutumbha* are often of systematic and permanent character, forming the basis of ongoing relations between kin groups or marriage classes. Nevertheless, these relations are considered as more fragile and

volatile in nature in comparison with *gotiyar* or *bansaj*. The saying that *"kutumbha ko bhar na parnu,* y*o kahile pani afno hudaina"*, meaning, never depend or trust on *kutumbha,* he never be one's own, is more or less the outcome of the very nature of the relationships.

Besides, these standard kinship relations of families, in village likes Gouriganj some kinship terms are also applied within the whole caste group or neighbourhood, sometimes even extended to other caste from higher to lower strata. A boy may call all the boys and girls of the village in his own generation "brother" and "sister" and all the men of his grandfather's generation "grandfather" and so on.

Furthermore, there are various kinds of *natasambandha* (kinship) that appear in public and political discourses when a person interacts with persons of different social identities. For example, a man has special *patikonata* (relation of similar party or politics) with his own party leader and members. He is considered nearer than the other ordinary public in party and political discourse. Similarly, a man can take a person in his confidence and works for mutual benefits placing him in his own inner circle of *afnomanchhe*, this is called *afnomanchhe ko nata*. In similar fashion, there is kinship of regionalism, religion, caste, and village that have been shaping the life of the people of study area. Among these, political kinship has become more prominent after the restoration of multiparty democracy in the country. Political kinship is necessary for every steps of life. From getting job to appointment to a doctor, child's school admissions to labour migration all need strong political connection.

6.2.2 Marriage Pattern

Marriages, generally agreed upon by households, bring two households and kinship groups together within a long-lasting network. While gathering of accurate data on the stability of marriage is not possible, available information strongly indicates that marriages, in general, are highly stable. Arranged marriage, particularly among high caste people is successful in the sense that the marriage is not dissolved or replaced. Marriage, apart from its economic, political and social dimensions, also bears a pronounced spiritual underpinning.

Marriage, in Gouriganj as else where, is socially recognised as bonding of man and woman typically for the purposes of legitimate reproduction. It is an essential institution in the establishment of nuclear family or creation of a new household. Furthermore, it is not only an opportunity to create new social bonds, it is often accompanied by prestations in the form of *dan*, *daijo* or *tilak*, of greater or lesser importance, as much symbolic as material, which firmly establish the marriage and set up long lasting relation between two households or families party to the exchange.

The popular form of marriage prestation in Gouriganj, presumably within the whole Terai region is the practice dowry, or *tilak pratha*, whereby a collection of good and services are offered by the bride's family to the groom or his family. The structure of marriage prestation has important political, economic and ritual consequences for the society as whole. The symbolic consequences of gender relation can be seen among the Rajbanshis, Tajpuriyas and Gangais when the *chumna partha*[1], a woman valued system of marriage prestation has been replaced by the tilak *partha* (dowry system) where women are considered as a commodity..

The search for bridegroom is complicated by involved rules relating to caste, locality, and clan or *thar*. Arranged marriage within same *jatis* is the dominant form of marriage practice in Gouriganj. Very few love marriages are reported and inter-caste marriages are still intolerable for the majority of the population. Village exogamy is a norm but not strict rule for maintaining marriage relation within a village. When a man wishes to get his son or daughter married, he usually look out for a bride or groom outside his own village, belonging to his caste, yet not to the same *gotra*. *Gotra* exogamy is not a standard rule for many *jatis* like Rajbanshi, Tajpuriya, and Gangai and there are of course several exception and variation to the marital codes practised within Gouriganj. Even among the Hindu *jatis* like Yadav and Halwai of Gouriganj are not particular about maintaining *gotra* exogamy and other standard Hindu codes of marriage in practice.

The Halwais have already practised marriage between two maternal first cousins. Sushil Das, a Halwai of Gouriganj bazaar has married with his mother's sister's daughter living in Bibiganj, India. It was reported that attractive *tilak* money offered by bride side was the main cause of such marriage. Furthermore, one of the renowned Halwai of the Gouriganj has married with a woman of *najika ko nata parne* (within close relation) because she was extremely beautiful in her *bainsa* (adulthood). Usually this type of marriage is prohibited and considered as taboo among the Hindus. It is reported that among the Muslims of Kanchira village, however, beside cross-cousin marriage, marriage between parallel cousin is permitted and indeed encouraged.

High caste Brahmins, on the other hands, are strict in caste endogamy and *gotra* and *thar* exogamy in the arranged marriage. A Brahmin boy of Bhandari *thar* never married a girl of same *thar*, unless they belong to different *gotra*. Even outside the *gotra*, marriage between two first cousins is not permissible. Among the Brahmin and Chhetri, a man may not marry even a daughter of either his father or mother's cousins. Generally, marriage is avoided

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[1] Bride price or bride service system, where object or services are transferred from groom's side to wife's side.

between the boy and girl up to five generations on the mother side and seven generations on the father side among the high caste people in Gouriganj.

Even within the same *jat*, say *bahun*, a person with of *kumain bahun* background does not marry with *purbiya bahun*. Similarly, the Maithil Brahmin does not marry in the family of Saraswat or Kankubj and similarly, the Karna Kaystha does not marry in the family of Srivastava. In addition, within the same *jat*, marriage does not so frequently occur between different groups because some regard themselves superior to others. For example, Upadhaya Brahmin hesitates to marry with the Kumain Brahmin and Kaspatiya Baniyas regarded themselves superior to the other local families of Baniyas. These various restrictions and confinement of marriage within the same but selected group of caste has fostered the *tilak pratha* in the Terai, as it limits the choice.

The extent of the marriage fields varies in different caste and groups. Low caste people tend to marry their children to others living in neighbouring villages. Marriages, in most of the cases, among these groups take place between families living few miles apart. Hill people marry within Nepal across village or district where as geographical verticality across southern border (northern India) is the common marriage vector among the *madhise* and *aadibasi* people. More than 60% of marriage relations among the plain people in Gouriganj take place with the people across the border.

The similar cultural landscape and traditional affinity across the border are the major determining factor to decide marriage field. This pattern results partly from the fact that there are generally fewer families of some upper and business castes like Brahmin, Marwari and Baniya living in nearby village. There is another factor fostering marriage between across the border. Since some of the castes of Hindus and Muslims are migrants into Terai or descendants of migrants from India (Gaige, 1975:20-24), they tend to maintain closer ties to their ancestral village through marriage relation. These marriage patterns, nevertheless, represent a continual and active reinforcement of the cultural ties between the plain people of Nepal and the people of the plain region of northern India.

It is a vital obligation for a person among the Hindus as well as the Muslims to get his offspring married. This ideology of marriage is so deeply rooted that his salvation in the "other world" and his peace of mind in this world depends on this very *karma* (work). To get married is counted as one of the *das karmas* (ten essential works) of life, according to Hindu literature. It is considered equally important as to give birth and provide care to children. This is why the arranged marriage system predominates in marriage relations and parents spend large sums of money on weddings, even at the risk of sinking deep into the debt. Ram Lakhan

Yadav of Deviganj village who was already in debt on the marriage of first daughter, for example, tried to get a loan of 20,000 rupees by *dhito pass*[2] for his second daughter's marriage. When I asked him why he should spend so much, he said that he could not conceive of spending less. The average wedding, as reported by local people seems to cost somewhere between NRS 20,000 to 30,000 rupees. The amount, however, may also reach as high as RS 50,000.00 on such function.

For rich people, the sum exceeds even up to 250,000 rupees. It was reported that a local renowned Yadav family spent about 250,000 rupees for *tilak* money on the marriage of their daughter. They gave their daughter to a government officer in India, who naturally demanded more *tilak* showing his prestige as government officer. In addition of the *tilak* money, the father of bride has to spend more money for food and other expenses when groom's party visits his house in various stages of marriage. The another factor of paying high *tilak* money is that the father of girl wants his daughter to be in comfortable circumstances and to have less work to do, ideally, than she has had to do at home. He will sometimes pay more for a wedding than he can afford, in order to marry his daughter to a good family. Furthermore, the marriage feast is an extremely important part of the negotiations, for both families want to have as large a feast as possible for showing off their social prestige.

6.3   Overall Trends and Changing Patterns of Households

Since the internal structure and outside role of households have by no means been historically uniform and have been undergoing fairly rapid transition in these days, the cultural specificity of households can be marked by a set of key structures and processes. Among such structures and processes, emergence of economic dualism plays an important role to shape the household structure and organisation. Lack of alternative reliable sources of livelihood, people of Gouriganj depends on farming which is basically a peasant-based, subsistence-oriented mode of production system. The farming practice is of seasonal kind nearly depended upon rainfall and low-productivity nature of agriculture. On the other hand, there exists side by side a rising capitalist with a weakening of feudal mode of production.

Predominant of arranged marriage system between households, coparcenary nature of household property ownership and the patrilineal inheritance system, combined with the

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[2] It is a system of local money lending in which debtor legally transfer his land in the name of moneylender as collateral of the loan, paying all the official expenses of land registration. The interest is generally more than 50% and if we add all the expenses it will be about 70%. If debtor could not return back the loan with interest in the agreed time, the land automatically goes under the control of moneylender. The debtor, however, can cultivate the land until the compound money of loan not exceeds the actual value of the land. This system of money lending is so pervasive that many people of Terai origin have already lost their fertile and good land by taking loan for ritual and other purposes.

patrilocal residence pattern form still another set of cultural rules, which define the household. The inclusion/exclusion and hierarchy-maintenance rules flowing out of kinship, community and caste/ethnic and inter-caste/inter-ethnic affiliations form another subset of cultural rules, which seeks to define the household.

The awesome reliance on subsistence farming and the relative lack of other sources of income, together with the multi heirship pattern of the household property ownership regime, have made the household an extremely close- knit social unit and, to some extent, insulated them from outside social worlds and changing forces. Within such a frame, and except for culturally legitimised outlets, e.g., the regular cycles of formation of new households and separation among the patriline (between father and son or between/among brothers or, in occasional instances, between husband and wife), individual dissension is systematically minimised or, on occasion, overtly suppressed. Nevertheless, households have recently been undergoing a fairly rapid transition.

Lack of employment opportunities other than agricultural in the village, which is still seasonal and very low paid activities; have led to a large-scale permanent and seasonal migration within and outside of the country. These trends have weakened the authority of the household over the migrating members and are instrumental in the break-up of the tradition of households and formation of new ones. Other forces and processes, apart from migration, have also contributed to a rapid transformation of the household structure and function. The rise and expansion of institutions for enhancement of individual-based knowledge, skills, health, work, income, e.g., schools, non-home-based places of training, hospitals, wage work and entrepreneurship, etc., are not only changing the functions of the household but also leading to changes in its structure

The multi heirdom nature of the household property ownership regime, even as it often ensured some degree of joint decision-making, made the head of the household a powerful and contentious figure within the household. While the extant cultural citations of father-son and, more particularly, fraternal feuds have tended to question the sincerity of the trustee in impartially managing the joint household property vis-à-vis all members of the household, recent literature on women has dwelt extensively on the gender-based exploitative agency of the patrilineal inheritance regime (Acharya 1997; Acharya and Bennett 1981; also, for recent legislative, judicial and public discourse on women and ancestral property rights, Pant 1996, Cited in NESAC, 1999).

The rules of patrilineality and patrilocality of household, of course, also encouraged a variety of gender-based discriminations against women, e.g., lower literacy rate, higher rate of

involvement in non-paying and low-paying work, very high rate of exclusion from the public domain and pervasive subordination.

Increasing literacy with the expansion of private educational institution, and non-governmental efforts together with an increasing level of access to mass media specifically with television after the electrification in Gouriganj have been generating a new culture of public awareness and public discourse, even at the local level. The local health post, post office and local government service agencies, ill-equipped and ill-serviced as they are, are providing service to an increasingly larger number of clients and supplementing household or family-based services such as shaving collection, loan dispersion for income generation and other services of indigenous health care systems and public awareness. All these efforts combining with other processes mentioned above have profound impact on the structure and functioning of households and families within Gouriganj.

A long historical and political circumstance has been contributing to emerge this type of cultural pattern and should be understood accordingly. For this we need to depict the different traits of cultural tradition and its normative principle that have been shaping the social life of the people. After grasping out the different traits, we could surface the features of social organisation, which govern them to reproduce and distribute cultural tradition in time and space respectively. A detail of organisation of cultural pluralism within Gouriganj shall be the focus of the following chapters.

Chapter: Six
Organization of Household and Kinship

6.1   The Concept of Household

Ghar-paribar (households) in Gouriganj, as elsewhere in Nepal are basic residential units within which economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing, ritual activities and shelter are organized and carried out. *Ghar-paribar*, in this connection are regarded to be crucial to social identity, and are primary locations in which life cycle phases (childhood, family establishment, elder hood) are enacted, rites of passage celebrated or planned, inheritance decided and *pitri* or *purbaj* (ancestors, who may symbolically or physically underlie the household) be venerated. In most of the cases, households consist of families; or else their core members constitute families, even though some members of the household may not be relative of the family around which it is built. Nevertheless, households have their own cultural dimensions too, and these need to be examined separately from those of families, even when household and family personnel largely overlap.

Because the household combines the functions of production, reproduction, and consumption within an ideologically legitimised multigenerational time frame, social reproduction by households is intense, reaches well into the adulthood of its members, and outweighs, by far, the impact of other institutions of social reproduction. In other words, in all household regimes, the phenomena of development cycle occurs, meaning that a household may assume different form through time as members arrive and depart, and new household begin.

The concept of *ghar-paribar* also indicates a system of social security for aged and dependent. It provides a strong sense of safety within its regime for its members. In the absence or minimum level of social welfare service from government side, village tradition and ethics lay down fairly strict norms regarding the treatment of aged, dependent parents. A son failing in his duty of providing adequately for his old parents, and not caring sufficiently for their comforts, particularly during illness, invite strong social disapproval and comment. He is regarded as bad example. Elders, well wishers and friends are bound to remind him repeatedly about his obligations to his age parents and other dependants.

The political implication of household is becoming pervasive particularly after the restoration of multi-party democracy in the country. People from all social and cultural groups are more or less involved in party politics and are divided into the followers of different political

ideology and parties. There is no correlation between political party and social and cultural group. Though majority of the plain people support Terai based Sadvabana Party, recently in bi-election they voted for the Nepali Congress candidate, hill Brahmin by caste. In last general election, CPM-UML candidate, a hill Kumain Brahmin was the winner. This indicates a situation in which people in the study area could be mobilised for political and electoral purposes on the basis of households. Households can still be vital unit of mobilisation for developmental intervention and other similar purposes. Households can play more important role in present day's politics than the higher level social institution of caste and ethnic groups. Households are real entities and occupy a distinct physical, social and political space in public discourses. Caste, ethnic groups and other social identities are rather vague and difficult to locate into a specific political matrix.

Households, in most anthropological studies (Fricke, 1986; Zurick, 1986; Holmberg, 1989; Caplan, 1970; Seddon et. all; 1980.; Hictchcok, 1966) in Nepal have been conceptualised in three ways- as an item of material culture, as an object replete in symbolic meanings and as the locus of domestic domain and system of household production. In addition to these dimensions, household has been taken as a category and idea central to the conceptualisation and practice of social relation through out of this study.

Though there are variations, households in Gouriganj each occupy a distinct physical space, which is laid out in a relatively similar basic pattern. Households are either built in an open space in the middle of farmlands or in a little congested area nearer to bazaar centre. The number of houses in each village or settlement ranges from ten to fifty and sometimes more because people prefer to live in compact dwellings. Sharing of a common compound by more than one household is also observed in some settlement. Nevertheless, the distinctness of the unit is marked- both materially created and symbolically expressed-by a compound wall about five feet tall, with single gate that can be locked. In some specific cases there may be an imaginary boundary line along fruit or fodder trees or similar other physical things, which distinguish households compound from other physical space. Such wall or boundary line is usually considered as impenetrable without permission. If it is built of branch thatch or jute residue -as is most common-it is possible by putting one's eye to the crack to peep through; but to do so from the outside is considered as ill manners, whereas persons in side sometimes do peep to observe the public scene outside.

Generally, the compound area is square or rectangular in size, and divided into two parts: an outer portion with huts and yard and an inner portion with separate building or huts and yards. The outer yard is called *bhari agina* and used for business, sitting, gossiping, and receiving guests and paddy sun drying and for such other similar purposes. There is also usually a

veranda area or a raised sitting platform for outside living and is occasionally used as sleeping ground for guest. The inner yard is called *bhiter agina* and is connected with main building that provides distinct area for sleeping and inside living, for kitchen, and for bathroom and in few cases for toilet facilities. There is no latrine in the majority of the households in the area. People use riverbanks and open field or bamboo groves outside the village or settlement for latrine purposes. In the backyard of the main building, every household has a small kitchen garden within the compound.

People unequivocally identify the compound as a domestic unit with limited memberships. But it is somehow difficult to get single answer to the question: what a person must do to be considered as a member of a household. People generally answer this question in three different ways: a person must sleep there, or eat there, or make some economic contribution, whether or not they sleep or eat there. Accordingly, persons who are absent on labour migration and other similar purposes and domestic servants or business assistants are generally counted as a member of the household unit. This reflects both the absence of any other basis for identity of absent migrant and domestic servant and their continued economic and service contribution to the household.

Though people express the delimitation of each domestic unit in a definite way, no single criterion is entirely satisfactory to define its constitution. Its component members usually hold joint property but holding private property living in the same unit is not restricted. Members are jointly responsible to maintain the household, but substantial subsidies may also be provided from kinsmen outside, while some income of its members may be kept privately for themselves. Women, specifically unmarried girls keep some private property in the form of either money or cattle/goats/chicken as their private income called *pewa*. Joint cooking is likewise no sure indicator of membership, since neighbours both co-operate and redistribute dishes, and some time contribute persistently by providing for old or disable neighbours. Domestic servant and business assistant are not allowed eat together with rest of the household member if they belong to low caste, though they might get food from the same pot. Thus, if we take the occasional presence of houseguests as an exception, the clearest definition of membership of any household in Gouriganj could be provided by sleeping arrangements, expressed by the locking or barring of the gate at night when all are in.

Households as conceptualised above are clearly form the core of the social and cultural structure and constitute the key locus of cultural and social reproduction. As elsewhere, households are also the key mediators between individuals and the more encompassing levels of social interactions. The social identity of a person in Gouriganj is found to be largely built on the foundation of the identity of the household he or she belongs to and people in study

area usually judge its member in terms of his/her household backgrounds. Thus, family and household provide the ultimate basis for all social reproduction, and we may expect the patterns that are predominant in this field to have profound consequences, directly or indirectly for the organisation and maintenance of all the paradoxes that are found in Gouriganj.

6.1.1 Composition

The basic residential, social, religious and economic unit of the people of Gouriganj is the patrilineal nuclear household. This unit consists of a man, his wife, and their unmarried children, usually occupying a single dwelling. If I have grasped the pattern correctly, it is true to say that family and household in Gouriganj show markedly 'urban' or 'modern' structure, in that they are characterised by a pattern of relatively small and exclusive units.   In some cases, however, a household may consist of two or more married males, their wives and unmarried children, all working on the same undivided land or business enterprises. Such households are termed here as joint families, which may split into two or more residential units, regularly occupying outbuildings, away from the main house. Regardless of residence all the individuals share in the family occupation and eat from the same hearth in joint families of the study area. Therefore in joint families, residence does not necessarily indicate the basic economic unit of a household.

The society in Gouriganj is a patrilocal one and can be seen from the fact that after the death of the household head, the responsibility and authority are both transferred naturally to the eldest son, but eldest women of the household becomes titular head of the household upon her husband's death, if there are no sons or younger to take over. Small sample censuses were made of households of a mixed settlement of Gouriganj in order to find out the household composition. Based on these gathered data a classification of households in terms of their composition or residence pattern has been made in the following table in order to figure out some silent features of household organisations.

Table 6.1   Household Composition in a Settlement of Gouriganj

Household Type	No. of HHs	Percentage of the total HHs	Population	Percentage of the total population
A. SIMPLE: 1. Husband and wife (wives) and their children and husband's widow mothers.	13		89	
2. Brothers, one married with children and other unmarried.	3		16	
3. Husband and wife and their children.	38		228	
4. Husband and wife.	6		12	
5. Widow and her children	4		21	
6. Widow, her married daughter and house son- in-law and her grand son.	1		7	
7. Man/ woman living alone	3		3	
Total Simple Households	*68*	*82.92*	*376*	*76.11*
B. JOINT: 1. Husband and wife or widower and there/ his married son(s), spouse(s) and their/ his unmarried grandchildren.	14		118	
Total Joint Household	*14*	*17.0*	*118*	*23.88*
Grand Total	**82**	**100.00**	**494**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 1999

The table 6.1 shows us that 83 % of the households fall into "simple" category that includes 76 % of the total population in 68 small residential units. Nuclear family as defined by Haviland (1989) is the smallest conjugal unit of mother, father and their dependent children. Here, out of 68 households grouped as simple type, 'pure' nuclear families comprise 38 households, the remaining simple type which can loosely be grouped as nuclear family includes widow and her children (4 households), man and woman living alone (3 households), husband and wife (6 households) and brothers one married and his spouse and children (3 households) types of resident. Among the remaining simple type, 14 households can be classified as minimal extended types of family in which a widow mother of the husband or wife and his/her spouse and children are residing together.

Caplan (1970) defines joint households as those, which include a married couple or widower and at least one marred son and spouse and their children. Outs of 82 households of the area 17 % (14 households) are joint, which comprises of 118 individuals (24 % of the total population of the sampled households).

The table also clarifies that the central, constituting relationship in a household is that between spouses and then come parent-child and brothers. In few households, nevertheless, domestic servant and business assistant are also reported as family members. The three persons living alone were widowers. The households where married brother and other yet unmarried are residing together can be called as 'incomplete' and are said to be in transition phase of household breaking or separation. Men who become single will seek to remarry, or if they are old enough they may choose to move in with a married child or some other close relative. For women remarriage is not impossible but it is very rare in practice. They also prefer to move in with married child, preferably with son in their old age.

Women of marriageable age are not allowed to reside separately or remain single. Even a married woman if her husband is on labour migration is not allowed to live alone. Binod Tajpuriya, a matriculated young man, left his wife with his mother while he was on labour migration to Punjab, India. People, including Binod believe that woman must not be left alone and someone must be responsible for her if her husband is away. People always doubts on women that they can protect household and other property while their husbands are away from the household for a long period. But the more pervasive fear among men, if I understood correctly, arises from the possible sexual misdemeanour of their wives during their (husbands) absence. Obviously, the practice of joint household provides solution to such situation, whereby close relative take on supervisory functions for each other.

In most cases, an eldest active male or husband of the family is regarded as the head of the household. The wife of the eldest male, regardless of weather the latter is living is the head of household chores or 'domestic sphere' and of the female component, particularly in joint family. As the head of the household, husband should demand respect and obedience from his wife and children and other family members. He bears the final responsibility and sole authority for the family's well being and everyone is supposed to work and act according to his instruction. As guardian, he is fully responsible to protect his family and their interests, obtain news, information and judgement that needed to avoid unfortunate involvement and mobilise family and his personal networks and connections at appropriate time to choose good sons-in-low and obtain desirable brides and dowry for sons. However, in some households it is reported that all the major decisions are taken by the husband in consultation

with his wife and grown- up children, but the final say in all matters connected with the family is always remain with the husband.

However, in many cases the *de facto* head of the family may be a son under whose guidance and supervision the land is cultivated or the craft or profession of the family is practised. Parents dominate the scene in their youth and early middle age. With approaching old age they gradually recede to the background. Nominally they remain the heads of the family, but their sons are (usually the eldest one) left more or less free to conduct the management of the family property and profession as they like. As long as the father remains the real head of the family, the internal management of the family remains the responsibility of the mother. Sons are expected to obey her and daughters-in-law are expected to carry her instruction. Any failure or reluctance on the part of the daughter-in-law to carry out the wishes of her mother-in-law leads to a constant quarrels and complications and in many cases to ultimate separation.

As a manager of household, the husband has to work hard to maintain the family. The major share of the family's subsistence comes through his labour; in some cases the wife also assists him. In many families, basically among the poorer, the women contribute substantial amount of the family earnings. However, the main task of the women is to run the household and manage the domestic economy. As far as possible women are responsible to keep house neat and tidy, to look after the children and cattle and above all they are fully responsible to provide meals for the members of the family at fixed hours. Ordinarily a woman does not interfere with 'outside affairs' that is matters that do not directly concerned with domestic management are believed to be the responsibility of the husband. Similarly, the husband is not expected to interfere too much in the actual running of the household. Nevertheless, in many families, it is reported that major decisions connected with either of these spheres are arrived at after mutual consultation

From the above discussion, it can be argued that gender roles within household pursuits are complementary rather than being based on gender division of labour. Women normally do all household works and men are responsible for all work that relates the household to the outside, but most tasks can be done by either sex. For instance, cooking is women's work only to the extent that it is done in the home and for domestic use; for large feast such as marriage and all collective occasion like picnic, men are the cooks. During menstruation period, men must be involved in all the domestic cooking particularly among the high caste Hindus. If we take ploughing and thatching as an exception, even in agriculture, there is no fundamental difference in job assigned to men and women. I have seen men and women transplanting, wedding and harvesting paddy and similar other crops and doing farm jobs

equally. Ploughing field and thatching huts are, however, considered as men specialised work in Gouriganj, as elsewhere in Nepal. On the other hand, there are some courageous women who not only support themselves but also contribute a substantial portion of household income by running small business and working in tea estate. Still, it is equally true that women in domestic spheres hold more power and authority than their men folk and men dominate the outside affairs of the household.

The activities performed by husband and wife as their respective responsibilities in household pursuits make them participants in very different social worlds. Borrowing from Barth (1982:118-120) this phenomena can best be conceptualised by using the metaphor of ''social space'' for the persons, places, and occasions in which each is expected to be involved. As we have seen, though their roles may be complementary, the social spaces in which the husband and wife usually take part are different and there is little chance to overlap. In other words, husband and wife, in most of the cases, are involved in different social spaces. The household provides them a 'private space' for mutual action; otherwise, men must and do move in to the wider social networks, constantly confronting strangers and facing the option of whether to transfer these strangers into acquaintances and associates, whereas women have relatively small social world both physically and in terms of persons. Their interaction is limited and confined to close neighbours and relatives, largely outside the normal space of the husband.

Accordingly man and woman have different orientation from their early age. Women have been taught from an early age not to orient their behaviour toward a wider audience. Restrictions are placed on them at the age of nine or ten, and they cannot play with boys, must be in the company of women and grown-up girls. They are not allowed to go out of the house alone except when sent on an errand. They are taught at this early age to acquaint themselves with the various household duties that a woman has to perform. As a result women rarely participate in public function jointly with men, except in a few religious ceremonies like *Purans* in which the presence of man's wife is necessary. Thus, they are automatically constrained to operate within a world of a different character from that of men. Men, from their early training are encouraged to face outside world to earn an income for household management. They enter into a wider social world maintaining a number of social relationships that provide them a greatest range of options in business and career opportunity. They usually utilise a wider range of their social relations and connections in harvesting livelihood and family welfare. They have a great deal of social encouragement to participate in a wider social activities from local level party politics to religious congregation and school management committee to tea estate labour union.

Because of these family orientations and social backgrounds, people in the study area, look daughters as an unnecessary burden because of their uneconomic value and huge expenses as *tilak* (dowry) which have to be borne at their marriages. In addition, people think that girls are *arkako ghara jane jat* (a *jat* who eventually go to some other family) and care for a daughter is regarded as 'watering a neighbour's tree'; you take all the trouble with it but its fruit goes to someone else. Hence there is no great rejoicing at the birth of a girl. On the other hand, people regard a son as an asset and is looked upon both psychological and a ritual necessity.

Stereotyped attitudes towards husband and wife relation is still noticeable and people express publicly without any hesitation that wife should regard husband as her 'master' and should 'serve him faithfully'. It is the husband's responsibility to provide adequate supports for the maintenance of his 'dependants' and wife's duty is to 'run the household carefully and efficiently'. In addition, people believe that husband should 'watch the activities and ways of his wife, as well as 'take care of proper upbringing of their children'. The traditional convention that husband is 'superior' and wife is his 'subordinate' is still in common practice among people. As mark of the recognition of his superiority, the wife shows respect to her husband by touching his feet and, in some cases; she is forced to drink water after washing his feet. She washes the husband's clothes and eats the leftover in his plate. The husband, on the other hand, cannot do likewise and even think to do so.

When the wife does small err, the husband not only reprimands her but can easily abuse and beat her. I myself have seen a fearful event in Gouriganj where a *dhobi*, or washer man was beating his wife bringing her in an open street so inhumanely that the surrounding people had to intervene the matter and cleft them forcefully. The only fault she did was *mukha lagnu*, or to answer him back. When the public noticed that the *dhobi* was still troubling her, they cached him and submitted him to local police station. Whatsoever may be the personal relationship, the cultural pattern of husband's domination is publicly reflected in the lament of wife over her husband's death, when she cries, '*where is my lord? Where is my master? Now who will support me? The shield that protected me is gone; now I am helpless* (Dhan Bir Rajbanshi, in Personal communication, 1999).

Though everyone in the village verbalises the expected husband-wife relationship in similar words, it does not mean that every family within Gouriganj has similar dominant relationship. My acquaintance with some families and their close observation reveal a different reality. The husband is, without doubt, superior and has in most families, the upper hand; but in practice, he is not completely dominant, authoritarian and patriarchal figure. Moreover, the quality of inter-personal relations between husband and wife change as they leave one stages of life and enters another. Malbati Sahu, a middle aged Teli woman discloses her uneasy relation with

her husband before she gave births their children. Quarrel between them was frequent. She tells quite amazingly that her husband abused but also sometimes beat in simple reasons like not washing cloth in time, answers him back. But now they are quite happy couple and enjoying good life understanding each other.

The families in the study area may be organised in one or other forms as presented in table 9 due to a particular social, historical and ecological circumstance. Due to the lack of adequate land holding, and its poor soil fertility, and other reliable sources of livelihood, majority of the population prefers to live in nuclear family than in extended or joint family. The nuclear family, which has become ideal in North American and European society, is also popular among the people who live in harsh environment, such as Inuit (Haviland, 1989). In addition, in nuclear family the members are more free and independent to sell their labour power for the better earning and the earning may be used in proper way without dividing to other family members as in extended and joint family. However, some people, who are self -sufficient in grain production for their consumption and have enough sources of earning other than land, prefer to live in extended and joint family to fulfil the labour demand of agricultural activities as well as to look after the other business jointly. In subsistence agriculture, like in the study area, household members primarily fulfill labor demand themselves.

6.1.2 Separation

In general when a joint family gets crowded the question of either permanent or temporary separation arises. In most of the households even after the marriage of the eldest son he and his spouses remain in the same house, eating in the same kitchen without any change, though the *bahu* or *buhari* or *dulahi* (daughter-in law) being an addition to the household members. Those who can hold together for few years generally continue to live under the same roof peacefully for a much longer period. Domestic quarrels and dissension developed within this period can compel them to start thinking about separation. Generally, when all sons get married, a joint family starts to break and simultaneously nuclear families begin to emerge. Nevertheless, separation is known to have taken place in some cases even after ten to fifteen years of living together

A separation from the main household usually occurs when brothers and parent divide their *chal, achal paitrik sampati* (ancestral property in kind as well as in cash) equally among them. Generally, the eldest son leaves first, followed by his younger brothers as they get married and bring their wives to join them. It is always the youngest son who remains with parents after marriage, if the elder brothers have already separated. When the house gets crowded the parents, widower or widow may suggests sons (elder) to leave the main house

and live in an outbuilding looking after the harvest/ livestock, or business. Though they start to live separately, they continue to share the same sources of income. This kind of separation can be called *ghar sallaha ko bhagbanda*, that is, separation based on understanding.

Separation is usually rationalised in terms of the strained relation among brother's wives within the single house. It can also be due to tension between father and sons as the youth begin to assert independence. Tension between a mother-in-law and sister-in-law can further contribute to break up a household. If the married brothers managed to live together for a longer period in a single household, dispute between their children might also cause the household division. Many such cases were observed in the study area.

A young married man separating from his parents or brothers generally maintains close connections with their family or families. However, as the immediate cause of separation is often a quarrel or an acute difference of opinion, for some time the separating families continue to have strained relations. They may not even be on speaking terms. After sometimes, however, the bitterness of the dispute wears off and cordiality gradually returns and they start taking interest in each other's affairs and problem. Family ceremonies, feasts and festivals bring them all together. Rites connected with major crises of life are great occasions for family reunions. Particularly in the event of death old quarrel and misunderstanding are generally forgotten and all *gotiyar* (near- relation) assemble for the last rites. In the rituals of 13th day, the presence of all branch of family is regarded as obligatory and the absence of any one at such occasion is bound to be viewed very seriously. The following case gives some idea about the process of separation in Gouriganj.

Case 6.1 Fission of a Joint Household

R.P. Tajpuriya of age 36 years is a local primary school teacher. He lives happily with his wife Sarbari, and three children (two sons and one daughter) of school going age. He married with Sarbari in 1985. She is from an Indian village just across the border about four or five hours walk from Gouriganj. ''Though the marriage was simple and brief, I had received *tilak* according to my *khandan* (family background) and *izzat*(prestige, status). ''I received one bicycle, a pair of cloths some kitchen utensils, brass plates, a copper vessel, a calf and few thousand rupees'' he told me reluctantly. In addition, his parents received clothes and other near relatives also received 'some thing' as marriage prestation. Before and few more years after marriage he and his family lived in the joint family with his parents, brothers and their spouses and unmarried sisters.

One year after marriage his wife came home to live with him. For few years or so after his marriage he continued to live with his parents and brothers. His wife also lived with him. In the mean time he joined job in a local school as a schoolteacher and started to make some money. Domestic quarrels and dissension developed in the family within this period compelled him to start thinking about separation. When a tension aroused with his father and elder brother on the issues of using modern farming techniques in land cultivation, he publicly expressed his desire to be independent from main house.

''I had thought that marriage and my school job will end my tutelage under my father and established me as independent members of the community''. But, he found that the parents and rest of the family members were not agreed with his view. And consequently in the period that follows there was

considerable stress between him and his parents. '' I was then in a dilemma of loyalty between to my father and my new -fond desire for independence on the one hand; my affection for the mother generated by close association from the day of birth and off course, not less my attraction for the wife on the other''.

But suddenly, in the winter of 1989, his father decided to make him separate from main house. According to R.P, his father thought that he became schoolteacher and was clever enough than his other sons and if remained in the main house, he would deceived them and their future will be in trouble. Thinking on that line his father advised him to live in a small outbuilding hut.

At first he was not provided his full share of paitrik *sampati*. Only 10 *kathas* of land and a small hut without kitchen garden were given to him. ''I didn't get any kitchen utensils in real sense. No cattle and goats were given to my family. For many years, I relied on the assistance of my wife's parent for running household activities''.

''Since the immediate cause of separation was an acute difference of opinion, for some time me and my family had strained relations with main house. For some time I did not even speak with my parents. After sometimes, however, the bitterness of the dispute wear off and cordiality gradually returned and we started taking interest in each other's affairs and problem''.

''The networks of family ceremonies, feasts and festivals brought us all together again. Rites connected with major crises of life are great occasions for family reunions. Particularly in the event of death old quarrel and misunderstanding are generally forgotten and all *gotiyar* (near- relation) assemble for the last rites. In the rituals of 13th day, the presence of all branch of family is regarded as obligatory and the absence of any one at such occasion is bound to be viewed very seriously''.

He, however, received his full share of *paitrik sampati* that was about 3 *bighas* of land and 2 *kathas* of ghaderi (house land) with small patch of kitchen garden after his father died three years ago. Few cattle and goats and some kitchen vessels were also given to his family as a share of *paitrik sumpat*i..

Field Work in Gouriganj, 1999

Economic ranking does play a role in household fission. Generally, it is believed that those household with large land holding or business that might need working co-operatively, would remain together while poorer households which rely primarily on wage labour and derive little benefit from living together, would split first.

The creation of new household usually, but not invariably, implies its independence as a land owning or business owning unit. Once a son separates and possesses a share, which is equal for all brothers he can enjoy either by keeping it or disposing it, but if he wishes to sell, first right of purchase goes to *hakawala* or the nearest agnatic keen: brother, father's brother or father's brother's son and then to agnatic collateral keen brothers or their descendants. This inheritance right reiterates the holding of ancestor's property.

6.1.3 Inheritance

The exercise of inheritance rights by the people of Gouriganj always proceeds by stages. That is separation of a son from main household will not correspond final division of property (ref. box 6.1). Generally, the eldest son separates first. A temporary settlement might be managed

for him and in such case he takes only that amount of property necessary to provide an adequate living. The remaining ancestral property is left undivided under the supervision of the head of the main household who has the sole authority over the property. In this as in all stages of division, the kitchen and the budget of the new household are quite separate from the main household. All income remains the property of the household and its expenses and debates are its own responsibility. Usually, the final divisions of the property occur after all sons of a man get married, and establish separate households. But in most cases it is delayed until after their father's death. At this time, a written document is usually prepared called "*bandapatra*", setting out the terms of agreement, and it is then signed and witnessed by respected elders (*pancha valadm*i) of the community and is registered in the *mal adda* (district land revenue office) to get the legal recognition of separation.

The rule of inheritance are based on the "principle of ownership by birth", that is it stresses virilocality and patrilineal inheritance except in the case of involving an adopted son or a son-in-law. Property is normally passed down with the patrilocal extended family. When a man dies, his property goes to his son as a group. If his wife is living the property remains in her custody until her death or remarriage, in later case it goes to the sons. If the widow is remarried and the son is too young to look after the business or farmstead, either the mother takes him with her or some other relatives take care of him until he becomes an adult. The nearest kin of the boy enjoys his share of land. If he wants to come to his farm after maturity of age he may do so.

In partition, a debt is always repaid or at least the promise of payment is given. A share of land or money for the payment of debt may be kept aside. Then, the remaining land and other property is equally divided among sons leaving a similar sized portion for the parents to maintain themselves in their old age called *jiuni* (maintenance property of parents). Usually, the son who lives with the parents and supports them in their old age and bears the expenses for their funeral rites will get the entire *jiuni* after their death, otherwise it is divided equally amongst the sons.

If there is no son, an adopted son or *dharam putra* can be designated to substitute for son both in the inheritance of property and the performance of parent's death rites. In case of inheritance by a *ghargiea* or *gharjuwai,* or son -in-law, the right to land and property remains in the hand of his wife and ultimately passes on to their sons or lacking son, to her lineage males unless, bequest has been made to her husband. However, the husband can use the property during his lifetime.

Though rare and the practice is dying nowadays, some occupational groups such as *Thakur*, *Brahmin* do inherit their religious and occupational role as the clients of other cast/ethnic group in the area.

6.2   Marriage and Other Kinship Relations

A brief description of kinship and marriages pattern within Gouriganj will be discussed in this section of the chapter. Though there are variations, we can depict some salient features of social organisations, taking into account of marriage and kinship relation that are central to shape the societies and cultures in the study area.

6.2.1   Kinship Relations

Societies in Gouriganj are the networks of two types of kinship relations. The *gotiyars* or *bansaj* are the relationships of blood. All the kin relations in this type are defined with blood relation and the principle of inheritance follows through this line only. The *gotiars* or *bansajs* are usually belonging to a same clan and worship a common ancestor spirits and common house deities. For hill people, the *common dewali or kul pooja (lineage or clan worship)* which is carried out either annually or once a three years period generally distinguishes the *bansaj* kin groups. Usually all the bansaj people are present in such pooja and show great respect to their ancestor. Among *gotiyar* or *bansaj* all are invited on all life cycle ceremonies and their presence is more or less obligatory in life crisis ceremony.

"Ragat pani bhanda rato hunshha" (blood is red than water) is the common saying among the *gotiyars* of a group in Gouriganj. That is a biological link of consanguinity, is a powerful bond of solidarity, mutual help, and reciprocity usually stronger than most other links. But there is a great deal of feeling of jealousy, unholy competition and fragmentation among the people of same *gotiyar* and *bansaj* in practice. People again equally say that "*satru ko anuhar hernu chha bhane dajubhai ko here pugchha"*, that is, if you want to see the faces of an enemy, just go and see the faces of your brothers. These are the examples of paradoxes that have been shaping the societies and cultures within Gouriganj.

The *kutumbha* are the relationships of affinity by marriage. Marriages are the central institution to define and distinguish the *kutumbha* relationships. A relationship of *kutumbha* may exist when a marriage between two households occurs such that all the consanguine members of the spouse' may be deemed affinities. These relationships of *kutumbha* are often of systematic and permanent character, forming the basis of ongoing relations between kin groups or marriage classes. Nevertheless, these relations are considered as more fragile and

volatile in nature in comparison with *gotiyar* or *bansaj*. The saying that "*kutumbha ko bhar na parnu*, y*o kahile pani afno hudaina*", meaning, never depend or trust on *kutumbha,* he never be one's own, is more or less the outcome of the very nature of the relationships.

Besides, these standard kinship relations of families, in village likes Gouriganj some kinship terms are also applied within the whole caste group or neighbourhood, sometimes even extended to other caste from higher to lower strata. A boy may call all the boys and girls of the village in his own generation "brother" and "sister" and all the men of his grandfather's generation "grandfather" and so on.

Furthermore, there are various kinds of *natasambandha* (kinship) that appear in public and political discourses when a person interacts with persons of different social identities. For example, a man has special *patikonata* (relation of similar party or politics) with his own party leader and members. He is considered nearer than the other ordinary public in party and political discourse. Similarly, a man can take a person in his confidence and works for mutual benefits placing him in his own inner circle of *afnomanchhe*, this is called *afnomanchhe ko nata.* In similar fashion, there is kinship of regionalism, religion, caste, and village that have been shaping the life of the people of study area. Among these, political kinship has become more prominent after the restoration of multiparty democracy in the country. Political kinship is necessary for every steps of life. From getting job to appointment to a doctor, child's school admissions to labour migration all need strong political connection.

6.2.2 Marriage Pattern

Marriages, generally agreed upon by households, bring two households and kinship groups together within a long-lasting network. While gathering of accurate data on the stability of marriage is not possible, available information strongly indicates that marriages, in general, are highly stable. Arranged marriage, particularly among high caste people is successful in the sense that the marriage is not dissolved or replaced. Marriage, apart from its economic, political and social dimensions, also bears a pronounced spiritual underpinning.

Marriage, in Gouriganj as else where, is socially recognised as bonding of man and woman typically for the purposes of legitimate reproduction. It is an essential institution in the establishment of nuclear family or creation of a new household. Furthermore, it is not only an opportunity to create new social bonds, it is often accompanied by prestations in the form of *dan*, *daijo* or *tilak*, of greater or lesser importance, as much symbolic as material, which firmly establish the marriage and set up long lasting relation between two households or families party to the exchange.

The popular form of marriage prestation in Gouriganj, presumably within the whole Terai region is the practice dowry, or *tilak pratha*, whereby a collection of good and services are offered by the bride's family to the groom or his family. The structure of marriage prestation has important political, economic and ritual consequences for the society as whole. The symbolic consequences of gender relation can be seen among the Rajbanshis, Tajpuriyas and Gangais when the *chumna partha*[1], a woman valued system of marriage prestation has been replaced by the tilak *partha* (dowry system) where women are considered as a commodity..

The search for bridegroom is complicated by involved rules relating to caste, locality, and clan or *thar*. Arranged marriage within same *jatis* is the dominant form of marriage practice in Gouriganj. Very few love marriages are reported and inter-caste marriages are still intolerable for the majority of the population. Village exogamy is a norm but not strict rule for maintaining marriage relation within a village. When a man wishes to get his son or daughter married, he usually look out for a bride or groom outside his own village, belonging to his caste, yet not to the same *gotra*. *Gotra* exogamy is not a standard rule for many *jatis* like Rajbanshi, Tajpuriya, and Gangai and there are of course several exception and variation to the marital codes practised within Gouriganj. Even among the Hindu *jatis* like Yadav and Halwai of Gouriganj are not particular about maintaining *gotra* exogamy and other standard Hindu codes of marriage in practice.

The Halwais have already practised marriage between two maternal first cousins. Sushil Das, a Halwai of Gouriganj bazaar has married with his mother's sister's daughter living in Bibiganj, India. It was reported that attractive *tilak* money offered by bride side was the main cause of such marriage. Furthermore, one of the renowned Halwai of the Gouriganj has married with a woman of *najika ko nata parne* (within close relation) because she was extremely beautiful in her *bainsa* (adulthood). Usually this type of marriage is prohibited and considered as taboo among the Hindus. It is reported that among the Muslims of Kanchira village, however, beside cross-cousin marriage, marriage between parallel cousin is permitted and indeed encouraged.

High caste Brahmins, on the other hands, are strict in caste endogamy and *gotra* and *thar* exogamy in the arranged marriage. A Brahmin boy of Bhandari *thar* never married a girl of same *thar*, unless they belong to different *gotra*. Even outside the *gotra*, marriage between two first cousins is not permissible. Among the Brahmin and Chhetri, a man may not marry even a daughter of either his father or mother's cousins. Generally, marriage is avoided

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[1] Bride price or bride service system, where object or services are transferred from groom's side to wife's side.

between the boy and girl up to five generations on the mother side and seven generations on the father side among the high caste people in Gouriganj.

Even within the same *jat*, say *bahun*, a person with of *kumain bahun* background does not marry with *purbiya bahun*. Similarly, the Maithil Brahmin does not marry in the family of Saraswat or Kankubj and similarly, the Karna Kaystha does not marry in the family of Srivastava. In addition, within the same *jat*, marriage does not so frequently occur between different groups because some regard themselves superior to others. For example, Upadhaya Brahmin hesitates to marry with the Kumain Brahmin and Kaspatiya Baniyas regarded themselves superior to the other local families of Baniyas. These various restrictions and confinement of marriage within the same but selected group of caste has fostered the *tilak pratha* in the Terai, as it limits the choice.

The extent of the marriage fields varies in different caste and groups. Low caste people tend to marry their children to others living in neighbouring villages. Marriages, in most of the cases, among these groups take place between families living few miles apart. Hill people marry within Nepal across village or district where as geographical verticality across southern border (northern India) is the common marriage vector among the *madhise* and *aadibasi* people. More than 60% of marriage relations among the plain people in Gouriganj take place with the people across the border.

The similar cultural landscape and traditional affinity across the border are the major determining factor to decide marriage field. This pattern results partly from the fact that there are generally fewer families of some upper and business castes like Brahmin, Marwari and Baniya living in nearby village. There is another factor fostering marriage between across the border. Since some of the castes of Hindus and Muslims are migrants into Terai or descendants of migrants from India (Gaige, 1975:20-24), they tend to maintain closer ties to their ancestral village through marriage relation. These marriage patterns, nevertheless, represent a continual and active reinforcement of the cultural ties between the plain people of Nepal and the people of the plain region of northern India.

It is a vital obligation for a person among the Hindus as well as the Muslims to get his offspring married. This ideology of marriage is so deeply rooted that his salvation in the "other world" and his peace of mind in this world depends on this very *karma* (work). To get married is counted as one of the *das karmas* (ten essential works) of life, according to Hindu literature. It is considered equally important as to give birth and provide care to children. This is why the arranged marriage system predominates in marriage relations and parents spend large sums of money on weddings, even at the risk of sinking deep into the debt. Ram Lakhan

Yadav of Deviganj village who was already in debt on the marriage of first daughter, for example, tried to get a loan of 20,000 rupees by *dhito pass*[2] for his second daughter's marriage. When I asked him why he should spend so much, he said that he could not conceive of spending less. The average wedding, as reported by local people seems to cost somewhere between NRS 20,000 to 30,000 rupees. The amount, however, may also reach as high as RS 50,000.00 on such function.

For rich people, the sum exceeds even up to 250,000 rupees. It was reported that a local renowned Yadav family spent about 250,000 rupees for *tilak* money on the marriage of their daughter. They gave their daughter to a government officer in India, who naturally demanded more *tilak* showing his prestige as government officer. In addition of the *tilak* money, the father of bride has to spend more money for food and other expenses when groom's party visits his house in various stages of marriage. The another factor of paying high *tilak* money is that the father of girl wants his daughter to be in comfortable circumstances and to have less work to do, ideally, than she has had to do at home. He will sometimes pay more for a wedding than he can afford, in order to marry his daughter to a good family. Furthermore, the marriage feast is an extremely important part of the negotiations, for both families want to have as large a feast as possible for showing off their social prestige.

6.3   Overall Trends and Changing Patterns of Households

Since the internal structure and outside role of households have by no means been historically uniform and have been undergoing fairly rapid transition in these days, the cultural specificity of households can be marked by a set of key structures and processes. Among such structures and processes, emergence of economic dualism plays an important role to shape the household structure and organisation. Lack of alternative reliable sources of livelihood, people of Gouriganj depends on farming which is basically a peasant-based, subsistence-oriented mode of production system. The farming practice is of seasonal kind nearly depended upon rainfall and low-productivity nature of agriculture. On the other hand, there exists side by side a rising capitalist with a weakening of feudal mode of production.

Predominant of arranged marriage system between households, coparcenary nature of household property ownership and the patrilineal inheritance system, combined with the

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[2] It is a system of local money lending in which debtor legally transfer his land in the name of moneylender as collateral of the loan, paying all the official expenses of land registration. The interest is generally more than 50% and if we add all the expenses it will be about 70%. If debtor could not return back the loan with interest in the agreed time, the land automatically goes under the control of moneylender. The debtor, however, can cultivate the land until the compound money of loan not exceeds the actual value of the land. This system of money lending is so pervasive that many people of Terai origin have already lost their fertile and good land by taking loan for ritual and other purposes.

patrilocal residence pattern form still another set of cultural rules, which define the household. The inclusion/exclusion and hierarchy-maintenance rules flowing out of kinship, community and caste/ethnic and inter-caste/inter-ethnic affiliations form another subset of cultural rules, which seeks to define the household.

The awesome reliance on subsistence farming and the relative lack of other sources of income, together with the multi heirship pattern of the household property ownership regime, have made the household an extremely close- knit social unit and, to some extent, insulated them from outside social worlds and changing forces. Within such a frame, and except for culturally legitimised outlets, e.g., the regular cycles of formation of new households and separation among the patriline (between father and son or between/among brothers or, in occasional instances, between husband and wife), individual dissension is systematically minimised or, on occasion, overtly suppressed. Nevertheless, households have recently been undergoing a fairly rapid transition.

Lack of employment opportunities other than agricultural in the village, which is still seasonal and very low paid activities; have led to a large-scale permanent and seasonal migration within and outside of the country. These trends have weakened the authority of the household over the migrating members and are instrumental in the break-up of the tradition of households and formation of new ones. Other forces and processes, apart from migration, have also contributed to a rapid transformation of the household structure and function. The rise and expansion of institutions for enhancement of individual-based knowledge, skills, health, work, income, e.g., schools, non-home-based places of training, hospitals, wage work and entrepreneurship, etc., are not only changing the functions of the household but also leading to changes in its structure

The multi heirdom nature of the household property ownership regime, even as it often ensured some degree of joint decision-making, made the head of the household a powerful and contentious figure within the household. While the extant cultural citations of father-son and, more particularly, fraternal feuds have tended to question the sincerity of the trustee in impartially managing the joint household property vis-à-vis all members of the household, recent literature on women has dwelt extensively on the gender-based exploitative agency of the patrilineal inheritance regime (Acharya 1997; Acharya and Bennett 1981; also, for recent legislative, judicial and public discourse on women and ancestral property rights, Pant 1996, Cited in NESAC, 1999).

The rules of patrilineality and patrilocality of household, of course, also encouraged a variety of gender-based discriminations against women, e.g., lower literacy rate, higher rate of

involvement in non-paying and low-paying work, very high rate of exclusion from the public domain and pervasive subordination.

Increasing literacy with the expansion of private educational institution, and non-governmental efforts together with an increasing level of access to mass media specifically with television after the electrification in Gouriganj have been generating a new culture of public awareness and public discourse, even at the local level. The local health post, post office and local government service agencies, ill-equipped and ill-serviced as they are, are providing service to an increasingly larger number of clients and supplementing household or family-based services such as shaving collection, loan dispersion for income generation and other services of indigenous health care systems and public awareness. All these efforts combining with other processes mentioned above have profound impact on the structure and functioning of households and families within Gouriganj.

A long historical and political circumstance has been contributing to emerge this type of cultural pattern and should be understood accordingly. For this we need to depict the different traits of cultural tradition and its normative principle that have been shaping the social life of the people. After grasping out the different traits, we could surface the features of social organisation, which govern them to reproduce and distribute cultural tradition in time and space respectively. A detail of organisation of cultural pluralism within Gouriganj shall be the focus of the following chapters.

Chapter: Seven
Cultural Pluralism and its Reproduction

''No one knows exactly how many languages and dialects are spoken in Nepal, certainly several dozen. As well as the Gurkhas.... there are the Newari.... the Gurung, the Magar, the Limbu, the Bhutia, the Kiranti, the Murmi and many others, divided and sub-divided into castes and sub-castes and groups so numerous that the ethnographical study of Nepal, despite the many researches undertaken, is still one of the most complex in the world''.

- Giuseppe Tucci[1]

7.1   The Categories of Cultural Diversity within Gouriganj

The multiplicity of distinct cultural traditions existed in Gouriganj pose a problem to a priori assumption that, taken all together, they make up an integrated whole in any logically or morphologically compelling way. It gives me an impression that we should rethink the metaphor of 'society as a system of articulated parts' (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Nor are they related to a 'part - whole hierarchy' of ritual purity and pollution (Dumont, 1980) in a strict sense. On the contrary, at first level, it can be seen as characterised by a degree of conceptual order of combination of ideas, material circumstances and interactional potentials; and statistical order that reflects as a result of processes which surface from particular events and has patterning as their consequences. In second level, we found the individual variation; in the relation to the processes where by some degree of shared reality is established. I think, following Barth (1993) 'these variations are not difficulties to be overcome but inherent features of the object that we wish to describe'. Methodologically, however, it would be wise to take these different traditions as a matter of empirical discovery to ascertain what their interdependencies are and how they are contributing to consolidate societal in one level and national unity at the other.

The people of Gouriganj conceptualised themselves into different cultural and social categories. The Hindu people usually put them into certain categories of a *jat*, say- *bhaun*, *chhetri* and then into different *thar* (surname or family name) like Bhattarai *bhaun*, Jha Brahmin (Terai) or Karki *chhetri*, *sindhia* Kshatriyas (Terai). Under certain *jat* there may be hundreds of *thars*. For example, under the Chhetri *jat* in a village of Gouriganj I have enumerated 9 *thars* or family names. Similarly, there are 21 *thars* of Brahman *jat* in the same village (see Box 5.2-5.13 in Chapter 5).

Some groups of people who claim themselves as non-Hindu, nowadays have started to put themselves into *jati* or ethnic category, for example Rajbanshi, Satar, Gangai, Tajpuria, Magar, Rai and so on. Hindu, Buddhism, Muslims, Christians, Santhali, Kirati, are some religious category that the people of the study areas belong to.

They sometimes also categorised themselves as *garib* (poor), or *dhani* (rich) irrespective of caste, religion and occupation. Farmer, industrialist, fishermen, carpenter, tailor, blacksmith, cobbler, merchant or trader, *jagirda*r (service holder), *janmajduri* (labourer) are the occupational categories of the area. They also categorised themselves as *bazariya* (those who live in market place) and *jhore/ jorebasi* or *dehati* (those who live far from market or who live near the forest). Although, situational, there is also a clear boundary between the followers of different political parties. Congressi, Communist, Sadbhavana, Janjati, RPP are some of such categories.

Categorisation of people on the basis of region of their origin is one of the most prominent features of social morphology of Nepal Terai as a whole. Division of the entire population of Gouriganj into *madhise* and *pahade* is an example of such categorisation. Such division functions irrespective of caste, religion, ethnic group, occupation, and political affiliation. For example, if two schoolboys one from hill community and one from Terai background fight for a girl then the whole population automatically gets divided into two groups. All the hill people get united in one pole and the rest to the other irrespective of their other socio-cultural and political backgrounds (see Box 1.1, the introductory case)

7.1.1   Contextulization of Categories

Before discussing the major features of cultural and social diversity of the study area, I find it necessary to contextualize the categories and to conceptualise the empirical world in which my description on the 'dimensions' of social and cultural diversity in Gouriganj is based. For this, I want to move on depicting some of the 'social scenes' that I encountered with in the field, which in my opinion would be helpful to define the categories. Here, I am presenting some actual scenes of interaction of people with me in the fields.

<u>Scene: one</u>

I: *Tapain ko jat ke ho*? (What is your caste?)

R: *Ma, bahun* (I am a Brahmin).

I: *Kun bahun*? (What kinds of Brahmin?)

R: *Jaisi bahun.*(I am a Jaisi Brahmin)

I: *Tapain ko thar ke ni* ? (What is your surname?)

R: *Ma, adhikari* (my surname is Adhikari)

I*: Tapain ko gotra / kul ni*? (What is your clan name?)

R: *Koudanya* (my clan name is *Kasyap*)

Scene: two

I: *Tapain kun jat ko*? (What caste you belong to?)

R: *Hami rai jati ko ho* (we are the Rai Jati)

I: *Tapain ko thar pani hola ni*?(do you have clan name or surname?)

R: *Chha, hami bantawa rai ho*.(yes, we are *Bantawa* Rai).

Scene: three

I: *tapain ko jat ke ni*?(what is your caste?)

R: *hami muslman jati ko ho* (we are Muslim Jati).

I: *tapain kun kisim ko musalman*?(What types of Muslim are you?)

R: *hami sunni musalman ho* (we are Sunni Muslim)

Scene: four

I: yo gaun ma ka-kas-ko basobas chha? (What types of people reside within this village?)

R: *yahan sabai jat ko basobaso chh? Nepali (I mean pahade), hami madhesiyas, adhivasis, musalmans ra tallo jaat ka gari sabai khale mancheharu chhan* (people of all castes reside here. Nepali (he means people of hill origin), we *madhesis*(people of Indian origin), *adhivasis* (indigenous people), Muslims and low caste people all are the permanent resident of this village).

''I am Hindu but follow Ramanandi sect''. ''We do not fall into any castes (in the sense of Varna), so we are *janjatis*''. ''We are Sunni Muslims''. ''They are *dalit* or *achhut jaat*''. ''We are Hindu Kshatriyas''. ''We are *sana jati* Hindu''. ''I am a Brahmin but I follow Christianity''. ''They are *pahade* and we are *madhese''. '*We are *adhivasi*''. ''We are *bazariya* (town people) and they are *jhorbasi* (villagers)''. ''We are *garip* and *sukumbasi*(poor and landless)'' and ''they are *dhani* (rich) and *Jimidar* (landlord)''. ''We are *istri jati* (women), and don't know much about outside world''. ''We are *congressi* (followers of Nepali Congress (NC) Party)''. ''We are *a-male* (followers of one fraction of Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) called United Marxist and Leninist (UML)''. ''We are *sadvawana* (followers of a Terai based party called Nepal Sadvawana Party (NCP)''. ''I am a *madhise bahun* (Terai Brahman)''. ''I am a *pahade bahun* (Hill Brahmin). ''We are Bangali''. And so on.

In similar fashion, people of the study area have divided themselves into several categories according to different 'grid' principles, purposes and contexts. Some of them, however, are perfectly solid and confident personal identifies, often based qualitatively different premises. Moreover, the illustration presented above indicates that the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, caste

and religious groups in Gouriganj are complex and overlapping. They defy net classification. However, an effort has been made to clarify the terms used in this study.

As in other places of Nepal and India, *jat* or *jati*, is the basic unit of social and cultural categories among the people of Gouriganj. The term *jati* derives from an Indo-European verbal root and can be used to designate a distinct sex, a race, a caste, or a tribe, a population, the followers of an occupation or a religion, or a nation (Marriott and Inden 1985: 349) or birth, origin or genesis, and refers to a strict regulated social group or community into which one is born (Srinivas, 1967). The word *jat* is frequently translated by the 'caste'. But it should be noted here that the Nepali word *jat* does not always mean 'caste' in the strict sense of hierarchical division or separateness. It is quite common in Nepali expression, for example, to hear one speak of the *jat* of dogs, of women, of crops, timber etc. (Bista, 1982:15). In the social context, however, *jat* commonly means caste in the hierarchical, stratified sense of the Hindu caste system. On the other hand, the term *jati* in the contemporary social discourses gives meaning of different categories of people. For example, as in illustrated above, it can be used for a single caste (e.g. Yadav), as a Varna (e.g. Brahmin or Kshatriya), as an ethnic group (e.g. Rajbanshi or Rai), as a religious group (e.g. Muslim) and as a language group (e.g. Bangali).

Similarly, there is a controversy, particularly in the academic discourse about the term-- *janajati*. In contemporary Nepal the term—*janajati* is exclusively used as the synonym of 'ethnic group' to designate non- Hindu groups only. The controversy is not unusual in Nepal for two reasons: one, these terms are well contested in Western societies as well, and two, the term 'ethnicity' is a Western concept superimposed onto Nepalese society, which obviously does not have a fit' (Bhattachan, 1998:119). However, scholars like Sharma (1984: 133; 1992) have written about the *bahun* and *chhetri* ethnicity and Bista (1995) has argued that the Khas, a Hindu group of the mid-western Nepal are the *janajatis*. Obviously, they apply the term to all distinctive groups in Nepal, even for majorities. By this category, says Gellener (1997:8) ''the dominant Parbatiyas (Parbates)- that is, the Bhaun (Brahman), Thakuri, and Chhetri caste and their associated low-status artesian castes- are also an ethnic group or category''.

On the other hand, some scholars (e.g. Bhattachan, 1998; Gurung 1998; and Fisher, 1993) have differentiated between Hindu caste people as *jat* and non-Hindu people as *janajati* or simply *jati* as equivalent to ethnic groups. Gurung(1998:40) writes ''the main distinction among the two groups is vertical hierarchy (social) of the former and horizontal differentiation (spatial) of the latter''. *Janajatis,* here are described as 'fundamentally non-Hindu' where Hindu is understood to mean those who accept a place in the Varna system of

hierarchy. A Task Force on a report submitted to His Majesty's Government of Nepal in 1996, defined *janajati* as ''those people who have their own mother tongue and traditional customs but do not fall within the four fold *Varnasram*[2] system of the Hindus (Cited in Bhattachan, 1998). This definition however, could not incorporate all so-called ethnic group of Nepal. There are some ethnic groups who do not have or have already lost their own mother tongue.

There is also an important distinction between the term *parbate*[3] and the *pahade,* although both terms literally mean hill people. The *pahade* refers to all the people of the hills, both the *parbate* and other ethnic groups like Magar, Tamang, Rai, Newar, Limbu, Gurung and so on. Available literature and my field materials suggest that minority hill ethnic groups object to *parbate* domination (i.e. *bahun* and chhetri domination), where as the people of the Terai object to *pahade* domination. This clearly indicates that ethnic feelings develop in very specific contexts of opposition and competition.

The term *madhise* in Gouriganj, presumably all over the country is also used in different ways. In general, it refers to the plain people of Indian origin, excluding the *adhibasi* or indigenous groups such as Rajbanshi, Tajpuriya, Gangai and Satar. Other times *madhises* are used in contrast to *pahade* people, to refer those who lived in the Terai before the *pahade* migrated to the area. In some local context, however, *madhises* and *adhibasis* are not mutually excluding categories. But it should be noted that not all madhises are *adhivasis*. The Rajbnashis and Tajpuriyas, for example, are recognized as *adhibasis* of the area, but they also called themselves as *madhise* and are also recognized as *madhise* by others in the area. In this study, however, the term *madhise* has been used to refer the plain people of Indian origin other wise it will be defined accordingly.

For shorthand, descriptive purpose I shall refer *jat* to groups who traditionally belong to Varna System and *jati* refers to the groups who fall outside traditional Varna System though both terms have a common etymology in terms of species. Following this convention, *jat* would include all the Hindu caste people while *jati* can be equated with ethics or non-caste people. Again, it is difficult to categorize people if they have controversial claim regarding their 'ethnicity'. Ethnicity, as Chapman et al. note (1989:15 cited in Gellner, 1997), is ''what it is you have if you are an 'ethnic group''. So is the case of the Rajbanshis and some few other groups who at a time claimed as *jati* as well as *jat* group. In local context they want to be a caste group while in national context they prefer to have ethnic status. However, in daily life people used both the terms interchangeably as presented above in four "scenes".

7.2   Conceptualization of the Empirical World

Since the study area covers relatively a large population, it is very difficult to get or gather relevant and valid information through any survey and sampling procedures. Again, the kind of data we need, it is obvious that sample surveying and other survey technique provide no answer. The major task of social anthropologist, in this very situation is to find out first what kinds of things are there to know about the society under the study rather than to attempt a rigorous recording of answers to questions that are already in principle known to investigator (Barth, 1984:8-9). For this a discovery procedures (Gronhaug, 1978); following loops (Batson, 1972) and mapping out the connections (Barth, 1984) have been followed whereby significant institutions and life circumstances affecting people's decisions were observed and recorded, and tried to understand.   The discovery procedure also helped in pursuing the linkages of related tasks, exchanges, relationship, and material factor and thereby identifying the fields of connected activities in order to find out the ways activities in different fields in a particular social formation are organised and the procedures whereby groups are constituted in respect to these fields (Gronhaug, 1978).

After that, I sorted out the two empirical features of the study area. First, the dimensions of social and cultural categories, which are *jat-nesse* and *jati-ness*, religious congregations, language, occupation and wealth, along which cultural tradition, is divided and ordered. Second, I searched out for the patterns in which some identities are regularly associated in persons, that is one can observe that in Gouriganj, hill people are regularly Hindus (leaving few as an exception) though they vary in class, occupation, and in their mother tongue while among the plain people *jati* identities can not predict religious affiliation. For example, all the Satars are not animist and all the *madhises* are not Hindus.

Only after mapping the whole inventory of such social categories, and their patterns of order, can we specify the circumstances under which any particular cultural tradition is maintained and affected by the coexistence of other cultural tradition in any complex plural situation, like within Gouriganj. In such circumstances, in order to understand the constitution of persons and society, and the condition of reproduction of cultural diversity, one has to sort out all the main identities that the people entail participation in a distinctive cultural tradition- a significant body of knowledge, belief, skill, and standards that is shared by a member of a particular social category and embraced by them as distinctively their own (Barth, 1984:36). These identities or social categories may be ordered in this way- they may be grouped in sets of alternative, where a person can normally occupy one position, that is, either Rai, or Yadav or some other groups but not simultaneously several. Similarly, one may be Muslim, Hindu,

Buddhist, but not simultaneously a member of several religious communities. However, there are some exceptions, for example the Satars usually recognised as animists are also following either Hinduism or Christianity simultaneously. Some Buddhist also observes many Hindu rituals and vice versa.

Let me, by way of illustration; provide a list of the over-arching identities or categories I have recorded during fieldwork. By over-arching, I mean identities which may in certain situations overrule all other identities and appear as essential in the sense that they induce action. They are following:

7.2.1 *Jati* Identities

Jati identities are equivalent to ethnic identities in Nepalese context. An ethnic group is a form of social organisation, where membership is a function of 'ascription and identification by the actors themselves (Barth, 1969:10) and where the memberships are conscious about forming a separate cultural and historical group (Smith, 1991). To Barth (Ibid.) ascription by other is also crucial when it comes to ethnic membership. De vos(1975), on the other hand, emphasis on self-ascription as the most crucial aspect for any understanding of ethnicity. In Nepal, the *jatis* are recognised as groups who claim that they belong outside the Hindu Caste system and can be equated as ethnic group for shorthand description but not as analytical category. However, they have been rooted mainly in mutually exclusive origin of myths, historical mutual seclusion, and the state's intervention in redefining and recreating individual, household and more collective *jati* or *jat* belongingness (Holmberg, 1989:13-37). The sub-*jati* and inter-*jati* categories may contain elements of hierarchy, but the predominant feature of the *jati* world is differentiation

The population of Gouriganj sees itself as composed of numbers of distinctive *jatis*, each with its characteristic cultural heritage. Like caste system, *jati* system can be studied as a schema for exclusion and inclusion. *Jati system* is a kind of social identification where inclusion/exclusion is founded on distinctive cultural principles. These distinctions are based on different cultural criteria, which are complementary rather than ranked or hierarchical. Membership in an ethnic group is, to a great extent, based on subjective identification (Barth, 1969:10-15). Although criteria for ethnic differentiation are not consistent with each other, there is always a close link between ethnic identity and kinship. Marriage and other kinship relation are more or less always regulated through an ethnic idiom. Politics e.g. election, local political events are often but not always guided by *jati* line. The primary *jatis* that constitute the present Gouriganj are Rajbanshis, Tajpuriyas, Gangais and Satars. In addition, there are few households of *jatis* of hill origin such as Newar, Rai, Limbu and Sherpa (see chapter on

morphology). There is, however, variation in size, mode of livelihood, and complexity of social and political organisation among them.

A person's membership in one or other of these groups entails a distinctive historical origin, ascribed *jati* identity, a distinctive cultural tradition, and embeddedness in a distinctive kinship network (though individual exceptions are recognised to exist).

Dresses of men do not signal particular *jati* identity but they are distinctly different between *pahade* people and *madhise* people in general. Traditionally these (plain ethnic groups) people wear a common range of colors and cuts, except Satars. The men folk commonly wear *kamij* (full shirts) and *dhoti* (loincloth) in most of the cases. The women, on the other hands, wear on piece of cloth called "*petani*" tie around the chest just above the breast which hangs up to the knees and they do not usually use any other clothe to over the body. This particular garment and few specific styles of ornaments of women are ethnically distinctive to plain ethnic groups except Satars. The common male dress of hill ethnic groups are *kamij* and *suruwal*(special types of trousers) which are typically different in cuts to the common dresses such as *kamij* and pyjama trouser of other plain people. Both the women of the plains caste Hindus and hill women usually wear sari and blouse which makes difficult to differentiate them by dressing pattern.

Since they wear same types of dresses it is difficult to distinguish between Rajbanshi, Tajpuriyas and Gangai in their dressing pattern. But collectively they are distinct from other caste and ethnic groups residing within Gouriganj. However, one can distinguish Tajpuriya women as they do not wear *phuli* (nose ring); where as the other women folk (Rajbanshi and Gangai) compulsorily wear the ornament. These are the traditional dress of ethnic groups or *adhibasis* people of the study area, except the Satars. The Satars, on the other hand dress up very ordinarily, with the males wearing a short loincloth called *kachhad* which covers their loins or region below the waist up to the knees and a colorful shirts of ordinary style. The females wear ethnically distinctive clothes called *panchi*, which are similar to sari, but they are wrapped around the torso covering the breast and groin area in a loose fashion.

Since their exposure with outer world through education and social contact, the traditional patterns of dressing are gradually disappearing from this area. Generally, young people prefer to wear modern dresses such as pant, shirts and coat according to their economic status and interest. *Adhibasi* women have also started wearing sari, blouse and sometime *choubandi chholo* (double-breasted blouse which is a traditional dress of hill woman) as a result of interaction with hill people. In addition, young and educated girls prefer to wear modern dresses such as mini-skirt, shirts, vests as well as various kinds of *kurtas* and *salwars*.

Both numerically and culturally, the **Rajbanshi** is the predominant ethnic group in Gouriganj. They occupy slightly less than the half of the total population of the area (See table 5.1) and the Rajbanshi *boli* or *bhasa* (dialect or language) is the dominant language. More or less every ethnic and caste group can communicate with their language. The Tajpuriya and Gangais have no their own mother tongue and speak Rajbanshi language with minor differences in some words. The Rajbanshis worship *thakur*, *brahmani* and *hanuman* as their *kul devatas* (clan deities). The abodes or shrine are always located outside usually northeastern corner of the house. They do not erect any shrines or abodes for God and goddess inside their houses. Besides, they worship village ditties known as *maharaj* with very care and respect. All the other groups including plain castes Hindus except Mahato or Nuniya and Brahmins worship the same Good and goddess as their *kul*

Plate 7.1 Gangais and Rajbanshi (first from right)

devata. This clearly indicates that the Rajbanshis are not only numerically but also culturally dominant group within Gouriganj.

The Rajbansis are a jati of mixed origin some being descended from Koches, while other are of Dravidian (Chaudhury, 1962:141) Whatever may be their origin, they used to have a separate kingdom called Koch country, which according to Hodgson, 'included the western half of Assam (India) on the one side and eastern half of Morang (Nepal) on the other with all intervening country' (1880:107). The British in India conquered this Koch State, while in Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1774 (Bista, 1987:134) annexed them. Under the Hindu influence, the Koch sanskritised and took the name Rajbanshi, and they are today a no-alcohol-drinking *jati*(a relatively high caste group in the sense of *jat*) mostly inhabiting in Jhapa and Morang districts within Nepal (Bhattarai, 1996:55). They are primarily cultivators and some also deal in grain and other articles. As a group they are very true to their words, simple and straightforward (Ibid.)

Their claim of both the *jat and jati* at a time indicates the ambiguity of their cultural and social identity. As a *jat* they claim to be an offshoot of the Rajput clan but they do not wear the sacred thread, nor do they observe menstruation as ritual pollution. In addition, they bury their dead; practice of widow marriage was prevalent among them (they renounced the practice few decades ago); the fathers or the brothers of prospective brides take high price

from would-be bridegroom before they consent to the marriage (which they have started to renounce these days). As a result their claim to kindred with Rajput is, however, untenable. As an evident, the Rajputs of plains and Chhetris of the hill both do not accept them as their equivalent.

In the context of Gouriganj, if we conceptualize the distribution of cultural sub-traditions within a population as different streams, the Rajbanshis thus participate in many such streams, which are also shared by the members of other groups. There are, however, some typical social and cultural features or traditions, which both Rajbanshis and others recognize exclusively as Rajbanshis. For instance, they speak their own language, have strong sense of hospitality towards their guest, their practices of head shaving on 12th days of death, abandonment of sacred thread and *bhai pooja* (worshipping of brothers) during *tihar*(festivals of light) and their typical dresses and settlement patterns.

The **Tajpuriyas** are the second largest ethnic group within Gouriganj. Though little or nothing is known about their ethnic history, they are regarded as *adhivasi* or the first inhabitants of the area. In comparison with the Rajbanshis, their number is smaller and is confined to certain pocket areas of Jhapa and Morang district of Nepal. They speak the same language as Rajbanshi and follow all the cultural, social and ritual practices similar to that of the Rajbanshis discussed above.

Plate 7.2   Tajpuriya Couple with their third Generation

However, there are some specific differences among them. They are strictly *jati* endogamy in marriage and other kin relations. Old generation even today does not eat cooked rice together. The women folk of the Tajpuriyas do not wear *phuli* (nose ring). Tajpuriyas celebrate *bhai tihar* with great joy and shave their heads at the 10th days of the death during death ritual. In this sense, they seem to more Hinduised than the Rajbanshis. They are primarily cultivators supplemented with animal farming and small handicraft production such as weaving for their living.

The **Gangais** or what they are locally known as Ganesh is the third major group in Gouriganj. ''They are apparently of Nepalese origin'' writes Chaudhury (1962:142) in a report of Bihar District Gazetteers. The popular saying *jahan jahan Kankai, tahan tahan Gangais* (you will find the Gangais, wherever you find the river Kankai) also suggest that

their origin was in Nepal. The saying is based on the fact, for the Gangais abound only in the country traversed by the Kankai and its olds beds. The similarity of their name and that of the river suggest the inference that they have been named after it. Obviously, in Nepal, they are primarily found along the riverbanks of Kankai.

They set up prayer flags like those so commonly seen in the hills. They don't have their own mother tongue and they also speak Rajbanshi language. They worship similar God and goddess as Rajbanshi and Tajpuriys do and observe all the rites and rituals similar to those of Rajbanshis. Usually they buried the dead body but cremation is also in practice. As in Rajbanshi, *saradha* (death ritual) is performed after twelve days by a special class of Brahmin known as *kantha* or *mahapatra*.

But they are strictly jati endogamy in their marriages and kin relations. They are also different from the rest in the sense that they have special *gharer gosai* (house deities) known as *panch deuti*. They worship these Gods on occasions of festivals and ceremonies and offer animal and bird sacrifice during *durga pooja* (Dasain). Another difference is that they are traditionally allowed to drink alcohol and consume pork and chicken, which are strongly condemned among the Rajbanshis and Tajpuriyas. But they do not brew liquor in their home and have started denouncing these practices.

The Gangais by profession are recognised as good farmers, who also earn their living by producing *murhi* (parched rice) and *chiura*(beaten rice). They sell their products in local weekly markets. The usually call themselves as Genesh and use the surnames of 'Lall', 'Singh' and 'Mandal'.

Among the major jati identities embraced in Gouriganj, Tajpuriyas and Gangais are the only groups that do not entail membership in a separate Grate Tradition or civilization. While Rajbanshi, Satars, Rais and Newars can confront each other conceptually as complete alternative schemes of existence, replete with institutions and tradition beyond the knowledge of common man, Tajpuriya and Gangai are identities implying only such behaviour as common men practice. There is no state, no government, no religion, and no historical/literature/cultural heritage elsewhere to which one is connected, only a geographical original homeland- eastern Nepal and bordering areas of India.

The **Satars** forms a small minority group in Gouriganj. They are one of the Indian ethnic groups who settled in eastern Terai during Rana period. They were migrated to the area from Santhal Parganas of Bihar and Bengal of India for various reasons such as natural calamities like droughts and floods. Exactly when did the first Satars arrive in the area is unclear but

based on their oral narration; we can assume that they have been living around Gouriganj for about fourth to fifth generations. Now they constitute the workforce of the area. Since only a few of them are landlords, most of them work as daily wage labourers or sharecroppers of rich people of the area. They also serve as palanquin bearers during the marriage ceremonies among the Rajbanshis and Tajpuriyas of the area.

The Satars women, in particular are easily distinguished from the women of other *jatis* by their dark skin, slightly curly hair and their particular way of dressing. They have their own distinct mother tongue that belongs to the Munda branch of the Austro-Asitic group (Gurung, 1998). Traditionally, Satars have been living in large villages, but today, as landless people, they have no choice but to stay in small settlements with few huts. In each Satar village there are a *manjhi hadam* (headman), a *naike* (priest) and a *godit* (messenger). They have their specific responsibilities in seasonal festivals and life-cycle ceremonies. They also act as the village representatives in marriage negotiations and inter-village disputes settlements. The village council where all men of the village attend and decisions are made by consensus does the hearing of all internal disputes and decision making.

Though they worship Hindu Gods and goddess such as *kali* as their tutelary deities, it does not mean that they have accepted the caste ideology, the superiority of the Brahmins or the ritual interdependence between castes. They emphasise their ritual independence and strongly reject using a Brahmin priest or other caste specialist other than theirs owns for ritual purposes (Buggland, 1998:100). The village deities - *marag buru, jaharthan, majhithan* are often called Satars national deities as they are worshipped in every Satars village on behalf of all the villages.(Ibid.). Satars of Guriganj are divided into different clans like- *hembron, kisku, hasda, murmu, soren*, and mardi. They are strictly clan exogamous and they also give preference to village exogamy in the marriages.

However, nowadays Satars are becoming the easy clients for baptisation of Christian missionaries. When I was in the field I found that most of the Satars are now converted into Christian and left their customary cultural traditions and heritage. Now no one remains as *majhi*, *naike* and *godit* in most of the Satars villages of Gouriganj and they renounced to worship their traditional deities, instead they are praying of Christ and doing church services. In addition, as the identity of tribal groups like Satars were intimately linked to agriculture and access to land and their ability to realize the tribal vision of 'good life' depend on their access to land (Gunnar, 1991) and they are loosing their lands so frequently (Buggeland, 1998, Bhattarai, 1994), that the reproduction of their cultural traditions in next generation is clearly in trouble and uncertain.

Finally there are some households of hill ethnic groups like Newars, Rais and one household of Sherpa. Among them Newars are the dominant merchants as well as the educated folk of Gouriganj areas. They originally migrated to the area from Kathmandu, Baglung and Sapatri districts about more than four decades ago. They have almost forgotten their mother tongue and have accepted Nepali as their own mother tongue. Culturally too, they seem most Hinduised hill ethnic groups in the area. However, in some context, they have preserved their own and distinct cultural traits. For example, some Newar families of Gouriganj are still following the practices of *ihi,* the mock-marriage of their girls to Suverna Kumar (a golden emblem of god Narayan).

7.2.2   *Jat* Identity

Unlike *jati* identity whose main motif is one of differentiation, *jat* identities are based on the principles of hierarchy and exclusion, and they, have been, and continue to communicate cultural difference and identity both in relation to intra- as well as inter-*jat* relationships. *Jats* in addition, are groups which are hierarchically ranked according to their ritual purity (Berreman, 1972,) and purity is expressed ritualistically in terms of pollution (Dumount, 1980) interdining and intermarriage (Ghurye, 1968). Although there might be disagreements about each group's rank within a social structure, these are, nevertheless, based upon a shared cultural and ideological framework (see Box 5.2 -- 5.13 in Chapter 5).

The *jat* system lies fundamentally rooted in Hindu religion, the communities of pre-1962 state which not only upheld the system but occasionally, also redefined *jat* and *jati* belongingness (of individuals, households, clans) through the implementation of specific laws and directives. *Jat* system not only separates the high *jats* from those *jats* regarded as untouchables in relation to ritual domain but also reduces access in political power and economic privileges.

Despite the legal abolition of discrimination on the ground of *jats* and *jatis* (enacted in the Public Laws of 1962), and though slow declining particularly in the urban areas, *jats* and *jatis* still continue to function as universal and salient social and cultural classificatory categories in the country. *Jat* affiliation, which is inherited, is still germane to individual, household, and larger collective identities and, to a substantial extent, opportunities, and attainments. While the overarching structure of the *jats* and *jatis* system in Nepal is considerably different from that in its heartland - the Gangetic plain of India - and while several variants of that structure are in operation even within Nepal (Sharma 1983), the *jats* and *jatis* system not only differentiates and hierarchies individuals, households, kinship groups, clans and lineage but it also sets a particular *jats* and *jatis* apart horizontally and vertically from the rest. Such segregation, however, does not at all imply an absence of inter-caste and inter-ethnic

interaction - only that the domains of such interaction are very specifically and rigidly defined.

Case 7.1 Brahmins of Gouriganj

Brahmin is a member of the priestly order in the Hindu society. People use the terms 'Brahmin' and 'priest' inter-changeably in their discourse. But, In fact neither all the Brahmins are priests and nor all the priests are Brahmins in Nepalese context. Most of the Brahmins either of hill or of Terai are primarily subsist on farming supplemented with animal husbandry, though they do not till the land themselves in most of the cases. Mostly they are ordinary farmers, managing livelihoods on the hillside or on the plains, like every one else. Very few or about 1% of the total Brahmin population may have been subsisted on the priestly work only.

There are many categories of Brahmins in Nepal and they are also placed in different position of the caste hierarchy, which are as fallows:

1. Hill Brahmin	1. Updhaya
	2. Kumain
	3. Jaisi
2. Newar Brahmin	1. Dev Brahmin
3. Terai Brahmin	1. Maithili
	2. Bhumihar
	3. Mahapatra/Kantha
	4. Telia

The *upadhaya*, the *kumain* and the *jaisi* are the categories of the Brahmins among the *phade* people.

Plate 7.3 A Kanth Brahmin (Funeral Priest)

Though they follow the similar religious tradition of Hinduism but they do not intermarry and interdinine. The *upadhaya* remains at the apex of the caste hierarchy among the Brahmins. They are further divided into hundreds of *thars* (family names) and few dozen of *gotras*(clan names). *Pokheral, adhikari, baral, ghimire, koirala, khatiwada, goutam,and bhandari* are the examples of the *thars* of *upadhaya* Brahmin. They are further organised into *gotra*. For instance, *adhikari, baral, ghimire* and few some more *thars* belong to one *gotra* called *kasyapa*. Similarly *bhattarai* and *bhandari* have same *gotra* called *basista*.

In similar way, *kumain* and *jaisi* Brahmin are also further divided into *thars* and *gotras*. One can distinguish *kumain* and other types of Brahmins by their respective *thar*s if he/she has basic knowledge of *thars* and *gotras*. *Kumanin* Brahmins have distinct and separate *thars* from that of other Brahmins. For example, *uprety, siwakoti, parsain* are the typical *thars* of *kumain* Brahmin and we could not find similar *thars* among the *upadhaya* and *jaisi* Brahmin. But it is almost impossible to differentiate between *upadhaya* and *jaisi* Brahmin, because they possess same and identical *thar* and *gotra* and it is a question of the subjective identification. Bhattarai either can be *upadhaya* or can be *jaisi*, it depends on the mode of marriage of the parents. Generally *jaisis* are the offspring of Brahmin widows, but there are other ways too. If an *upadhaya* couple give birth a child before their formal marriage then, the child will have a *jaisi* status. Only the *upadhaya* Brahmins who have certain knowledge of Sanskrit and educated or trained for 'karmakanda'(ritual specialisation)

work as *purohita* or priest. Rest are not allowed do the same, though some of them are very excellent in Sanskrit and *karmakanda*.

In similar fashion, *maithili* or *paschima*, *kantha* or *mahapatra* and *bhumiar* are the three categories of Brahmins in Terai. The *bhumihars* are the non-priestly caste of plain Brahmins. There is also a category of Brahmins that officiates the rituals of low caste people such as Teli called *teliya* Brahmin. They are also further divided into separate *thars* like *jha, mishra, pandey, tiwari* and so on. As in the hill, some are well trained in Sanskrit and *karmakanda* and work as *purohita*. But *maithili* Brahmin only officiates the *dev karma* (related to Gods and goddess) and the *mahapatra* only officiates the *preta karma*(related to death or ghost). All the death rituals from the 1st day to the 12th day of death are initiated by *mahapatra*. These rituals process are related to *preta karma* and considered as inauspicious.

Death ritual and related *dans(ritualgift)* are always carried out and given in the context of ritual actions that are said to promote the well being (achieved through) gift-giving and auspiciousness of the donor and the household, through the transfer evil, afflictions, fault, and inauspiciousness more generally form donor to recipient (Raheja, 1990:82). This is why upon the death of King, Burghart (1984:105) cites Leuchtag(1958: 235-36), the *mahapatra* funeral priest took these sins in the course of a meal composed, in part, of the deceased king's cranium(the place where the king's soul left his body at the moment of death). Having digested the sins committed by king and a portion of the sin committed by his subjects, the funeral priest was then mounted backwards on the elephant, jeered "Demon Brahmin" and derive from the realm.

The *maithili* Brahmin only starts his work after the 12th day ritual. After that all the rituals are related to *dev karma* and considered as auspicious. Among hill people, there are no such categories of Brahmin like *mahapatra* and *teliya*. Both types of ritual works (*dev* as well as *preta karma*) are done by the same family priest. But they refuse to take *dan* (ritual gift) and eat food in certain days of the death ritual. Dan of death ritual may have effect on the recipient in the form of disease, madness, a diminishing of his power or his fiery energy, or in the form of a general decline of his family and lineage (Raheja, 1990:82)

In both region, there are individual Brahmins who have acquired in-depth knowledge of *dharama sastra*(religious epic), *purans* and *veda*s by learning *sankritic* tradition are called *pundit* or *bayas*. They generally give *prabachan* (lecture) in different topics of Hindu religion and its fundamental principles. Basically, they lecture on *purans* and other Hindu *dharama sastras*, which are, run either by community or individual initiation. They deserve quite respect from the public mass and usually have higher social status than other Brahmin and *purohits*.

Plate 7.4 A Madhise Brahmin (Priest of the Village)

All categories of Brahmin wear *janai* (sacred thread) and are called Brahmin in general sense. But they do not inter-dine and inter-marry. Maithili Brahmins are considered themselves as superior than *bhumihar, kantha* or *mahapatra* and *teliya* Brahmin. There are two household of *maithili* Brahmin in the study area. One is working as local health assistant and recent migrant from Saptri district. The other one is the local *purohita* of the area. Though he is not a Nepali citizen and all his family are permanently residing in India, he has been providing the service for several years. He owns a small patch of land with small house near the boarder area and live there with his cousin. There are about 500 household of local people who employ him as *purohita* or priest for the various ritual purposes. He acts as family *purohita* and after his death his son will follow the work. Thus, there exists a *jajamani* like relation between local upper caste people and the

Brahmin. The similar condition exists between the *kantha* Brahmin and the local high caste people.

The Brahmins of Terai have their own distinct cultural traditions. They are usually organised with clan or family name. They have much restriction on marriage, food, and interaction with others, especially low caste people. They are caste endogamy and *gotra*(clan*)* exogamy in marriage. They are strictly vegetarian. They practice more orthodox Hinduism. They socialise their children in different ways. Their tradition of schooling children from the early age is a unique practice among the Terai Brahmins. They have a strong tradition of imparting knowledge from one generation to the another. Traditionally they acquire "values" of learning and their value system is quite different and unique from other *jat* and *jatis*.

Manu, the Hindu lawgiver, prescribed six functions of a Brahmin: *padhanu padhaunu* (study and make others study), *yagya garnu garaunu* (sacrifice and make others sacrifice), *dan dinu linu* (give and receive gift). As a result they belong to well-educated strata of Nepalese population. Other *jats* and *jatis*, on the other hand have different value system and they prefer to send their adult to British Gurkha Regiment as *lahure* and more recently they prefer to go abroad (Arab countries, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan) for making money.

Among Brahmins, generally elders (father, brothers, or family guru) bear the full responsibility to train and teach new generation. Women folk generally teach the basic skills and training to the girls among the Brahmins. They first train the children with moral education and provide them basic Sanskrit education in home. After that they send children to formal school. They always give first priority to education irrespective of their economic background. The number of student enrolments[4] in primary schools during 1999 clearly shows these trends. Although the Brahmins and Chhetris occupy only about 11 percent of the total population of the Gouriganj, their children in school enrolment occupy the largest percentage of the students. They occupy nearly one-third of the total number of student enrolment in 1999.

Field note (1999) in Gouriganj.

It might be true that few individual Brahmins might have exploited the other castes, they might have taken advantages of their caste position and other privileges for their personal benefits in the past, but they too were subject of the state, not a class born to rule. Brahmins have been part of Nepal's past and ongoing heritage. Throughout much of Nepal's recorded history, Brahmin have served as ideologues, priest, and even soldiers (Shrama, 1992). Even today they are the most diversified caste. They have made an entry into every possible profession, turning possibilities that are available to every one to full advantage, particularly by emphasising the education of the young. Along with Newars, Brahmins were the earliest to realise the importance of modern education and training for the profession. Even in the past, they not only made use of limited opportunities to educate young at the country, but also sent their offspring to Banaras, India to acquire training and knowledge. Their professional training, commitment to learning rather than the prerogative of former caste is what place Brahmin at the higher echelons of today's society.

Some scholar (Bista, 1991) blamed the Brahmins of having fatalistic orientation and suspect on their working ethics. The fatalistic outlook, nonetheless, could not have been the propelling force behind the Brahmin's success story. Today one can find Brahmin in every part of the political and ideological spectrum. Within their ranks, there are conservatives, liberals, monarchists, republicans, socialist, Marxist, Maoists, extremists, and anarchists.

Even the Communist cabinet of 1994 was fully dominated by Bahuns of Nepali State. A propensity for fatalism does not explain their successes in every fields of the society.   K. P. Malla (1992) has rightly written that-

> ''If any section of Nepali society has perfectly internalised ''the Protestant capitalist work ethics'' and its accompanying cult of acquisitive success, it is the Brahmin. Without relentlessly pursuing success, how could they have dominated every field of Nepali public life just in a matter of a few generations since the creation of the Nepali nation-state? You name it- rightist, centrist or leftist politics, the media, literature, and diplomacy, civil service- you will invariably find Brahmin at the top, if not dangerously close to it. Fatalism certainly didn't carry them so close to the peak''.

Unlike *jati* identities, criteria for *jat* distinction are more or less uniform and strict. Despite the fact that *jat*[5] may sometimes behave like *jatis*, and in some cases increasingly begin to resemble *jatis, jat* identities, however, are distinct from that of jati identities in Gouriganj. Even the best ethnographers habitually are confused *jati* with *jat*, which, on any reasonable assumption, is a different kind of social category. Unlike *jati*, which are primarily based on the principle of egalitarianism, the *jat* identities are based on the ritual hierarchy and occupational stratification. Marriage and kinship relation is strictly regulated through the relative *jat* position.

It is worthy to mention here that there are some significant differences between the caste systems practiced in the hill and plain regions of Nepal, though they both are based on the same basic principles of Hinduism. While comparing the equivalent caste ranking I came to know that similar occupational castes have different ranking within their respective caste system. For examples, the *sunars* of the hills and the *sonars* of the plain are makers of gold and silver ornaments. In the plains, the *sonars* have highest status among the various craft castes. But in the *sunars* of the hills are untouchables, ranked even below the blacksmith. Similarly, the *lohars* (iron worker) in Gouriganj are considered as pure caste and all high caste people accept water from them but in the hill their equivalent caste Kamis are untouchables. Even among the similar ranking castes of hills and plains like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, there is no evidence of intermarriage and establishment of other kin relations.

Another difference is the numbers of castes in each of the systems. The caste systems in the hills is simple and there appear no more than a dozen of caste in the hierarchy of Brahmin, Thakuri/Chhetri, Sanyasi, and Untouchables like Kami, Damai, Sarki, Badai and Gaine. In the plain caste system, there are more than 30 distinct cultural groups (though many of them share a common language) and present a more complicated social structure than the hill caste Hindus. The hierarchy is also more complicated in the plains (see Box 5.2-5.13 in Chapter 5). In addition, there is a interesting caste in the hills which has no counterpart the plains- the *Garthi* or *Bhujal* caste, whose members are descendants of ex-slaves.

7.2.3 Regional (regions of origin) Identity

Identity based on the origin of geographical regions is another identities marker for the people of study area. Since the process of social, political and emotional integration to the national main stream has been very slow, regional identity has also remained strong among the people of the plains. The politically dominant *pahade* people have historically treated the residents of the Terai as inferior, second-class citizen. The Terai dwellers are also viewed as having a close affinity to India culturally, socially and politically than to Nepal; their loyalty to the central authority of Nepal is always suspected rather than expected by the ruling elite. They are often called *madhises* rather than Nepal. While the term *madhise* literally means as a Terai or plain inhabitant, colloquially it has a demeaning connotation, in the words of Shrestha(1990:166-167)- 'an alien or an uncivilised immigrant from northern India'. The *madhise*, on the other hand, blame the *pahade* as coloniser and exploiters of the Terai. I shall discuss the divides between them in details in Chapter 8)

One can easily distinguish *pahade* and *madhise* people in a number of ways. The first and the most important indicator is that of language. Hill people speak Nepali language and all the hill *jatis* of Gouriganj also have adopted it as their mother tongue. On the other hands, Terai people speak many languages and some groups have their own mother tongue too. Though plain *jat* and *jatis* could speak Nepali but their descant is clearly distinguishable.

People of *pahade* and *madhise* origin have separate and remarkably different settlement patterns in Gouriganj and one could easily identify the people by village settlement. *Madhise* people prefer to live in compact dwellings where as *pahade* people chooses open space for settlement. The house type is also different. Houses of *madhise* people are generally small decorated differently and houses of *pahade* people are rather big and are designed differently. As mentioned above their dressing patterns are visibly different.

7.2.4 Class and Occupational Identity

Though it is difficult to establish links between economic class and such a complex *jat* and *jati* pattern, there is, however, a significant overlap between high *jat* and high economic status in Gouriganj. Big landlords and big business holder of Gouriganj are also from the upper echelons of *jat* and *jati* hierarchy. Given the predominance of the upper-*jats* and *jatis* in the political and cultural domains and in the economic domain as well, the various cultural groups and even religious groups tend to be forced within the *jat* framework and relegated to its middle and lower echelons. But it does not mean that there are no poor high caste people. In

particular villages, I found that *bahun* and *chhetris*- supposedly the highest *jat*- are often no more prosperous than their subordinates in the ritual hierarchy.

The debate of the relationship between class, caste and ethnic division in Nepal, however, need to be seen in the light of the historical development of caste system in the country and within the context of country's contemporary power structure. There is no significant resemblance between the caste system in Nepal and to that of India. It was relatively lately introduced into Nepal and was used as a device to achieve 'Nepalazation' (Bista, 1982:4) which was a political mission to integrate diverse ethnic communities into a single national hierarchy dominated my certain hill elite groups. The caste system in India may have arisen out of the concepts of religious purity and pollution (Dumont, 1980) but was also based on the socio-cultural and economic specialization, where as in Nepal the caste system was a state intervention with political motivation of national unification. Obviously, Dumont's notion of caste system is difficult to apply to Nepal. On the other hand, the interpretation of caste system as a vehicle for justification and legitimization of class structure founded upon the basis of economic and political power (Melillassoux, 1973) has far more resonance in this case, in Nepal

Trade unions frequently cut cross *jat* and *jatis* and regional lines. Few occasional strikes demanding various professional facilities called by labor unions in Loka Nath Tea Estate and Dhiraj Rice Mill in Gouriganj have shown their identity giving sense of belonging to a certain class rather than to *jat* and *jatis* or regional groups. Nonetheless, the total population of Gouriganj can be divided into upper, middle and lower class in terms of economic criteria such as land holding, size of business and office work etc. But the feeling of belonging to a particular class in a 'political sense' has not yet clearly emerged.

As far as occupation is concerned, there are several supplementary occupations in practice, in addition to agriculture as main occupation of the people within Gouriganj. There is no overarching pattern that some groups have specific occupation. Even traditional occupational castes are not following the prescribed occupation and are doing different works. On the one hand, traditional merchant caste like Baniya, Marwaris and Newars all are also practicing agriculture farming, and traditional farmers like Rajbanshis and Brahmins are also running business on the other. Similarly traditional *halwai* or confectioners are not only making sweets but are schoolteachers and office workers too. At first sight, it seems that people of Gouriganj, are more or less involved in different occupations irrespective of their other social and cultural identity but there are some occupations which are only confined to particular block of people. Only lower caste people could practice the occupation of leather, iron,

cleaning and washing related works. The choice and priorities of persons in selecting an occupation are thus clearly affected by considerations beside the simple pursuit of wealth.

7.2.5 Gender Identity

It is not prominently apparent in Gouriganj so far. Some educated women and NGO activists have certain impact on public debate on gender equality. Recent development of public discourses on women and ancestral property rights has made people aware about gender identity.

7.2.6 Religious Identity

Due to historical and political circumstances, **Hinduism** was predominant religious identity in the past and even today it is the state religion of Nepal. As the group having an unchallenged political prerogatives, the Nepali speaking Hindus formulated an all encompassing, all embracing social model in which each of the different participating social units is given a caste name and a definite rank within a single hierarchy, no matters how divergent such groups may look or be in their beliefs and practices. Obviously, ethnic groups as well as other minority religious groups were forced to come under the umbrella of Hinduism. But, now people are free to search their religious identity. Some ethnic groups such as Rai, Newars who called them Hindus previously are nowadays claimed as non-Hindu.

Plate 7.5 Hindu Sadus in a Shiva Temple of Gouriganj

Some groups like Rajbanshis, and Tajpuriya claimed both the Hindus as well as ethnic groups, paradoxically.

Gaige (1975: 12) has rightly written that 'Hinduism represents a bond between the plains and hills people as well as a barrier to interaction between them'. Though the Hinduism of both regions has many features in common (e.g. worship same gods, celebrate common festivals, and share a common body of Sanskrit literature and ritual), Hindu practices in the hills differ from those in the plains in many respects. Hill people follow rather flexible and liberal types of Hinduism. Strict vegetarianism is practiced by few of those people, for some, they do not have any qualms about eating buffalo meat and pork, and neither do they seem to mind eating more exotic kinds of red meat. Upper-caste

plains people observe the dietary restriction of Hinduism much carefully. Although by no means common, intercaste marriages some times take place among hill people; such marriages are considered taboo among the plain people. Such differences of religious practices have restricted the social and cultural interaction between hill and plains people.

In addition to different practices of Hinduism among the people of hills and plains, Hindu people of Gouriganj irrespective of their caste and ethnic backgrounds want to be recognised with several other identities within Hinduism, such as *ramanandi* (followers of the lord Ram), *pranami*(followers of the lord Krishna), *sanatani* (followers of ancient or traditional Hinduism), *santamat satsang* or *midas sampradaya* (Followers of an Indian Guru Maharsi Menhi), *jaya guru anukul thakur* (followers of an Indian Guru Anukul Chandra) and *om santi* (followers of Brahma Kumari). These identities are nevertheless, not strong for political and similar such other purposes.

However, there exist distinct Christians, Muslims, and shamanism identities in small numbers besides Hindu majority. Though Hindu constitutes the major religious group in Gouriganj, Muslims, Christians and other religious sects are freely conducting their religious activities.

It might be true elsewhere that difference in religion produce significant distinction of culture and identity (Barth, 1983:50), and there exist fundamental distinction between Hindu, Muslim and Christians but religion is perhaps, the least conclusive marker of identity within Gouriganj. Many different ethnic and caste groups share the same religion, there exist local variation, and the Newar can be either Hindu or Buddhists. High castes Hindus of both hill and plain origin have already internalised *maharaj*, the village deities of Rajbanshis, as their own. Groups such as Satars, Rajbanshis, Tajpuriyas, Rais and Gangais simultaneously follow the two religious traditions in their day-today life, Hindu as well as local shamanism.

Another remarkable characteristic of the predominantly Hindu rural society of Nepal is that non-Hindu communities have also been influenced by the caste-hierarchy of Hinduism. Even the non-Hindu have had to fit some how into the rigid framework of the caste dominated social system; and while they have always remained outside it, having never been regarded as Hindus, they have nevertheless acquired a quasi caste status in accordance with their general social, economic and political position. For example, tailor master, *dhuniya* (quilt makers), *khasikatta* (butcher), and *bham*(they castrate goat and cattle) all are Muslims but are equally considered as occupational caste within the Hindu community in Gouriganj.

The **Muslims** are a minority religious group who were migrated to the area about four generations ago from northern India. The Islamic culture in Terai still remains as a prototype

of Indian mainstream Muslim culture. In general Islam in Nepal is considered as ethnic religion of Indian migrants or their descendants. All Muslims within Gouriganj follow Sunni belief and particularly the *Hanafi School*. Majority falls into Saiyad and Seikh divisions but there are some occupational groups too. All are farmers and there are no great inequalities of wealth and possession, and consequently, within the Muslim community of Gouriganj, there are no evidences of class distinction.

As in other parts of Terai, the mother tongue of the Muslims of Gouriganj depends upon the locality where they live. Initially their mother tongue was Urdu but now they speak a local dialect as their mother tongue which is a mixed dialect of Rajbanshi, Hindi, Nepali and Urdu. They don't have any specific dressing pattern and dress as normal as local people do. Some, however, occasionally wear Turkish hat or the skullcap and grow beards to show their Musalmanness. In strict sense, the Muslim women in Gouriganj do not follow the practices of *purdha*, the keeping of women in a state of seclusion. Expect in *nikaha* (the Islamic exchange of consent), the marriage ceremony is commemorated according to the local customs and tradition. Now, they are becoming a close-knit group in socio-religious matters of Gouriganj

Plate 7.6 Muslims of Gouriganj

In matters affecting their socio-religious life they act as a separate and self-sufficient group, rarely seeking the help, assistance or advice of their Hindu neighbors. That is, in religious activities, they have maintained their Islamic tradition. Until recently they had run a *madarsha* (muslim informal school of Islamic teaching) but due to the financial problems and lack of *moulavi* (teacher), it has remained closed. They have a *masjid* (mosque) which was built nearly four decades ago and they have owned 6 *katthas* of land for *kabristhan* (graveyard). On each Friday all villagers gather in the mosque for praying. During the festivals of Id-UL-Fitrand and Id-UL-Zoha, a large numbers of men join in praying.

Though they certainly have some plights of being minorities, Muslims of Gouriganj are performing all acts considered as duty in their own religion, and the tradition of their family quite freely. In fact, no restrictions are placed on religious practices. Muslims of Gouriganj, presumably all over the Terai have favourable chances to observe their religion. A continued process of Islamization here also contributed to the progress of the religion

Christianity is comparatively a new religion for the people of Gouriganj. Though confined to limited believers and audience it has a history of more than two centuries in Nepal (Perry, 1990: 10-11). It got a great momentum to spread all over the country after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. A daily news paper reports that ''the Christians are penetrating the only Hindu State in the world so rapidly that they have planned to build a total of 8000 churches by the end of 2000. The only Hindu State in the world has only 647 temples including all the *patipouwas* (traditional rest house) and *satal ghars* i.e. the guest houses for Hindu saints and believers'' (Kantipur, December, 25, 1999).

Under the leadership of a hill Brahmin, who was baptised into Christianity more than three decades ago, a church called ELSA-BOATH Prayer house was established in 1994 in Gouriganj. The church is made up with concrete floor and brick walls and roofed with corrugated metal sheets. The regular followers what they called as *biswasi* are about 20 families. Out of 20 *biswasis* majority belong to *matawali jatis* such as Rai, Newars, Magars and Satars. Only two of them are from Brahmin and Chhetris.

Though they have not emerged as a concrete religious group in comparison to other religions,

Plate 7.7 Christians of Gouriganj

in the village context they are maintaining a separate identity. All *biswasis* have renounced their traditional cultural practices,(e.g. women have left wearing *chura* and *pote*, stop celebrating Hindu or traditional rites and rituals such as Dasain, Tihar) and started to adopt rituals, festivals, and practices as prescribed by the Bible. They have regular prayer meeting on Sunday and other voluntary social services.

The sustainability of this newly adopted tradition within a village context is, nonetheless uncertain in many respect.. In case of marriage, it is very difficult to get suitable partner within such small population and so might be the case to establish other social and kin relations. As they are the part of wider Christian movement in Nepal, I can assume that they will establish wider networks to solve the problems of reproduction of their tradition.

7.2.7 Age Identity

Youth increasingly tend to share social idioms, networks and activities irrespective of ethnic, caste, gender, religious, regional background, in addition to going to common school and

colleges. But after crossing certain age groups and accumulating experiences of social circumstances, they gradually become conscious towards their respective cultural traditions.

7.2.8 Political Identity

People usually identify with political parties- though that could be fluid. For example, there is a Terai or region based political party called Nepal Sadvawana Party (NSP), but not all the *madhise* are its members. On the other hand, there are some national political parties named Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) and its various fractions, Rastraya Prajatantra Party (RPP) with open membership irrespective of castes, classes, regions and religions. However, if we look the central leadership pattern of the leading political parties, national politics in Nepal remains under the control of hill high caste Hindus. The local leadership pattern in Gouriganj is also in similar line.

After the restoration of multiparty system in the country, political identity with certain party affiliation is becoming essential in every day life. Party affiliation is necessary not only to get new job but also to secure job (see Box 1.1, the introductory case), to make work done, to keep influence in the village matters and other many such purposes. It is almost impossible to live in a village like Gouriganj without any political backing. One must have to choose one political line in order to survive socially and politically as well.

Village life is highly politicised in Nepal. People usually are divided into different groups as the supporters of respective political parties. Each and every event occurred in the village are interpreted along the political party line and local leaders are always prone to bring the event in the interest of their party. Even in highly secular matters like marriage, people calculate political equation. A daughter of a local Congress leader is not allowed to marry with a son of local UML leader, though both are culturally acceptable marriage partners. Similarly, if someone is requested help from local government bodies say, VDC, the local government representatives first assess his or her party backgrounds and then decide about the help.

7.2.9 Local Identity

Although the ethnic and regional or *pahade* Vs *madhise* elements play vital role in local politics, villagers are often united on single issues, and sometimes divided along non-ethnic and regional lines. People residing in certain village or settlement usually unite irrespective of other backgrounds to get development support from government agencies and other sectors.

7.2.10   Linguistic Identity

Jati identities and languages go hand to hand in Nepal where over 70 languages are spoken. The problems of variation in terms of languages spoken in Nepal are also prominent because there are, on the one hand, multi-lingual *jats* and *jatis*, and on the other, diverse *jats* and *jatis* who speak single or multiple languages. The rulers have taken advantage of such complex linguistic situation to impose and rationalise Nepali as the only official language in Nepal. Consequently, now a days Nepali language has become, mother tongue to just over one-half of the total population and a "link language" to a large majority, forms another anchor of cultural symbols and social participation as do many other languages within more localised settings

Although Nepali is official language and majority of the inhabitants of Gouriganj can speak Nepali, other local languages are also spoken as their mother tongue. Besides Nepali, Rajbanshi and Satar are the other prominent languages spoken in Gouriganj. Some people, especially leaders of NSP advocate of Hindi as regional linguistic identity of Terai. But in Gouriganj, Hindi is neither mother tongue nor second language of communication among the people. On the contrary, people communicate either in Rajbanshi or in Nepali languages.

7.2.11   Supra-ethnic/caste/regional or National Identity

In fact, this form of identification is most evidently appeared among ruling elite, urban middle class, intellectuals, academics and the like. However, after the *desh nirman* (nation building) agenda of 1960s was forwarded, a large numbers of Nepalese inhabitants of Terai have visibly associated themselves with the Nepali State. *Madhise* people of Gouriganj, presumably all over the Terai now seems to be in the process of developing a common set of supra ethnic or regional, national myths and symbols which are invented with meaning and relevance to its population, although ethnic and other forms of identification still remain strong. Terai as bread basket of the country and birth place of Lord Buddha are such symbols that have been invested to develop a national imagined community during 1960s. Since the Terai people have minimum representation in national decision making bodies and they have some sorts of feeling of discrimination by the ruling elite of the central government, it is impossible to state weather this symbolic framework will in the long run sustain to secure a sense of unity among hill and Terai dwellers. It is nonetheless clear that any viable Nepali nationalism will have to reconcile itself not only with ethnicity but also with the emerging non- ethnic constituent parts of society.

The democratic Constitution (1990) of Nepal has propagated a model of Nepalese nationhood. It has depicted Nepal as *bahu jatiya and bahu bhasik desh*(multi ethnic and multi

lingual country) and see the nation being made up by the very 'cultural mosaic' that it embodies, and locates nationhood to the interface between the constituent ethnic or cultural groups and their mutual respect. It also lifts nationhood to a supra-ethnic level and depicts Nepali nationhood as the universal values and institutions of multi-party democracy and human rights that all Nepali share; the political, legislative and judiciary system, the territory that all Nepali believe in. The message is in a word, that if such shared institution work reasonably impartially and according to universalistic principle, ethnic, regional and other cultural diversity of the country will not be obstacle to the noble mission of nation-building.

7.3   Understanding of Cultural Pluralism within Gouriganj

In common sense the term ''cultural pluralism'' refers to situation in which several cultural traditions coexist in one community. But modern refinements in cultural analysis have increasingly rendered the concept 'cultural pluralism' as understood in common sense unfit for any discussion of pluralism. Our accounts no longer provide empirically and distributionally bounded descriptions of cultures, composed of identifiable elements or items, and they no longer pretend to provide an exhaustive or gross picture of a content of a heritage (Barth, 1984: 79).

Unable to identify and delimit 'cultures' in a plural situation, one can argue that the concept of ethnicity can provide a framework. But as argued by Barth (1969) and others have not given alternative views so far, the idea of ethnicity best used as a concept of social organisation of cultural difference. Such organisation frame allows us to depict the boundaries and relation to social group in terms of the highly selective repertoire of cultural construct that are employed emblematically to organise identities and interaction. For that very reason, ethnicity provides only a very oblique and deceptive framework for investigating the actual bodies of beliefs, values, and practices that are distributed in a population, though it no doubt serves to identify one set of forces that affects this distribution (Barth, 1984:80). In similar way, the concepts of 'little tradition' and 'great tradition' initially developed by Redfield (1956) and latter utilised by his student (Marriott, 1959) in Indian context are also not provide a conceptual vehicle for depiction a variety of patterns of coexistence of several cultural traditions and identities in communities or regions like Gouriganj.

For an analysis of dynamics of cultural pluralism, Barth has argued that one should develop some criteria by which he or she can identify and separate the 'stream' or 'tradition' that together comprise the plural scene. In this process, one should not abandon the refinements that have been gained by developing an ideational concept of culture (Kessing, 1974) in the place of simplistic concepts of 'custom' and 'trait' but we need to develop a discovery procedures to ascertain how ideas/cultural items cohere in cultural stream or tradition, what

the gross content of each tradition is, and how the contradiction and variation in a plural situation reproduced and affects one another. He further argued that such contraction and variation can be separated, and their coherence and contents can be explored, by describing their social organisation, their distribution in space, their history, and their prospects (1984:82).

From the above discussion, it is clear that Barth's intention is to differentiate the strands or streams, the separate tradition of cultures with their different histories and different prospects, so as to make an inventory of the local distinctive conditions of the perpetuation and change and their interdependence and dynamics. This focus on the distinct cultural traditions as the object of major interest must also affect how we phrase our question and description. Thus, in any plural context, we should not ask how culture is 'shared' between person, but instead investigate the process of 'enrollment and 'embracement' whereby person came to participate in tradition.

The earlier discussion of major features of social and cultural identities within Gouriganj reveal that one can't know from an ethnic group membership what his / her occupation will be. Similarly, a person's religious congregation does not say his economic class, or neighbourhood of residence. The classical model of caste hierarchy in terms of occupational specialisation is also not properly applicable. Such cultural multiplicity found in any complex society does not necessarily show any single, overarching pattern. However, taking into account of over-arching identities which may in certain situation overrule all other identities (see Box 9.1 in last Chapter), we can draw some inferences to construct a model of pluralism within Gouriganj. This model, nonetheless, stress on the one hand, unlimited social and cultural diversity, on the other hand, a rather limited set of cultural contrast- Hindus verses Muslims or non Hindus, *jati* verses *jat*, hill people or *pahade* verses plains people or *madhise*, high caste verses low caste and *adhivasis*.

Moreover, the hierarchical organization of *jats* and *jatis* within the community is so fixed in the structural patterns of rural Nepal that the *jatis*, as well as non-Hindu (such as Muslim, Buddhists and Christian) section of the population come to be regarded as another *jats* in the village. As other parts of the country, while maintaining their socio-religious identity, several of these non Hindu groups have acquired some caste characteristics, particularly occupational specialization. For example, some Muslims of Gouriganj function as an occupational caste of *damain* (tailor), *khasikatta* (butcher) and *dhuniya* (quilt maker). It is interesting to note that there is no any tailoring and butchery caste among the Hindus of plain as in hill Hindus and Newars of Kathmandu valley. The Muslims in Nepal Terai provide such services.

Another aspect of social and cultural life within Gouriganj is that the composite population not only comprise a number of groups belonging to different caste groups, but also several ethic groups, tribes as well as many religious groups with their distinct identities and cultural heritage. As far as the Hindu section of the population is taken into account, these diverse groups (different *jats*) are more or less inter-dependent and are integrated in a common social, economic, and ritual organization of the community. Even today one can observe that no caste alone is self-sufficient, for it requires the service of several other occupational castes which holds the monopoly of certain crafts and professions. This system of co-operative labour, based on pattern of inter-caste relation approved by tradition, is not confined only to economic activities but also extends to ceremonial and ritual life. For instance, I have enumerated 17 service castes that were providing services to dominant *jats* and *jatis*, the Yadav, the Rajbanshis in various occasions of life cycle rituals, feasts and festivals and for daily works.

7.4   Forms of Pluralism in Gouriganj

In order to present an observed pattern in the cultural diversity of Gouriganj, I have enumerated (consulting with local people) some kind of descriptive entities-- Rajbanshis, Hindu, Muslim, Mahapatra, Pahade, Madhise, Yadav, Adhivasi, and Nepali. Each identities or categories of people provide us two key features of persons. First it serves to identify persons in question as a parts of social persons and; second it can be characterised by a considerable syndrome of distinctive cultural skills, knowledge, belief, values and experiences or we may collectively call it as 'cultural streams'. The features of each cultural stream are distinct; but they possess certain characteristics in common.

1. Each cultural stream more or less acts as a 'culture' and has continuity through time that transcends the life span of persons: each persists through the enrollment and socialisation of personnel who embrace and reproduce the similar cultural features. The concept of culture here implies not a set of behaviours, or patterns of behaviour, but a set of ideas behind such behaviour which, together with other factors (e.g. social and natural resources, environments, social constraints and contexts) shape the events of behaviour and cause pattern. For example, Rajbanshi as a group follow a distinct 'cultural tradition' which has been sustaining continually through the embracement of their language, tradition of politeness and generous hospitality and other rules of enrollments like marriage (*jati* endogamy), and adopting certain ideas, skills and values from old generation. Any cultural stream, nonetheless, probably never fully reproduced through time- it changes with the modification of old ideas /and the new ideas and arrangements with the changing circumstances of life. In this whole process, they are like all other streams: changing in content, but with a continuity that in the short or

intermediate run allows us to say that it represents the traditions with incremental change. One can observed many symptoms of cultural changes among the Rajbanshis in time perspective but still they are representing a distinct cultural heritage of Rajbanshis.

2. Each stream has a distinctive distribution beyond the community of Gouriganj, with territorial and social boundaries unique to itself. Thus, the Hindu cultural traits of *madhise* people are identifiable in northern India, but not in hills of Nepal. Hill peoples of Gouriganj share Hindu syndrome of traits with Nepalese of Indian origin in Sikkim and Darjeeling, India but not with the plain Hindus of Nepal and India. The syndrome of knowledge, skill and value characterizing the merchants of Gouriganj might be similar with the merchants of all over the Terai and northern India, but not among the persons engaged in trade and business in the northern hills and valleys of Nepal. Similarly local variations of customs of Muslims within Gouriganj are found among Muslims of other parts of Nepalese Terai and northern India, but not among the Muslims of Nepali hills (Thapa, 1998).

3. Each stream is also sustained by a characteristic social organisation, not only descriptive of its patterns of enrollment but also instrumental in organising the various behaviours entailed by the cultural stream. Thus, we can describe this social organisation of each category or cultural stream in terms of which members of a cultural stream interact and organise their behavioural activities. For example, the social organisation of Nepali speaking *pahade* people, of Hindus, of Muslims, of Christians, of *madhise* people, of merchants and traders of Gouriganj, of *bahun*, of *halwai* and so on. The features of cultural elements which each such categories share is presumably sustained by these distinctive forms of organisation: there should be a mosque, *mothersa* and imam to survive a Muslim tradition; as no Hindu tradition survive without Hindu temple, *purohita* and learning of Sanskrit. Similarly, for Christianity, a church and father are necessary. No Satars tradition survives with *majhi, nayike* and *jahar than* and *majhi than*. Without *kul pooja* (ancestor worshipping) and *bansabali* (clan association), it is difficult to survive most of the hill caste cultures in Gouriganj. No cultural tradition of Rajbanshi without the cult of maharaj and practices of *deoniya* (village leader) and practices of *thakur, brahmin*i, and *hanuman* worshipping.

Thus, in this way, each trait or entity of categories of persons within Gouriganj can be considered as a 'cultural tradition' or a 'cultural stream' and one can speak of a *pahade* culture, a Brahmin culture, a *madhise* culture, a *bayapari* (merchant) culture, a Congressi culture and a Communist culture and so on. Such representation of categories of people as a culture or tradition certainly facilitates to generalise about their differing conditions of continuation, their interdependence as coexisting traditions in a community, and their changes. If this notion of pluralism depicts major features of persons, then the overall

situation of Gouriganj is truly one of cultural pluralism: both in the sense that a number of cultures coexist and in the sense that every persons participates in several though far from all, of these cultures.

However, any effort to construct a logical or typological structure to encompass the organization of diversity in any plural situation may be a way to characterise some of the patterns, but it provides no way to identify an overall social structure or the determinants of such order and pattern as prevails. For this we need to understand the process of embracement and reproduction, and the factors that canalise them, through which a degree of order and pattern is generated.

7.5   Reproduction of Cultural Pluralism

In this section, I am trying to analyze the processes that bring about continuity and change in the component tradition in Gouriganj. In other words, I am dealing with the processes of cultural reproduction. If we wish to develop a dynamic analysis of cultural reproduction, we must use a realistic model how culture as an 'experience-induced tradition'- that is, meanings, understandings and evaluations- is indeed learned (Barth, 1983, 194). This implies that the ideas that compose a culture must develop in each separate person as a precipitated of continuing experience through life. When such ideas are shared, it must reflect a parallelism or identity of experiences between persons (Ibid.).

The reproduction of cultural diversity in Gouriganj depend both on the replenishment of the distinctive groups and categories in terms of membership and on the transmission or adoption of distinct cultural features by those members. The process by which a cultural trait reproduces in time, however, depends upon the various factors. Changing historical circumstances, resource base, level of ethnic and other collective consciousness and cultural policies of state are the major factors for cultural reproduction in Gouriganj.

7.5.1 Changing Circumstances

Despite the various homogenising policy of social engineering of preceding governments dominated with Nepali speaking Hindus, the people of Gouriganj have succeeded to preserve their cultural tradition in numbers of ways. Even under the tremendous pressure of monolithic state policy of Panchayat period-"*hamro bhasa hamro bhesa, hamro raja hamro desh"* (one people, one nation, one language, one culture), pluralism remained the reality of life. Rajbanshi and other local dialects still remain as the mother tongue of many groups in the area. Different cultural streams have distinct ways and style of celebrating national festivals

like *dasain* and *tihar*. For example, *madhise* people do not grow *jamara* (seedlings of different grains) for the pooja of Vijaya Dasami and do not practice *tika* (to splotch of vermilion powder mixed with uncooked rice and yogurt onto forehead) and *jamara* while blessing each other. The Rajbanshis do not observe *bhai pooja* during *tihar*, while Tajpuriyas and Gangais do. The Gangais do not celebrate *kukur* (dog) and *kaga* (crow) pooja, while Rajbanshis and Tajpuriys do.

In politically open circumstances after 1990, people here become aware towards their culture, tradition, language, and religion. Accordingly, they have started to organize themselves into many cultural associations aiming at preserving and promoting the cultural traditions and heritage. Such associations formed on the basis of clan, caste, mother tongue, ethnicity, gender, religion, etc., are also active in achieving their respective objectives and goals. Among such groups, *Tajpuriys Society Welfare Council, Rajbanshi Bhasa Prachar Samiti and Gangai Samaj Sewa Samiti* and *Nepali Santhal Language and Development Committee* seem to be successfully intensifying cooperation at the sub-community level, to assert the legitimacy of sub-community-level knowledge and culture and to resist and struggle against the hegemony of the larger community.

These organizations are formed with specific organizational structure having their own written constitution. They represent non-governmental local level organisations. While communities are generally segmented along caste/ethnic and class lines - and, in this sense, are divided into several sub-communities. The communities on the one hand, anchor and generate high levels of belongingness and on the other hand provide linguistic, religious and ethnic security as well. They are highly organised social entities, which provide protection to members and promote their interests against outsiders. In addition, they also engage in a variety of social and cultural activities to promote organisational, economic and other local interests

7.5.2 Local Organizational Framework

People have historically created, maintained and recreated/transformed multiple, diverse and multi-layered social organisations and cultural values to organise and regulate social relationships both among the constituent individuals and institutions themselves which are providing a strong framework for cultural reproduction. Such groupings or associations are based on the traditional forms of co-operation and the value systems of the local people. While both the values systems and forms of co-operation are not stable and changing with time and other social, political and economic circumstances, they are still playing an important role in shaping the daily life of the people. The value system is the understanding

how values are created and recreated, and is the outcome of people's experience of life and their evaluation of immediate life circumstances. If we grasped the pattern of value system and goals of social networks and scenes that appear in daily life of the people, we may understand the basic forms of societies and cultures and their social reproduction in time.

The social institutions among the people of Gouriganj have a complex of norms and behaviour that have persisted overtime by serving collectively valued purposes. They have been functioning under the set of locally institutionalised customs, practices and rules for the promotion of socio-cultural, physiological, political, economic, judicial and religious interest leading toward self-reliance and an improved life situation for its members.

Let us take a concrete example from Gouriganj. There are a numbers of organisational frames for *maharaj pooja*, *mellas* (large gathering for exhibition and market) arrangement and other social and cultural purposes. These groups are based on either *jat* or kinship or may include all the inhabitants irrespective to *jat*/kinship of a particular geographical location to ensure continuity and security of community's social, economic and cultural interests. In most of the cases, these groups are concerned to ensure continued observances of social and religious customs and ceremonies of the community. However, in some cases they have also been working as asset creation groups and involve themselves in community development activities by mobilising socio-cultural and natural resources through various indigenous means with little or no input from outside agencies. They usually focus on common needs such as irrigation water system, community *poojas* and related activities with an established pattern for participation and an organisational structure to support and continue the creation and maintenance of local community assets and cultural heritage.

In addition, there are informal labour groups, which are basically formed to solve labour problem but also function in other cultural and social activities among particular community in a village. Labour groups have been known variously like *hawlis, parma*, *sar-sahayog* among the people of Gouriganj. They are informal but quite highly organised groups and offer a self-reliant basis for group action in a new economic and social venture. Framers of some villages pool together their resources including tools and implements and undertake cultivation with mutual help. A farmer secures the help of other farmers for sowing and transplantation and in return renders similar help to other farmers. Thus, labour shortage during peak periods of farm operations is duly met through such exchange system.

Remoteness, and geographical isolation might have encouraged people to develop mechanism to take care of their common needs in the past but perceived needs towards the preservation of language, culture and common assets and regulation of cultural heritage have played a

catalytic role in their emergence. Majorities of them are formed to uphold the religious practices and to preserve cultural traditions.

People of Gouriganj have been trying to teach and train or socialising their cultural tradition to new generation through this organisational set up. Obviously, these frameworks are promoting a cultural model of 'experience-induced tradition' by which new generation are learning meaning, values, ideas and cultural skills of their tradition. In strict sense, these organisational frames are nothing more than an institutional arrangement to provide cultural orientation to the new generation in different social and cultural context. At this age of globalisation, however, the new generation people acquired different orientation and accumulate different cultural experiences other than of their 'own' due to effective mass media and communication technology. People of new generation of Gouriganj are also accumulating new cultural values through various means of mass communication, especially from Indian Television Channels, films, as they can't receive Napali national TV broadcast. This media hegemony and degrading their resource base are becoming the greatest threats to their reproduction of cultural tradition.

Despite the constitutional guarantee of the rights of every community 'to conserve and promote its language, script and culture, many cultural traditions of Gouriganj are, nonetheless, loosing their grounds. People are loosing resource base specially land and access to agriculture- the main basis of 'good vision of life' and 'generous hospitality' which has really threatened the survival of many colourful cultural traits of people in the area. People are demanding effective government measures for uplifting their rich cultural heritage.

Note:

[1] Cited in Stiller (1973) in '*Nepal, the Discovery of the Malla'*, trans. Lovett Edwards (London, 1960), pp75-76.

[2] The caste or Varna system based on five primary social classifications: the Bahmin (priest), the Kshatriya (warrior or administrator), the Vaisya (merchant), the Sudra (labourer), and the untouchable (or polluted).

[3] In strict sense it denotes hill Brahmin, Thakuri and Chhetri castes and their associated low-status artesian caste only.

[4] Number of Student Enrollment in Primary Schools in 1999 at Gourigang VDC by Caste and Ethnicity

Bra/Chhe	Newar	Tamang	Rai	Kami	Damai	Sarki	Satar	Musar	Tajpuriya	Rajbanshi	others	total
653	32	35	50	25	29	10	191	78	352	588	689	2084

Source: Primary Education Project (1999), Gouriganj

[5] In fact, in Nepalese context the State (Hindu Rana regime (1846-1951) designated the social units it recognised as *jat*, essentially 'caste', though the term could apply equally well to units that outside observers would view as tribes or ethnic groups(Gellner,1997:13)

Chapter: Eight
Everyday Life: How does it Shape the Society and Culture?

Gouriganj has provided a fertile ground to flourish and coexist various cultural traditions. In order to depict the structural and dynamic relations of the cultural traditions, we must therefore depict social life as it actually unfolds in Gouriganj. In other wards, we should surface the whole social and cultural context within which the multiple traditions coexist to understand the relationships between different traditions. My argument in this context is that a close observation of the praxis of social organization in Gouriganj will reveal both the extent of the morphological integration between cultural traditions and the processes by which they are interconnected.

With the intention to bring out the features of social organization in Gouriganj, the focus of this Chapter will be in finding out how the major identities of persons are interconnected and may influence each other's expression in the life and behaviour, and how persons with different identities interact. For this purpose, I will discuss the ground rules and the overt forms, by which persons confront themselves and make decisions concerning themselves; that is - how they meet, interact, and form relations. In such description, I want to maintain a simultaneous attention to what individuals are doing and how the separate cultural traditions are brought in to play. Accordingly, I shall discuss fractions, networks and groupings of everyday interaction; and the daily activities of the people of the study area in subsequent sections of this chapter respectively. In the following section, I want to present some ground rules governing social interaction in general and social conduct of individual person in Gouriganj. I believe this discussion is helpful to reveal some aspects of perceived social reality of people of the study area.

8.1   Behavioural Pattern and Presentation of Self in Daily Life

My first approximation with Gouriganj as a student of anthropology has given me an ample opportunity to observe and understand the various aspects of social life which I had never thought of and taken into account before, though I had visited the place several times in different capacity during past two decades[1]. The fully paradoxical everyday life is the striking feature of social interaction in Gouriganj. The hierarchic and contradictory basic value stances of people show corresponding features of mutual scepticism, domination, and discrimination; and intolerance of variation, of change, of the state of world, of the behaviour of others.

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[1] Besides this fieldwork (July- December, 1999), my first long contact with Gouriganj was during 1980-1982 as a student of local high school named Gouriganj High School. After graduated from high school, I have occasionally visited this place as members of neighbouring local community for several purposes.

8.1.1   Incoherent Behaviour and Paradoxes in Public Life

There is much paradox in the patterns of behaviour in day to day life. At the beginning of interaction they exercise considerable reserve in their initial dealings with outsiders. The first impression that one gets regarding their attitude is one of the extreme constriction, suspiciousness, and guarded behavior. When I was able to break this initial stage, they reveal themselves in a totally different light- as emotional, communicative, and at times even boisterous. People express their opinions freely and in all public gatherings- big or small- which is rather noisy. But unobtrusiveness is not regarded as a virtue, and the people freely make comments and counter comments on all the subjects with which they may or may not have any concern. There is a great tradition of argument, which can easily drift into becoming a noisy quarrel of altercation.

Tempers raise easily among the people, and abuse may be showered volubly by both sides; but differences are patched up as easily, and it is common to see two people walking together as great friends although on previous day they might have quarrelled bitterly on some worthless issue. In their inter-personal relations the people are critical and very sensitive. This leads to a perpetual attitude of fault finding. As the people do not easily let go an opportunity of commenting on and criticising their neighbours, their relations are never very smooth and certain. However, on occasions which demand a display of good - neighbourliness and generosity people come forward very readily to help those who need it. It is common to suspect other's motives; and not unusual to be always on the alert to read hidden meanings into the seemingly innocent utterance of others. They are always on the defensive; but their inter-personal relations are not characterised by detachment. In their thoughts, likes and dislikes they are quite open, and all persons having even casual contacts have a fair acquaintance with one another's ideas and attitudes. There is no coherence between saying and doing of the people. People say and do one thing in private and do the another in public.

Display and ostentation are severely criticised in the community. Individuals inviting social censure for this fault are frequently nicknamed and mimicked. Sexuality, in all in different aspects, provides another popular form of gossip. Although bragging about unusual potency and sexual adventures is very common, in general the community watches and comments upon all abnormalities, particularly excessive indulgence, and lack of adequate sex vigour.

The behaviours of person who have just come into wealth or a position of authority is subject to a particularly critical scrutiny. People attaining conspicuous success are invariably

the subject of malicious criticism, their actions and speech are closely watched and eagerly sought and indirect references to their humble origin are frequently made. For instance, people always refer to the pitiable past life of some merchants who are now in economic prosperity. Indirect reference of dirty past backgrounds of newly elected VDC chairman of Khajurgachhi is quite popular in daily public discourses. He is often censured as an immoral person referring his flagitious activities of past life.

But people still give much emphasis on *jasari bhaya pani paisa kamaune,* making money by hooks or crooks. Government service in custom offices; tax offices and other similar offices where the *jagire* (employee) can get *ghus* (bribery money) are regarded as prestigious job. The *jagires* in such offices, irrespective of their educational background and official ranking, enjoy a great deal of social reputation and public lure. Swaggering about wealth, money and opulent life style of a *kharidar* (a lower post in government service) working in custom office and the public praise of his courage of making money give some insight about the dominant value orientation of the people, in this connection. Who cares for this poor university teacher who never saw the face of *ghus* in his life and never thought of making easy money? There is no any charm remained for university teachers, and other similar jobholders who are living on their dignity and honesty.

Anger is freely expressed. Loud shouting, use of foul language, and occasional physical violence are the principle channels for the expression of aggressiveness. Exercising little control over their emotions, people get excited very quickly; anger and friendship are both aroused in them with equal ease. Sentiments of love and friendship too are publicly expressed; the only exception in this case being the suppression of all sentiments of suggesting sexual intimacy.

Concept of *mardpan*(manliness) and *izzat Jogaune*(defending the honour) play a significant part in governing interpersonal relations within the community. It is not mainly to beat anyone who is too young, too aged, weak and women. On the contrary, a fight between equals in terms of *jat, jati*, age and gender is always considered fairs. The notion of personal and family prestige differs in different *jat* and *jati*, as well as at different income level and any challenge to personal prestige or family honour is bound to arouse a violent reaction. But people still indulge in malicious gossip and backbiting.

Truth and straightforwardness are acclaimed as social ideals; but intelligent and ingenious ways of deception too receive unmistakable appreciation. A story of hill Brahmin who seized 57 *bighas* of land from a Satar family and registered in his own name while he (Brahmin) was in Chandragadi (district headquarter) Jail is an example of ingenious ways of

deception narrated by local people with appreciation. Nevertheless, cowardice and treachery are condemned.

Mutual scepticism characterises the general features of inter-*jat*, inter-*jati* and to some extant interpersonal relations. Mutual suspicion as 'back stage phenomena' *(*Goffman, 1959*)* is usually expressed in-group level. Hindu suspects Muslims; the *pahade* or Hillman suspects the *madhesiya*, or plainsman in their loyalty. The original inhabitants or *aadhibasi* suspect the Hillman and plain caste Hindus; and lower *jats* and *jatis* suspect the upper *jats* and *jatis* in their intention. In interpersonal level, however, two families of same *jats* and *jatis* on the road of prosperity are likely to be jealous of each other, but adversity almost never fail to bring them nearer and closer.

The village ethic lays great emphasis on *ramro kam garnu* (acting rightly), that is on the observance of traditional norms; because it is the only way to achieve happiness and prosperity in this life and more than that to ensure the destiny of the soul after death. The problems of future play a very significant part in the ordering of life. Accordingly, various caste principles and other discriminative value standard guide them so deeply that no one can convince them to deny such things. However, on the contrary, there are some moral norms to act rightly saying that 'we shall have to account for our *kam* (action), before God. We can deceive our family, our village, our *jats* and *jatis* and even the established authority, but we can never deceive God'.

8.1.2   Local Hinduism and Social Hierarchy

The above discussion makes clear that people in Gouriganj behave and interact with each other quite differently and it is very difficult to find out the fundamental rules governing the standard of behaviour. At first glance it might seem that there is no any prominent normative principle governing the behaviour of the people. Nevertheless, after having cautious observation of social intercourse in Gouriganj we can depict a code of conduct that people exercise in the company of others, both individually and collectively. The main features of this code of conduct are best revealed in the everyday acts through which the body of knowledge is expressed.

The Hindu value system based on *jat* and *jati* organization, even today provides such codes of conduct that controls and sanctions the day to day modes of behaviour. And deviations from these are not usually tolerated. Though the primary unit of village society is family, nuclear, or joint, *jat* and *jati* division determines and decides most of the social relations. However, Hinduism as it is practised in the village is different from the Hinduism of the

classical philosophical systems of India, for it possesses neither the metaphysical heights nor the abstract content of the latter. The argument I am going to pursue is that this ideology of local Hinduism, as it may be called, provides directives for behaviour which profoundly affect the course of interaction and the kind of encounters and groups that emerge.

The social organisation of Gouriganj can be seen as a complex cultural framework built round the traditional Hindu social system represented by the caste organization. The Hindu social system, founded on the division of society into different *jatis,*and *jats* presents a social framework of great complexity. The relative positions of different *jatis,* and *jats* ascribing order of precedence and social superiority or inferiority within this framework are still recognised in many contexts. Within each group there are several sub-groups (sub-caste, *thars*), that can further be arranged in hierarchical orders within themselves. Interrelations, between both major groups and their subgroups, are largely governed by the hierarchic world view of Hinduism and all major form of contact, viz. touch, interding and sexual intercourse, come under the purview of this world view.

8.1.2.1   Manifestation of Hierarchy

In caste-cultural configuration, entry into a social status is a function of heredity: individual achievement, personal quality, or wealth has, according to traditional prescription has no role in determining social status. Lets look the case of Kadama Dom. After observing the discriminative behaviour of Halwai Chai Dhukane towards Kadama Dom and his wife (see case 8.1) I started to observe other features of social life. I visited his home and talked with him and his wife. At the beginning they were not so open but after some time, I succeed to win their hearts. After discussion with them and with other local people I came to know that Kadama Dom was one of the richest men among the average people of Gouriganj.

Plate 8.1 Kadma Dom and his family with Prof. Gunnar Haaland, October, 1999

He owned 5 kattha of *vitta* (homeland) in Gouriganj Bazaar area worth of about five hundred thousands rupees and more nowadays. Though the high caste people and local elite were trying to displace the Dom Tol where Kadama and few other Doms are residing for many years, he brought that land paying more than the average land price of the time. Before, they were living on

that land under the contractual basis. In addition, he owned 2.5 Bigha of paddy land a few kilometres far from the Bazaar. In addition, to his physical property, Kadama also disclosed me that he has deposited cash of more than 50,000 Rupees in a bank.

But when I inquired him that how he was able to earn so much of money and property. He told me that he and his wife work in local VDC offices and high school as sweeper and toilet cleaner. In addition, he also works as sweeper of the Bazaar area where he collected fee RS 0.50 to 1.00 per shop during bazaar day. He also claimed fee for disposing carcass of villagers and town people and daily cleaning of road and corners in front of stores and shops of the bazaar areas.

Though he owns land and secures permanent government job, both the symbols of high status among many people of Nepal, I did not observe any change in his social ranking and position. For many people Kadama is Dom and just a 'Dom', a lower caste and untouchable *jat*. When he was poor, he never mined such discrimination. And he was happy and satisfied with what he had. Nowadays, people speak about equality, freedom, human rights but it has no sense and meaning for Kadama. He is accumulating the same experiences of life at this age of modernisation that his father or forefathers had experienced. Such aspect of social life has many implications in developmental discourses in Nepal. Until and unless the symbolic networks of such value system is destroyed completely, there is no meaning of any kind of development

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Box 8.1 Untouchability among the Untouchables

Pitiable as is their condition, the *nichh jats (lower caste)* can also be arrogant. Perhaps it is arrogance born out of humiliation, for if others look them down upon, they have a malicious pleasure in regarding some others as inferior to them. They also have a strong feeling of *uchha(upper)* and *nichh (lower)* and concept of hierarchy among them.

The feeling of *chhuwachut (*untouchability) and concept of hierarchy is equally distributed among the lower caste people of hill origin and their plain counter part. In hill, Kamai and Sarki, for example, consider untouchable all the other low caste people including Damai. There is no equal treatment even among Kami and Sarki. Similarly Damai considers Kumal, Gaine and Badi as untouchable and Gaine thinks superior than Kumal and Badi.

In similar fashion, the Chhamars and Dusadhs consider themselves as superior to the rest of lower caste people in Terai and never accept water and food from them. Khatwe and Musahar on the other hand put themselves in higher position than Dom and Halkhor and do not interdine each other.

Field observation in Gouriganj (1999)

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intervention and other efforts in the name of development of such people. Rather such intervention makes people more frustrated. For instance, though Kadama believes on Hinduism, he is not allowed to inter the local Devi Temple. However, he has strong faith on Hinduism and offers annual Pooja to Devi temple.

He is largely guided by Hindu value system of preference son rather that daughter and seemed to be worried about his next life without having son. He has adopted a *gharjya* (son-in law) for looking after the business, fields, and his old age giving him 25% of his total property after his death. He previously thought that if someone from poor family adopted as ghargiya, he would be grateful and provide service honestly. Accordingly he selected a poor boy of his *jat* from India to get married with her daughter and kept him in his house. But he found that his daughter in law is not honest and not looking after his business and fields properly then he decided to kick him out his house. He greatly regrets without having son to look after him and his property and his death.

In addition, the hierarchical organization of castes is so influential and pervasive that it has incorporated non-Hindu (such as Muslims, Buddhists) and other social groups as another *jats* and *jatis* and people treat accordingly in the village. As a result, while maintaining their socio-religious identity, several of these non-Hindu groups have acquired some *jat* and *jati* characteristics. Thus, the already existed rather loose and somewhat open hierarchical order of the various communities was given a rigid and hereditary based by Hindu faith. Gradually, over the time this Hindu influence helped the hierarchy become increasingly rigid and permanent even among the other groups, who were comparatively egalitarian until then.

Every jats and *jatis* has their own code of conduct and *jati dharma*. *Dharma* here means not 'religion' as translated by western anthropologists and others, but it is the way of life or that, which is right. Acceptance of *jat* and *jati* tradition, and general rules of piety, observance of fasts, and feasts, rigidity following the norms governing the rite de passage and undertaking pilgrimages to places of worship or for bathing in holy rivers, can generally be said to constitute the *dharma* of the people. It is through *dharma* one can look forward to shaping one's destiny. The concept of *pap*(sin) and *punya*(merit), and *pabitrata* (ritual defilement) are fundamental to the wider concept of *dhrama*. Any members of the community irrespective of his *jat* and *jati* must not do certain things because they are sinful. Murder, extreme cruelty and violence, and incest can be placed under this category. There are certain other things, which must not be done by certain *jast* and *jatsi*, or by certain individual in particular condition. Sexual relations, or inter-dining with a person of lower *jat* and *jati* will lead to impurity or *asuddha* or *bitulo*. Women in means or a family immediately after childbirth and death remains in a state of ritual impurity for a specific period. After certain bodily excretions as those of faeces, urine, or semen, a prescribed bath or wash is necessary to remove the *asudhata,* or impurity caused by the act.

The mode of behavior in Gouriganj is more or less guided by the principle of hierarchy of *jats* and *jatis*. The essence of hierarchy is the absence of equality among the units, which form the whole (Sirinivas, 1955: 19), in this sense, the various *jats* and *jatis* in Gouriganj do form a hierarchy. The hierarchy is symbolically expressed during interaction by the way of interdining, acceptance of water and food, seating arrangement and manner of greetings. Inter-personal and inter group relations in several spheres of village affairs are governed by an established usage social ethics. In most of the cases, people interact with other in terms of 'social position' in addition to ritual position he or she holds. The social position is usually determined by the relative position in *jat* and *jati* folds, but there are other attributes too. Economic status, educational status, political and other public post are the other factors that govern the social interaction. Accordingly, there is, at least nowadays, a certain discrepancy between the hierarchies as it is conceptualised by the people and as it exists in behaviour. Discrepancy is due to the fact that, in conceptualising hierarchy, ritual considerations are dominant, while in day to day relationships between *jat* and *jatis* factors like economic and political power play an important role. For instance, a local Chammar is always treated as inferior by a high caste people, but when the same high caste people meets an untouchable official in   *mal adda*, land office, he shows respect, although covetously.

8.1.3   Presentation of Self in Society

Presentation of self in caste society plays important role in determining behaviour in every day social interaction. The ideology of hierarchy always demands proper way of presenting self in a 'given definition of situation' (Goffman, 1959). There are many ways of presenting self in society. In secular life, materials well being are the major symbols of presenting selves. Wealth, house types, vehicles, clothing, and women's ornaments are the ways of expressing self among rich people. Of these, wealth seems the most prominent. Wealth is usually invested in building of houses and buying vehicles. A person with good house and vehicle irrespective of his caste position may deserve good respect in the village. Wealth may be discreetly sensed in the clothing of men and women. Immaculate whiteness of clothes has been noted as an important signifier of rank among men. Many pairs of clean clothes in different style, and golden ornaments are the expression of wealth for women.

In ritual life, people express their selves through the established code of conduct of *jats* and *jatis*. The feeling of *uchha* and *nichha*; the concept of *sudha* and *asudha*, *pap* and *punya* play an important role in expressing selves. Nevertheless, cleanness, way of expression, sitting arrangement and through food sharing, people project their self in ritual state. Many life cycle ceremonies, ritual feasts, and festivals are the occasions where people project their

self in terms of both ritual as well as secular life. For example, marriages not only act as signifier of wealth but also give sense of *jat* and *jati* hierarchy. In one hand, only equivalent *jat* and *jati* could establish marriage relation. On the other, marriage is the most appropriate forum to show social status and ranking either getting much *tilak* or *daijo* in the marriage of son or giving much *tilak* or *daijo* in the marriage of daughter.

However, high caste people always expect respect from lower caste people. They always dominate the lower caste in public discourses. High caste people use the term '*tanh*', a 'rough' code while addressing low caste and expect respectful and 'polite' code like *tapain* or *hajur* from them. Similar situation of discourses has been noticed in between dominant Hillman and their plainsmen counterpart. Most of hill people express their selves through the hegemonic discourses of hill culture in every spheres of life

It will be clear their attitude from the following narration of high caste people towards lower caste "*the* lower caste people will be rude if you are gentle with them, and will be gentile if you are rude to them. For them *lath ko manche lai bath le hudaina*. Kick him first and ask him to do a thing, a lower caste people will never refuse. Ask him to do something in soft words and he will have a thousand excuses ready''.

8.2   Hierarchic Values and Shaping of the Society

The hierarchic value system pervades all parts of social life, specifically among caste groups, where some *jat* and *jati* people feel themselves either superior or inferior to other *jat* and *jati* people and some feel themselves superior to the majority of the population. They treat inferior people as if they are not human beings. The discrimination towards low caste people is the must inhuman behaviour. Though there has been many efforts to abolish the *chuwachut* (touchability-untouchability) based on caste hierarchy in the country, it is still deeply rooted in the society. Many people even today becoming victimised by this discriminative and inhuman concept of *chuwachut*(see Box 8.2)

The ideology of hierarchy sees *sara sansar* (the whole world), in segmented order. Work, place, time, month, days, castes, foods all are perceived in hierarchic order. Each item in this world either be *sudha* (pure), *subha* (auspicious), *ramro* (good) or *asudha* (impure), *asubha*

> *Box 8.2 Punishment Because of Touching Milk Fortuitously*
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> Biratnagar, March 22 - Kumar Rasaili a resident of Sanischare VDC-1, Morang has been punished because of his *jat* background. He was a Kami by *jat* and belonged to the so-called untouchables While he was buying milk for his sick mother in a teashop he came to touch the milk-pot accidentally. Then he was abused and assaulted by the teashop owner, and local. They believed that after touching by an untouchable, the milk become *asuddha* (impure) and worthless to use and forced him to pay Rs 65 as the cost of five litres of milk.
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> Source: The *Kantipur*, March 23, 2000

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(inauspicious) and *naramro*(bad) according to this world view. As a result the high *jats* and *jatis* people denied to work that they feel inferior jobs and some time despised physical labour too, because it is not considered as appropriate 'things' to be done by high caste people. For instance, most of the Hindu students coming from India, Nepal, and Sirilanka prefer to work on news paper distribution rather than washing and cleaning job in Bergen. Though they are educated, the hierarchic value system does not permit them to work on such low profile jobs of cleanings and washing. On the other hand, Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan prefer to work washing, and cleaning rather than the difficult job of distributing newspapers. The simple reason, behind it is that they do not possess such hierarchic value system. The work 'washing dishes and cleaning offices and houses' involve handling dirt. This makes the work unclean and defiles the upper *jats* and *jatis* who work on such things. Accordingly, they prefer to work rather hard but 'clean' job with small amount money. Their preference of newspaper distribution is the result of hierarchic value system

Within the belief system of hierarchy the people in the highest-ranking positions consider doling out favours to one's own sycophants or hangers on as normal and proper behaviour. While despising those below them, the hierarchic mentality produces sycophancy and dependence on those above. It is usually expressed when people receive treatment from anyone and become comfortable, they begin to identify that individual or family as a father figure calling *mai bap.* The institution of *chakari*, or institutionalised sycophancy, in the words of Bista (1991) 'is one important manifestation of this hierarchical tendency'. *'Chakari* is vertical relationship, particular manifestation of personalised, dyadic ties almost similar to patron-client relations where patron has always an upper hands' (Ibid.).

Complementing *chakari* and flowing from it, but lying on a horizontal rather than vertical social axis, is the other main institution, *afno manchhe*. The concept of *afno manchhe* as an institution flourished more prominently and apparent in present day political discourses specifically in party politics. Nonetheless this concept is equally influential in intra party politics. There is a strong distinction made between 'us', who are trustworthy, loyal, to be helped, and 'them' to whom one has no responsibilities and who deceived and are to be deceived. Bista (1991) defined the term *'afno manchhe'* as a concept to designate one's inner circle of associates- it means 'one's own people' and refers to those who can be approached when need arises'. The concept has wider implication and is deeply rooted in every aspect of social, economic, and political life. When I asked my assistant why didn't he do any *jagir*, he simply replied that he didn't have *affno manchhe* in upper post. For him *affno manchhe* refers to either his *jati's* people working at high level post or supporters of the political party to which he is affiliated.

The mental construct among the people of the study area, what I found is very clearly structured in several types of hierarchical divisions. The distinction between the in-group of ''us'' and the rest of the outsiders as ''them'' manifest in every walk of social cultural and economic life. Every thing inside the circle of us is predictable and manipulable and outside the circle is unpredictable. When I was in field, it was reported that VDC chairman of neighbouring village, a *kumain* Brahmin from Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist, and Leninist (CPN-UML) had an illegal sexual relationship with a Satar woman in his own village. Once he was caught red hand by her husband and demanded to public hearing. But it was immediately negotiated giving some money to poor Satar family with the help of *afno manchhe* circle of CPN-UML of the village. All the party supporters then started to dilute the case saying the event just as a rumour of a drunken Satar. This case itself explains the concept *of affno manchhe* is becoming prominent in daily village life under the patronage of political party. Now it has stronger base of political parties than few decades ago when only some influential elite provided patronships.

The another aspect of local Hinduism by which people are more or less influenced is the belief of *lekheko kura*, or *bhagya,* (fate or luck) that one has no personal control over one's life circumstances, which are determined through divine or external agency. This idea is partly arises from the Hindu notion of *karma*, that one's fate is written on one's forehead at birth and there is nothing that can be done to alter it. Under such unfounded belief, responsibility is continually displaced to the forces acting outside, typically to the supernatural.

Both Hindus and Muslims and to some extent Christians have a degree of *bhagyabad,* (fatalism) and demonstrate a spirit of resignation towards predestined facts ordained for them by the supernatural forces of the world beyond. People can often be heard to remark. 'If it is written in our fate, we must submit to it. Human effort cannot alter the will of god. What is predestined must have its course'. But it does not mean that some one who has fate will get every thing without any efforts. People usually say that *bhagyama chha bhandaima dokama dudha rahadaina*, that is, though you may be lucky enough to have good fate, you can not milk in a basket with holes. In most of the cases, fate orientated belief appears only when the people have tried their best to solve the problem and have left no stone unturned only to find looming but still find themselves failure. In this context of encountering failure, the notion of fatalism, keep people intact in normal life preventing them from over frustration and psychological stress. In such situation, the fatalistic belief, in which responsibility is continually, displaced to the outside forces, typically to the supernatural, give some sense of social remedy of societal disintegration.

Coupled with fate is the Hindu doctrine of *karma* or ritual action. As this concept takes for granted the phenomena of transmigration of soul and its re-birth, our actions in this life determine the character of our present life, and our action in this life will determine the character of future life. I found most of the village people of old generation including some new generation clearly reconciling and synthesising these two views into a practical precept: the course of our present life is largely predestined on the basis of our acts in the past life, but by 'acting rightly' or by doing good work (*ramro kam*) in this life we can materially influence the course of our life after death (see Box 8.3)

Every society has some sort of hierarchies, but in most cases they are not rigidly stratified as in the caste system. Among the Hindus, the Vedic theory of the divine origin of the caste system makes it impossible to change one's caste status. It is impossible to raise it into higher level in one's own lifetime. This necessitated creating a belief system in life after. Puranic texts are replete with various stories of how the individuals succeeded in achieving their goals after death through religious rituals and by giving generous gifts to be rewarded in the life after. This is why the poor Musahar (Box 8.3) arranged such a big party in his father's death to secure a place in heaven.

> **Box 8.3 Son's Lavish Party for Father's Good 'next' Life**
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> *By a Post Reporter*
> RAJBIRAJ, Saptari, March 22 - A small incident in this eastern Terai district shows how good some Nepalis are at partying. They manage to celebrate no matter how poor they are. A poor family belonging to Dom community, an etheric group, managed to hold a party here after collecting Rs 80,000 in donations and loans.
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> Asharvi Rasik, from Mansapur village of Bangama Katti VDC-8, held the party to mark the death anniversary of his father. He took RS. 50,000 as loan from various people, while he collected the rest as donations. "My social status [*izzat*] would have been doomed if I had not done so," said Rashik.
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> "Now, even my father will be granted a good life (in his next birth), I am happy to have held the largest party that no one of my fellow community members have held in the district". Around 500 people attended the party that took place last Monday.
>
> Source: The Kathmandu Post, March 23, 2000

Inequality is the result of social policies rather than human nature and intelligence. Intelligence can be enhanced through an enabling environment. The only path to improving the status of disadvantaged groups in Nepal is adoption of affirmative action based on egalitarian principles. What might be the sources of egalitarian principles and how can we adopt such principle? It might be an issue of debate. The only way as I think is to destroy the symbolic chain under which Nepali society is hanged on. For this a great deal of devotion is needed. The following case gives some insights how some people are surviving in such symbolic world.

Case 8.1 Who Says the Caste System is Abolished in Nepal?

I was sitting in a *chai dukan* (teashop) and having a cup of tea and breakfast, a middle-aged couple with fairly well dressed came there and ordered for tea and breakfast standing outside corner of the teashop. I requested them to sit on a bench where I was sitting. For a while they did not respond to me. When I again requested them to take sit, only then the man sat on the bench though much reluctance. And in the mean time, I saw the woman collecting two teacups from the roof of teashop and went to outside washing them. When she arrived with two cleaned cups in her hands, the owner of the shop made two cups of tea and poured it into her cups with very care of touching the cups each other. She came near to our bench (but didn't sit there) and gave a cup to her husband and started to drink together with very uneasy way. When the shop owner made ready *chana-bhujiya*(breakfast), he did not give the stuff in his own plate but poured it on a news paper and offered them. The couple ate the *chana-bhujiya* standing in a corner of the shop. When they finished their breakfast, the woman threw out the paper on the road and washed the tea cups her-self and put them on the place from where they were taken. After that they left shop requesting the owner to keep account of their expenses (*khata ma lekhnu*). Then they went to the next *Pan*(bettle) *Dhukan* and ordered two *jarda(*tobacco*) pan*. The striking point is that the owner of Pan Dhukan also gave

> **Box 8.4 Chamars Rue Social Boycott in Lahan**
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> *Kathmandu Post Reporter*
> LAHAN, March 26 - Chamars, a lower *jats*, have been socially boycotted in Lahan Municipality since Friday. Their only fault was that they wanted to switch to better occupation. Chamars of Saptari and Siraha, some six months ago, had decided to quit their traditional occupation -disposing carcass.
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> "Chamar community is under virtual economic embargo, " says Darshanram, a coolie at the local buspark. "No one sells anything to us (chamars) following a public announcement on Friday that no one shall sell anything to chamars and that RS 501 would be fined from anyone who defies the order."
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> A joint meeting of 11 communities of Lahan-1 on Thursday decided to form a Chamar Boycott Committee to bar under the co-ordination of Purna Dhoj Khadka to prohibit Chamars from any other occupation till they retain their traditional occupation.
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> Source: The Kathmandu Post, March 27 2000

them Pan with care of touching them. When they went back, I asked to teashop owner why he didn't give him *chana-bhujiya* in his plate and why did they use their own teacups in *his chai dukan*. He told me that they were Doms who are '*tallo jat ko manche* and *achhut*'(who belong to lower caste and untouchable untouchable). ''Nobody will wash their dishes and his dishes will be spoiled if they (Doms) touch and use them'' he (owner) replied. Since he is a Halwai, an upper *jat* people, he will be defiled if he washed the dishes used by lower *jat*. The lower *jat* people like Dom are, all the time forced to lead a life of humiliation and degradation. Upper *jat* people do not accept food and water from them and offer them food and water not in their *bartans* (plate, cups etc) but in papers or leaf plate. Some time these people drink water in their cupped palm. This encounter reveals many aspects of social reality of Gouriganj. It provides us to understand how daily life is going on there and how it has been shaping the society in Gouriganj.

8.3   Factionalism and the Daily Life in the Village

Three main distinct social or cultural divides are apparent within Gouriganj. The first is between the *pahade*, or hill people, and the *madhesiya*, or plains people. The second is faction between the Hindus upper *jats* and the *adivassi* or original inhabitant such as the Rajbanshis, Tajpuriyas and Gangais, and the third is the divide between *uchha jats* and *jatis* and the *nichha jats* and *jatis*. As the region even today is not getting national priority, all three main

groups that are residing within the region nurse negative feelings towards the Kathmandu government? In addition to the everyday push and tug amongst these groups, Dahal (1992) has observed that 'there is the influence of politics from across the border, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, above all, the problems in each case revolve around the politics of difference in cultural identities of people as expressed through region, language, religion, *jats* and *jatis* and the question of fare participation in national economy and politics

8.3.1   Pahade vs Madhise[2]

The influx of hill population of the past few decades in the area has contributed in the development of the dichotomy *pahade,* verse *madhese* in social, cultural, political, and economic life of the village. The domination of hill people in administrative and other similar fields of governmental discourses in the one hand, the neglect of the plains people by the government in Kathmandu on the other, encourages to divide people into such discrete division within the Terai in general and Gouriganj in particular. The hill people, for their part tend to utilise the affinity that many Terai dwellers feel for their kinfolk across the border in India.

Madhise people felt discrimination and domination both culturally and politically after the arrival of hill people in the area. Their *jat* rankings, affinity to government officials and comparatively better literacy skill enabled *pahade* people to take advantage of the administrative regulation on land and other resource acquisition in various means. In Gouriganj it was reported that the divide between *pahade* and *madhise* people became more intense when former gradually replaced to latter in the holding of land and other social positions during the last few decades. In, addition, the heavy expenses of life cycle ceremonies and social occasions of plain people forced majority of them to sell their lands and other properties to hill people or rich people of their own origin because very few of them could fulfil their social and cultural obligations with their own farm surplus and savings.

Even in local politics *pahade* has upper hand, though they are clearly in minority in terms of population. However, in last local election *madhise* were elected in the majority of posts of the VDC. Before, the VDC was always leaded by *pahade* people either through election or nomination from *mathi* (upper level authority).

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[2] The term *madhise* in Gouriganj is used in different ways. Sometime it refers to the plain people of Indian origin, in contrast to the *adhibasi* or indigenous groups such as Rajbanshi, Tajpuriya, Gangai and Satar. Other times *madhises* are used in contract to *pahade* people, to refer those who lived in the Terai before the *pahade* migrated to the area. In some local context, however, madhises and *adhibasis* are not mutually excluding categories. The Rajbnashis and Tajpuriyas, for example, no doubt are regarded as adhibasis of the area, but they also called themselves as *madhise* and also recognized as *madhise* by others in the area.

The politics of cultural difference in actual sense works during the election. Though the *madhise* people are in majority in numbers, they are divided into several groups and segments viz. Yadav, Rajbanshi, Gangai, Tajpuriya, Halwai, *adhibasi*, Hindus, Muslims, Satars and like. They further divided into different political parties. These divisions provide a playing ground for politicians to play the electoral game and use the cultural elements to articulate message of 'we' and 'them' during elections. Pahade people with the help of government machinery are in better position to utilise such opportunities in their favour during election and other political purposes. In addition, ''government machinery always remains in the favour of *pahade* people even in small local dispute among them'' said a *madhise* friend of mine in Gouriganj.

The practice of *dhito pass pratha*(see foot note 2 in Chapter 6) in taking loan has accelerated the rate of land acquisition of hill people from their plains neighbours. *Madhise* people now feel that *pahade* has snatched their traditional resources like land, forest and dominated in every field of life circumstances. There were many stories of land acquisition by hill people from their neighbours of plains origin. One is as follows:

Case 8. 2 How Madhises and Adhivasis are Becoming Sukumbasis (landless).

A *pahade* family from the eastern hill migrated to Gouriganj around latter sixties. At beginning he purchased one or two *bighas* of land from a Rajbanshi *jimidar* and settled cultivating this. His hill background with fairly good literacy status and his connection with local government offices specifically with *thanas* (police station) provided him opportunities to expand his influence among the *adhibasis* and *madhises* of Gouriganj. He then started money-lending business and invested some amount among these people with very high interest rate. Since *adhibasi* have some social and cultural occasions, which need a lot of money (Bhattarai, 1996), he easily succeeded to multiply his business within a few years.

It is reported that he had cheated many people of Gouriganj giving less amount at the time of loan negotiation and writing more amount in the *tamasuk* (contract document) so that *adhibasis* and *illiterate madhises* had to payback more money than they actually had borrowed. Most of them were illiterate and did *lapche* (finger print) without properly knowing the content of the *tamasuk*. After few years, with the high interest rate the amount became large enough to payback for debtors, then without any other choice they had to sell their land and pay back the loan.

Many *adhibasis* report that they have lost their lands in this ways. In addition, he succeeded to accumulate lands by trapping the local people into several fraud cases with the help of police and other corrupt government officials. Now, he owns several *bighas* of land and is counted as one of the richest persons in the village. When I inquired how the people of Gouriganj could led this happen and why they did not fight back, Kachalu, my assistant said ''we *adhibasis* were a *sidha- sada* (straight and honest) people and mostly believed on peace rather on confrontation. In addition, he says ''an *adhibasi* could not complain against him to local authorities or police because he had a 'good connection' in all offices''. The good connection is nothing more than what Bista(1991) has called the culture of *affno manche*.

Field note (1999), Gouriganj

This story, however, does not represent all *pahade* people and it does not mean that *pahade* people always cheat and exploit their plain neighbours. It is true that some *pahade* have benefited from the *adhibasi*'s illiteracy, naive and weakness, or we may say that it is their 'ignorance' which has led them to a state of material and socio-economic deprivation despite their affluent past. *Pahade* are not always rich and dominant, and many have become poor upon arrival in Gouriganj too. Nor all *pahade* are clever enough than their plains neighbours specifically to the caste Hindus. This popular saying among the *pahade* of Gouriganj clears the relation, which is *mare ko auta madhise le saat jana jiudo pahade lai sajilai thagna sakchha* (one dead *madhise* can easily deceive seven alive *pahades*).

In fact, ''many *adhibasi* are exploited and cheated in greater extent by the rich and clever *adhibasi* and other plain people rather than by h *pahade* people'' reports Kachalu Rajbanshi, my field assistant sharing his experiences. He further adds that ''we *adhibasis* ourselves are not less responsible for our situations. We never thought our future and never tried to current ourselves rather blindly followed and continued some customs, rituals, traditions and socio-cultural obligations of high economic and social cost''.

Responding on such and other similar situations of hill domination, some Terai leaders, particularly those representing the Hindu caste groups in the NSP, have started a *pahadiya hataao* campaign to physically remove the hill people from the plains (Dahal, 1992). Though indirectly and in obscure language, plain people of Gouriganj especially *adhibasis* and upper caste Hindus have also similar views towards *pahadiyas*. They expressed that this land (they mean Terai) is for them and *pahadiya* should not come down from the hill. ''Hills above the *Madhumalla*, a bazaar in churiya range, are the land for *pahadiya* people, why should they come here'' said an old man reacting on the domination of hill people in land acquisition. Nonetheless, they expressed such view only in back stage not in front stage or openly. Thus, the resentment of the hill-dominated administration and the culture that it inherits is an important aspect of the *pahade- madhise* dichotomy within Gouriganj.

The *pahade- madhise* dichotomy within Gouriganj also seems linked to the flow of Indian migrants crossing the border to settle in Nepal. Due to the similar and to some extant identical cultural landscape on either side of the border made it difficult to differentiate the Nepali terrain from the Indian settlers. Daily familial, cultural, and business interaction which takes place between these groups, as if the border does not exist, further complicates the matters. This situation naturally raised the question of national identity among the people of the plains. For example, *dhotis,* meaning loincloth, commonly wearing garment among the male people of plains of Nepal and India is a word frequently used to abuse the plain people by their hill neighbours. The word *dothis* is equally used in abusing the Indian

dwellers all over Nepal. The garment *dhotis* is an part of national dress of India and gives some sense in abusing Indians, but I don't see any reason to abuse Nepalese citizen calling by *dhoti*. The only possible reason of using similar abusive term for both the Nepalese and Indian is the problems of differentiation between the plain people of Nepal and their neighbours across the border in the eyes of the hill dwellers. It means, the problems of their own, separate, distinct identity of the plains people and their unwillingness to assimilate with the dominant hill culture have directly or indirectly contributed to divide people in the line of *pahade* and *madhise* groups.

Another occasion in which the divides between *pahade* and *madhise* become prominent is the local and national level election. The divides become more visible in local level election. Let us take the example of last VDC election of the Gouriganj. Though five political parties were competing in the election, NC and NSP were in the front. A Brahmin of hill caste and VDC chairman of that time and a Rajbanshi and former schoolteacher were leading NC and NSP respectively. It is reported that majorities of the voters of plain backgrounds in Gouriganj are NC supporters but the NSP bagged the chairmanship.

When I asked to my assistant Kachalu (who once was active in NSP and now affiliated with Communist groups) how was that possible? He said ''political ideology remained secondary and doesn't assure some one to win specially in the local election, if the election is between *pahade* and *madhise* candidate. *Madhise* people tends to vote *madhise* candidate and a similar trend is developing among the *pahade* people too''. He further clearfies me that ''many known Congress supporters of *madhise* community (including the headmaster and his alliance, see introductory case) not only casted vote to NSP candidate, but actively involved in his election campaigns, though indirectly''. The only cause of supporting NSP candidate despite their own party's candidate was the feeling of cultural difference between the *phade* and *madhsie* community.

This does not, however, mean that the divides between *pahade* and *madhise* will be more intense in future elections. For instance, a different trend was appeared in the last parliamentary bi-election of December 1999 in which a hill Brahmin of NC succeeded to win getting supports of the *madhise* people of Gouriganj. Nonetheless, people seem to be interested to elect *affno jaat ko manchhe* ('own people') in local election because they frequently needed his help on daily matters of administration and local disputes. The following case provides some hints about the recent trends of parliamentary election in the area.

Case 8.3 Parliamentary Elections in Jhapa Constituency-6

The constituency- 6 of Jhapa District is the largest constituency of the country with 90,000 registered voters. Out of this about 10% voters are from the Gouriganj areas which also belong to the same

constituency. CPN-UML candidates have won all the past three general elections in the post-democracy year's traditionally Communist stronghold, in this constituency. Khadga Prasad Oli, politburo member and the second most powerful leader of the main opposition CPN-UML was elected third time during the last May 1999 general election and had resigned from this seat after he also won from Jhapa-2. This was the first by-election in this constituency, which was held on December 1999.

The main issues prominently raised by the voters of Jhapa-6 are Damak-Chisapani road, Ratuwa Mauwa embankment, Kisni Khola irrigation, and resettlement of landless people. Construction of Rangeli- Jhapa *hulaki marga*, expansion of electrification programme, distribution of more telephone lines, construction of drinking water reservoir tank, distribution of lands for *sukumbasi* (landless people), and black topping of Damak-Gouriganj road were the major issues raised by the people of Gouriganj during the bi-election of December 1999. However, candidates on the campaign were more concentrating on portraying their competitors from other party candidates as incompetent than showing concern at the problems faced by the constituents. Many voters seem cautious and were not openly supporting any party, which was a new trend in this election, and it had made election forecast difficult.

NC (Nepali Congress) had contested the officiating District President of their party, Dr. Gopal Koirala as their candidate while CPN-UML's choice of candidate was the party district secretary Devendra Dahal. There were 10 candidates from different parties including independent candidates. NC managed to break the *lal killa* (red fort) or a traditional Communist stronghold of Jhapa District, as the party's candidate, Dr. Gopal Koirala, secured 28066 votes against 21963 of his closest rival, Devendra Dahal, of the CPN-UML followed by Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) 3609 votes and Nepal Sadhbhavana Party (NSP) 1976 votes respectively.

In the last general election of May 1999, however, K.P. Oli of CPN had defeated NC's Kashi Lal Tajpuriya by a wide margin of 4036 voters. 23749 and 19713 were the votes secured by the candidates of CPM-UML and NC respectively. Rastriya Prajatantra Party and Nepal Sadbhawana Party candidates were in the third and fourth positions respectively.

Field note (1999), Gouriganj

Another ways of dichotomization of *pahade* and *madhise*, especially in official discourses is the issues of citizenship granting. Many people specifically Hindu *jats* of merchant class and Satars reported to me that government officers were reluctant to grant them citizenship certificate just because of being *madhise*, though they were living in Gouriganj for many generation. ''Officials demand several kinds of documents and recommendations of local elected authority as well as police inquiry in order to prove some one's 'Nepalease origin' to have citizenship rights'', said a sufferer of *nagarikata* (citizenship) in Gouriganj. In practice, those who can show the citizenship certificate of their father or another close relative, or *dhanipurja* (land-ownership certificate) in his /her name are granted citizenship, though cautiously.

The *adhibasis* such as Rajbnashis, Tajpuriya and Gangais, on the other hands, are getting citizenship comparatively more easy way and no any *pahade* people were reported to have problems with citizenship. ''Since the caste Hindus of Gouriganj and else where in Terai are physically, culturally, and linguistically more similar to the people across the border, government officials always see them in suspicious eyes being as Indians and demand more concrete evidences of origin rather than the proof of their continue 15 years long stay'' says Devi Rajbanshi, VDC Chainman of Gouriganj and the local authority to recommend for

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granting citizenship certificate. When I asked about *adhibasi*'s position, he confidently replied that nobody can suspect them because they are already established as *bhumi putra* (son of the land) or first settlers of Jhapa and Morang district of Nepal.

The citizenship certificate, in Nepal also bears symbolic meaning in addition to its legal importance in economic, social, and political activities within the countries. It provides an emotional sense of national identity to its holders and its denial in one's own country means humiliation as one is treated as foreigner. As a bond between the individual and the government of the country, citizenship plays a significant role in the process of national integration. ''Many people residing in Gouriganj for several generation are facing problems in getting citizenship certificate easily'' says, the VDC Chairman of Gouriganj. He further points out that ''he has to face many controversies and tensions as to who is a local Nepali and who is an outsider meaning an Indian citizen while recommending a person for citizenship''. Accordingly, he also demands documents of evidences or *sarjemin* (public inquiries) to every one, who needs recommendation for citizenship, though he personally knows that most people are genuine Nepali. "Many of them, who are not in position to produce enough evidences, are still remained without Nepali citizenship in their own country. What an unfortunate situation"! says the VDC chairman.

When I inquired why the controversies and tensions are aroused in recommendation for citizenship in the area, he stated that *madhise* people living in Gouriganj, presumably all over the Terai region, are physically and culturally the same as people living across the border. Language, food habits, style of wearing clothes, and other socio-cultural patterns are also similar and in many case identical too. The problems of identifying who is Nepali and who is not have become further complicated because of the high frequency of intermarriage across the border. Thus, a person who has lived in Gouriganj for much generation may be deprived from Nepali citizenship if he is unable to produce official document of his Nepali origin. But a recently migrated Indian can be provided citizenship if he is clever enough to produce fake document or has managed to purchase land. It is reported that two Kaspatiya Baniya families are already granted citizenship, though every one knows that they were recently migrated to Gouriganj from India and are counted as successful businessmen. ''There are several stories of such 'unusual case', says Lakhan Mahato, a local farmer who has not been granted citizenship due to lack of land in his name and his father's citizenship certificate.

8.3.2 Lower *Jats* vs Upper *Jats* and *Adhibasis*

Approximately two-thirds of the total population of the study area are directly or indirectly affiliated to the Hindu caste framework. The remaining one-third is comprised of various

groups and *adhibashis* and non-Hindu religious groups. But, given the predominance of the upper-*jats* people in the political and cultural domains and, to some extent, in the economic domain as well, the various traditionally non-Hindu groups and even others religious groups tend to be forced within the caste framework and relegated to its middle and lower echelons.

As noted in the earlier chapters, the caste framework is fundamentally hierarchical and, therefore, exclusionary. While certain domains of exclusion apply to the upper-caste slots as well, the lower slots, the lowest in particular, are forced into extremely debilitating exclusions ranging from the cultural to the political to the economic (NESAC, 1998). These exclusions severely limit the life-chances of the lower-caste, particularly the lowest-caste, groups. The lowest-caste groups are shunned even physically (see Box 8.2). In terms of residential locations, they are slummed into specific corners of a village. The presence in school classrooms of children belonging to these groups creates, at the least, a rearrangement of the seating plan. Even accidental physical touch is considered by all other caste groups as defiling; hence the term "untouchable"

The lowest-caste groups suffer from a host of other deprivations, e.g., loss of personal and collective self-respect, dependence, extreme economic insecurity and exploitation of labour. Thus, economic and political deprivations and social and cultural exclusions and other discriminations towards the lower caste people are the main causes of the split between *achhut jaats* or *dalit* (lowest caste) and uchha *jaats* (upper caste) people in the study area, presumably all over the country. The split some time becomes violent and converted into social riots specifically when the lowest caste feels socially and publicly dishonoured by the upper caste. The following case explains the situation.

Case 8.4   Dalits Force to Close Teashop

KATHMANDU, March 27 (RSS) – Whether or not you allow a person from the Dalit[lower *jat*] community into your house is completely your personal discretion, but mind you, you may be in for an embarrassing situation if you start discriminating people on the basis of their caste at a public place or an eatery.

A tea-stall owner at a village near the capital who abused a Dalit man for failing to wash the glass from which he drank tea faced such a situation here Sunday and he had to close his shop and flee after a group of about 100 Dalits picketed his shop protesting his action.

It is learnt that 15-year-old Bimal Bisunke (Sarki), a resident of Tahachal, Kathmandu metropolitan city, who had gone to attend the wedding ceremony of his relative Putali Bisunke at ward no. 1 in Ban Bhanjyang VDC, Kathmandu was abused by the owner and his sons Bhim and Mohan when he refused to wash the glass he drank tea from at their tea-shop.

Bimal Bisunke, a grade nine student at local Paropakar Secondary School, Bhimsensthan, complains he was beaten up for no fault of his when he protested why he should wash the glass when he has paid for the tea.

After the unfortunate incident, Bimal filed a complaint at the Kalimati police post and went to the Bir Hospital for treatment. A day after the incident took place on March 7, the Society for the Liberation of Oppressed and Downtrodden Castes of Nepal, Kathmandu district Committee office-bearers went to the Thankot police post to lodge a complaint about the incident demanding legal action against the abusers. But they complain that even the police did not co-operate but scolded them instead.

However, egged on by the society, the police called the accused persons to present themselves at the police post within 15 days of the incident, made them sign documents that they will not engage in such caste discriminations henceforth and freed them.

In this connection, the Society for Liberation of the Oppressed and Downtrodden Castes of Nepal Sunday organised a protest corner meeting near the teashop where the incident occurred so that such incidents do not recur in the VDC and elsewhere.

The teashop owners closed their shop and fled from there on seeing the large assembly of the people from the Dalit community. Addressing the protest gathering, central general secretary of the society Dipak Jung Bishwakarma said that the society would now organise such protest meetings on a campaign basis at the place of the incidents since the so-called "higher caste people" still continued to discriminate against the people of the lower castes even though the constitution of the kingdom of Nepal-1990 prohibits caste discrimination against them

Central treasurer of Nepal Dalit Sangh and Dhuba Surkheti, a local Dalit youth called upon all the Dalits to unite to eliminate social discrimination against them. Journalist Hiralal Bishwakarma, victim of the abuse Bima Bisunke, Kathmandu district member of the Liberation society Kamal Purkoti and others flayed the incident and rued caste discrimination in our society.

When a Dalit man tried to buy a packet of biscuit from a shop owned by a person of the surname of Adhikari after the mass meeting, he was denied and nearly beaten up by the owner. The members of the Dalit community were furious at this and they tried to attack the shopkeeper. However, the police intervened and calmed them down. The situation cooled after the local intellectuals offered their apologies to the Dalits on behalf of the shopkeeper.

Nearly 45 families in bad Bhanjyang VDC belong to the Dalit community. Most of them are Surkhetis, Achhamis, Bisankus and some of the Pariyar surname.

Central treasurer of Nepal Dalit Sangh and former VDC vice-chairman of Ban Bhanjyang VDC Dhruba Surkheti say that caste discrimination does not exist in other wards of the VDC except ward no. 1. He says the people of the so-called lower castes are socially stigmatised and looked down upon by the people of the higher castes. It is learnt that there is a grocery shop at the VDC owned by a Dalit where most of the 350 Dalit families buy commodities. Otherwise, they need to Thankot to buy goods not available at the shop.

Source: Kathmndu Post, March 28, 2000

Though the caste system has been legally abolished four decades ago, for an overwhelming majority people of the study area, the caste framework continues to be an extremely salient feature of personal identity, social relationships and access to opportunities for capability formation, use and enhancement. In reality, extreme poverty and landlessness are the major problems associated with the social fraction between upper and lower caste within Gouriganj. As in other parts of the country, in Gouriganj too, poverty is commonly associated with the land holding and other forms of economic exploitation.

The landlessness and exploitation are historically associated with the low caste Hindu (Dahal: 1995:159) and more recently connected with *adivasis* and ethnic groups of eastern Terai

(Bhattarai, 1996:62-63; Buggeland, 1999:110). It means landownership is more or less correlated with the hierarchy of *jats* and *jatis*. That is to say, the higher the *jats* and *jatis* status of a family, the larger its landownership, and vice-versa. It is estimated that about 20 % of the total households within Gouriganj are landless (VDC records, 1999) and most of them are from the low *jats* of Hindu groups such as Chammars, Musahars, Doms and Koch Kahars and then some group like Satars. This finding is in similar trends with other studies like Dahal (1992) who observed that nearly 30 % households mostly from the low caste Hindu groups in a Terai village of Mahotari district were landless while compared to less than 5% landless in hill villages. The result is obvious that despite being Nepal's granary, the percentage of landless people is found to be highest in the Terai.

This and other such discriminatory and exclusive policies (e.g. distribution of citizenship, lands) towards *madhise* people of lower *jats* and *jatis*, and *adhivasis* have further complicated the divides between the high *jat*, low *jat* and *adhivasis* people within Gouriganj. As noted earlier, much *madhise* Hindus and some *adhivasis* were denied to provide citizenship certificate due to lack of the concrete evidences of their 'Nepalese origin[3]'and lake of landholding. As a consequence, they are prevented from HMG's distribution of land to landless people who naturally require citizenship, as foreigners have no right to own land in Nepal. With little exception, Government does not grant the low caste people in Gouriganj any lands. An observation made by Buggeland (1999: 110) in Jhapa district is appropriate to mention here:

> ''Visiting the (*sukumbasi aayoga*) Landless Commission in Chandragadi (district headquarters), I was therefore not surprised to learn that according to a survey made my the previous commission, no Rajbanshis, Meche or Santals have been given land, while a thousand Brahmin/Chhetris and four hundred other Paharis have received it. The Landless Commission also stated that there are about 17,000 landless people in Jhapa.''

This is not a single event that lower *jats* and *jatis* of Terai were discriminated, there are several episodes. During the so called Land Reform Program (1964) implementation which was aimed at achieving a more equitable land ownership and tenancy system, about 27,000 hectares of land was found to be in excess and distributed among 13,000 families, but no such

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[3] One important provision that the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990) has made for acquiring Nepalese citizenship is: A person who is born after the commencement of this Constitution and whose father is a citizen of Nepal at the birth of the child shall be citizen of Nepal by decent. Though there are provisions of granting citizenship by naturalisation (one should reside at least 15 years) called *angicrit* citizen, by birth called *janma* *siddha* and by decent called *bangsaj* in the low, Buggeland (1999:101) who also carried out her search in Jhapa has mentioned that, ''the Citizenship Act since 1980 allows only citizenship of *bansaj* or 'by descent' to be granted. Neither citizenship of *janam siddha*, or 'by birth' nor citizenship of naturalisation, or *angicrit* to foreigners has been granted since 1980 in Jhapa district''. In practice, one should either produce his / her father's citizenship or *lalpurja* or *dhanipurja* (land ownership certificate) in order to claim for Nepalese citizenship. Most of the low caste people in Gouriganj reported that they have neither of this to get citizenship.

land was given to people in Terai, as if they were all well off.(Parmamand, 1986: 1010). On the contrary, a large numbers of *mohis* or *jotahas* (tenents or tillers) have been dispossessed from their holding during the autocratic Panchayat system. In addition, a huge part of Terai forest was cleared but there, too, the low caste and *adhivasi* people of Terai got nothing (Shrestha, 1990: 231). Thus, the lowest *jats* and *jatis* whether belonging to hill or the Terai groups, who constitute nearly 13 per cent of the total population (CBS, 1991) are socially, economically and politically the most disadvantaged and backward groups in Nepal. And so is the case with the *adhivasis* of Terai, who once regarded as 'the sons of the lands' are now making their life by simply working to others.

The emerging trends of *jats* and *jatis* cleavages within Gouriganj indicate that on the one hand, the *adhivasis* are baffled or disappointed with government that their integration into the political economy of the country has been so slow but on the other, they do not take kindly to the state policy of encouraging their integration into the caste model. A similar situation has been grasped by Dahal (1992) and he writes ''a mild cultural backlash is taking place in which the Tharus and other ethnic group and *adhivasis* such as the Satar, Dhimal, Gangai, and Rajbanshi are coalescing into one force, setting themselves apart from both the Terai caste groups and *Pahades*''. The *adhivasis* are, in fact, quite frustrated when they found themselves displaced from their homeland by *pahades* and plains high caste Hindus and forced them to spend miserable life. The lower caste people are in more miserable state than the *adhivasis* and spending life not as human being in real sense.

By putting things in perspective, it must be noted that it will be hard to sustain a modern society, bedevilled by poverty, discrimination, and exclusion and marked by growing political consciousness amongst those on political periphery. There is no strong pan- *jats* and *jatis* and low caste organization of Terai, but the prospect is very real (as they have already started to organise[4]) if the democratic system is unable, or unwilling, to incorporate their political demands and, just as importantly if it proves unable to alleviate their absolute poverty. It means, it is time to realize that such fraction and split between depressed caste and high caste, and upper caste Hindus and *adhivasis* that live in Terai in general and the study area in particular harbour potentials for *jats* and *jatis* violence and communal riots. It might get

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[4]   The Society for Liberation of the Oppressed and Downtrodden Caste of Nepal, a low caste people's organization is expanding its activities all over the country. Though there are no any activities launched in Gouriganj yet so far, some people of low caste were quite aware about the organization. In similar way, *adhivasis* have also been organized into their own ethnic organization. For example, Rajbanshis have their organization called 'the Rajbanshi Bhasa Prachar Samili (RBPS). The Tajpuriya Society Welfare Council is the organization of Tajpuriyas and the Nepali Santal Language and Culture Development Committee is for Santal people. The Gangais have also their own organization working for upliftment of their culture and heritage. All are reported to be active in Gouriganj and making people aware about the present situation. Among them the RBPS is also associated with the Nepal federation of Nationalities, a pan Nepal Federation of ethnic and indigenous organizations of the country.

movementum and spread easily all over the country if the technology of *jats* and *jatis* politics across the border districts, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh of India has been transferred without claiming any "patent rights".

8.4   Some Visuals of Daily Life in Gouriganj.

The following pictures show some account of everyday life of the study area. These visuals reflect some aspect of social and cultural life and give insights how people are managing their different activities

Plate 8.2 A Glimpse of Local Bazaar

Plate 8.3 Celebration of Chhaith Festival

Plate 8.4 Followers of Santamat Sadsangh

Plate 8.5 A Fisherman's Family

Chapter: Nine
Imagining of the Nation: Context and
Processes of National Identity in the Making

The Tarai citizen of Nepal has been systematically purged under a grand design by every government, every political party, and every ruling elite since the Rana regime. They have neither been treated as Hindus nor as Nepalese. We have always been called Madhise[1] and treated as second-class citizen. Tarai people, whether they are Muslims or Hindus are treated as Madhise. But we are as much Nepali as anyone else is, and we deserve to be treated as full citizen of this country[2].

9.1   Problem of Identification

This was the general voice expressed during a one day national symposium on 'Madhise Community after Ten Years of Democracy' organised by Nepal Intellectual Forum. This indicates that the plains people of Nepal Tarai have their own identity problems, similar to those of people who have emerged from colonial experiences. 'Neither Nepal's history and nor her hill culture satisfy their identity needs, because they have not been associated with either' (Gaige, 1975:202). The narration further indicates that Kathmandu government lacks efficient mechanisms of welding together the various elements of national life and community- ethnic, regional, religious, cultural, and economic-into one social whole or unified body politic so that every individual can identify him/herself with the Nepali sate. State's polices of isolation of Tarai and its least efforts to bring Tarai people into national life even after 1950s have created them a problem of identification with Nepali state in psychological terms. The problems have been further aggravated with the increasing 'Indian orientation' of the plains people due to the frequent contact and dealings with people across the national frontiers.

Thus, in the lack of any shared socio-cultural values and historical experiences with the ruling hill people, the people of the plains have problems of making national identity. In other words, they lack what Eric Hobsbawn (1983 in Corlin, 1993:54) has coined the term 'invention of tradition to characterise the process by which history is selected, modified, or invented to legitimise the existence or the claims of a nation or an ethnic group'.

Many researchers have noted that people residing within a national boundary characterised by some essential, natural identity (Spencer, 1996; Verdery, 1996; Corlin, 1993) that we may call as national identity or elements of nationalism. Though individual members may differ, they

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[1] The hill people use the term for the inhabitants of the plains or *madhes*. Originally it was not a negative term but now days it has come to carry an opprobrious connotation and stigmatised identity.

2 Kathmandu Post (14 May , 2000).

share essential attributes that constitute their national identities; sameness overrides difference (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1991; Eriksen, 1993; Balakrishnan, 1996; Whelpton, 1996). Outside the boundary reside other people who do not share this essential identity and in fact those who don't share this identify inasmuch they are qualified as different by an essential identity of their own (Barth, 1969; Foster, 1991). The creation of national symbols thus necessarily involves the identification of some characteristics or criteria that function simultaneously to exclude outsiders and to primordialize insiders (Geertz, 1963; Marriott, 1963; Barnett, 1976; Eriksen 1993).

But the identification of the essential attributes of national identity agreeable and acceptable to all is again an urgent issue of national level debate and as in any multiparadigm country the question of identity must be handled delicately. Presently, there are, at least three different public discourses of Nepali *rastiyata* or *rastarbad* (nationalism). The first one or we may call it as official, defines nationalism in terms of one nation, one King, one religion (Hindu), one language (Nepali) and one dress (*daura suruwal* and *topi* for men and *chobandi cholo* and *saari* for women). The ruling Brahmin Chhetri and 'national political parties' that are under their command, according to Bhattachan (1998: 118) are the exponent of this discourse of nationalism. The second discourse is related to anti-Indianism, anti imperialism and anti-expansionism and some *bampanthis* or left groups are the main propagators. The third discourse what Bhattachan has called is ethno-nationalism derived from the life styles of different jatis of the country

State often adopts symbols and myth to promote a sense of oneness but the national symbols[3] with which the Tarai people could easily identify are missing. The rhetoric of national identity is derived from the cultures of hill regions of the country. In contrast, the Tarai is, culturally, an extension of northern India; the dominant symbols that organise the identity of most of the people there (caste, language, religious rituals, styles of dressing, eating. living) are those of the plains.

The idea of a 'uniquely Nepalese identity' drawing key symbols basically from Hinduism, monarchy and the culture of the dominant ethnic groups, the Brahmins and Chhetris of the hills, which has only gradually emerged, now pervades and structures the self - image of the people who call themselves Nepali, even as it exists in a dynamic tension with regional and ethnic identities (Pigg, 1992:197). This is why the Nepalese national identification is not equally compelling to all Nepalese citizens. The narration expressed above also indicates that the relation between the political entity which is in the Nepalese state and other social identities remain problematic. With this background I shall discuss how the people of the

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[3]   Crown, sceptre, royal crest, royal standard, coat-of-arms, cow, national flag, pheasant, rhododendron and red blob are the national symbols devised during Panchayat regime (Gurung, 1998:191).

study area are imagining the nation- state in their daily life. In this endeavour, I shall discuss some contexts and processes through which the nation-state comes to be constructed and concretely become visible in the eyes of villagers. In the mean time I will discuss how they identify themselves with the state contextually.

As discuss earlier, the *madhise* people living in Gouriganj, presumably all over the Tarai region, are physically and culturally the same as people living across the border. Language, food habits, style of wearing clothes, and other socio-cultural patterns are also similar and in many case identical too. The problems of identifying if a person is Nepali or not has become further complicated because of the high frequency of intermarriage and other socio-cultural dealings across the border. It is usually believed that people residing within the national boundaries, must, as individual, identify themselves with their country. I would rather argue that the national territory is not simply a piece of land but a sacred entity to which one belongs, not only physically but also psychologically. Admittedly, such identification does not develop suddenly; it is the product of a long, often tortuous process.

In staking the claim of Nepali citizenship some people are more successful because some other critical collective features (e.g. language, facial structure, family link with hill people etc) favour them while for some groups the claim is not easily accepted. For example, the bona fides of *pahade* origin people[4] as Nepali nationals are not contested though they came to the region after 1950s from Darjeeling, Assam, Kalimpung, Megahalaya, Sikkim, Kurseong, Bhutan, and Burma as immigrants. But the similar claim of the *madhise* people is always suspected as really being Indian despite the fact that settlement of these people to Tarai dates many years back before 1950s. Some of the Tarai villages have archaeological evidences at least a half millennium old (Burghart, 1994:5).

Due to lacking of distinct symbols of identification with the Nepali State and resulting suspicion of their loyalties, people of hill backgrounds hesitate to encourage participation of the plain people in national life. They fear that this will enhance Indian influence in Nepal. As a result though they have lived in the territory of the Nepali state for the stipulated period of time and many of them have acquired citizenship, many people from the Tarai may not have developed psychological identification with that territory as their homeland. The acquisition of citizenship in such cases implies an instrumental rather than an emotional bond. If we minutely observe the daily life circumstances and some aspect of social and cultural life situations of the study area, the sense of the larger national identity has yet to be evolving, and traditional manner of identifying with tribe, caste, family, ethnic or linguistic groups is

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[4] They are collectively known as *prabasi*- Nepali speaker from Burma, Bhutan and the north-eastern states of India

still dominant. They simply designate 'Nepali' to the people from hill, as if they are not Nepali and they don't have any right to claim as Nepali.

9.2   The Concept of Boundary

It is after Barth's (1969) work on ethnicity of early sixties that the distinction between social and cultural dimensions has become part of a widely shared repertoire of ideas about discontinuities in the organisation of human life. The term 'boundary' has perhaps at the same time given some emphasis to the possibility that such discontinuities can be quite sharply defined, as in the instances of group memberships and their cultural emblems (Hannerz, 1997: 540). It means, any one can be marked as either insider or outsider, one of 'us' or one of 'them'. Like ethnic ideologies, nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents, and by implication, it draws boundary vis-à-vis others, who thereby become outsiders (Eriksen, 1993:12). That is to say, as ethnicity, nations are formed in the context with, and in contrast to, other nations. It does not, however, mean that nationalism always tends to be ethnic in character; while latter is general phenomenon nationalism seems to be a quite special one. Historical roots and essentialist beliefs often play an important part in nationalistic ideology, while ethnicity, according to Barth (1969) is situational rather than the primordial.

In recent years, however, the emphasis has been somewhat different to the notion of 'border' in social anthropology. Especially, in the sense of 'borderland', it has suggested something in between, a contact zone, an area where discontinuities become a bit blurred (Hannerz, 1997: 540). In some respect, this is why the plains people of Nepal face the problems of national identity making. They sometimes find themselves in the insecure state of being seen as Indians in Nepal and as Nepalese in India, thereby facing double discrimination. One observation states that ''the plains people of Indian origin are much more closely related to India than to Nepal in terms of physical features, language, and culture, and their social structure is identical to that prevalent in India''(Parmanda, 1986: 1006). The above narration presents a quite interesting but controversial case of conflicting loyalties. Is it true that people in the Tarai, because of their cultural and linguistic proximity with India can be blamed as to be leaning more towards India in their loyalty? Which should be their primary loyalty- the countries they live in or respective group with different cultural traditions they cherish?

9.2.1 Blurred Boundary and Question of Nationality in the Tarai

The political and cultural boundary between India and Nepal in the study area seems to be somewhat blurred in the sense that one can observe daily familial, cultural and commercial

interactions between the people of Nepal and India taking place, as if the border does not exist. Similar cultural landscapes with an open border and the right of citizens of both countries to work in either economy[5] have further complicated the situation to understand what Nepal is or who is a Nepali. In the border area in India, the *madhise* people of Nepal are looked down upon, as kith and kin of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh caste group. In Delhi and other parts of India, they are looked upon, as Indian Hindi speakers settled in Nepal. On the other hand, certain section of Nepalese population, primarily of hill and mountain backgrounds brands the *madhise* people as outsider. Theses observations provide enough grounds to understand that the *madhise* people have been facing identity problem and there is no distinct boundary between the plains people of Nepal and India visible to all. On the contrary, as noted earlier, there is not much in the Nepali State with which the *madhise* people can identify with and there exists a distinctly visible divide or a clear boundary between the peoples of *pahade* and *madhise* origin. This is a paradox need to be addressed here

Though they are differing from the rest of the population physically, linguistically, and culturally, I shall argue that the allegiances of plains people of Nepal to a large extent remain always to the country they live in. My argument is that yet in most instances, the concept of 'border' involves recognition of greater symmetry (Hannerz, 1997), and people and culture are recognised to exist on both sides. When people cross the borders between different nations, situationally and overt time, they accumulate varied sets of experiences, orientations, competencies, and taste. There always exist some ideas of a political-- geographic division between states that have been remembered from the distant past, and will be imagined in the future. And, it must be noted here that we are dealing with heterogeneous units where it is clear that borders are not only state/state but in some way they are also culture /culture[6]. Thus, if we observe minutely, the people of plain origin also have their own distinct identity as Nepali nationality contrary to Indian, though they share many common cultural and social traits.

9.3   Identity Politics

As noted earlier chapters, people of Tarai were less involved in the unification process, and their social, cultural, and emotional integration has been very slow. However, in present context, they have contributed a lot in the nation building process. It is also true that regional

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[5] The Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) between Nepal and India has established an open border and has provided the right of ownership of property and the right to participate in trade and commerce.

[6] Following Barth (1993), I assume that a culture develops in each individual person as a result of continuous experience through life, and consequently that people with similar experiences will develop similarities in their outlook on the world. Since the people residing in Nepal and India on border side accumulate different experiences, orientations and competencies, I would argue that they automatically harvest different cultural orientations in time.

and linguistic identity has remained strong for some people, but it does not mean that it has come from grassroots. Some observers, in recent years have observed that the manifestation of regionalism and ethnicity in Nepali politics is only superficial, and it is not so much an outcome of grassroots passion as it is a creation of vested political interest groups (Dahal, 1995:167, Sharma, 1994). During the last few general elections political institutions in Nepal have demonstrated sufficient capacity to integrate the mosaic of ethnic and regional groups and defuse explosive ethnic and regional issues. As always, ethnic, regional and caste identities played major roles in the elections, but they did so in subtle and complex ways typical of Nepal's pluralist politics.

If I have grasped the Barth's (1969) perspective towards the relationship between culture and groups boundaries correctly, I can say that there is an essentialist tendency in the current identity politics in Nepal. A line of analysis which emphatically distinguishes between groups membership and culture, and which dwells on situationality and flux, could undermine political claims based on assumptions of permanent, non-negotiable heritage and qualities. For examples, the Sadvabana Party should have seized a large numbers of seats in the Nepal Tarai, if regionalism had played a major role. Similarly, Brahmins from eastern Nepal including Madan Bhandari would not have been victorious in the heart of Newar community of Kathmandu. Likewise, in recent general election, Kashi Lal Tajpuriya should not have been defeated in the midst of *adhivasis* and other Tarai groups of Jhapa Constituency-6.

Huntington's (1996) approach of differentiating 'others' in identifying 'we' might be helpful to the analysis the problems of identity making of the people of plain. He has argued that in the post-Cold War world, the most important distinction among the peoples is not ideological, political, or economic but is cultural. Peoples and nations are trying to answer that most basic questions- who are we? - And politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity. 'We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against' (Huntington, 1996:20-21). The claim- *'yo asali Hindusthan ho'* (this is the pure land of Hindus*)* made by Prithivi Narayan Shah can be seen as the beginning of this perspective in which the identity politics clearly indicate the level of civilisation.

Nepali nationalism- meaning the construction of particular distinctive Nepali identity- had never been a crucial issue when the British ruled India. An independent and largely Hindu India was another matter. Given that Nepal defines herself as a Hindu state and that her economy is largely an extension of -and dependent on- that of her giant neighbour, the ruler had to define a distinctive sense of Nepali nationhood. Nepal's claim of being *asali Hindusthan* from the beginning of her inception and trying to contrast with India in modern

period was the hill people's concern of their own distinct identity from that of the Hindus of southern plains, and the more modern fear of being sucked into the great Hindusthani cultural cauldron. Great efforts were made to underline the distinctiveness of Nepali society and draw a thick line between what was defined as 'Indian' and what was 'Nepali'

Thus, it was not enough to define the political boundary; it had to be reinforced internally by a cultural framework of some sort. Beginning with the demarcation of a defined border in 1816, continuing through the incorporation of tribal groups as a result of a grant, legally mandated scheme of a single caste frame[7] in the mid- nineteenth century (Hofer, 1979) and the designation of Nepali as official language, circa 1930, the transformation of Nepal into a modern nation-state--an independent sovereign, politically demarcated territory inhabited by culturally unique people (Burghart, 1984) culminated after the establishment of the partiless Panchayat system of government (Pigg,1992). In this endeavour, it is no exaggeration to state that the 'Nepali national consciousness', as we understand it today, crystallised for the first time during the beginning of Panchayat era. By the same token, 'national' is a political not a cultural referent in Nepal.

The culture of the *madhises* as mentioned earlier was naturally shared with the peoples of northern India from whom they were derived. Highlighting the few points of departure from the Indian social and cultural system was therefore an exercise in the preservation of Nepal's political autonomy and was also effective way of building a sense of national identity in a society compartmentalised by so many *jats* and *jatis*, regional and class division. As a result, a great majority of the people of Nepal do not have any problem identifying themselves with one cultural-linguistic or ethnic group or another at one level, and with Nepali society in general at another level. It, however, does not mean that national identification is equally encouraging to all the Nepalese citizens and in certain regions and in certain groups, identification with Nepali nation still seems to be weak.

9.3.1 Ways of Imagining the Country

Benedict Anderson (1991), in a fascinating study, defined a national community as an 'imagined community' that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is 'imagined' in the sense that members will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each life the image of their communion. This does not mean that the nation is contrasted with 'real' communities; all communities according to Anderson are imagined. But, the style of imagining is different. Anderson persuasively argues that people imagine the

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[7]   There were three historically and regionally autonomous caste hierarchies. That is, the Parbatiya (Hill), Newar (Kathmandu valley), and Madhisiya (Tarai) had their own caste systems before 1854.

nation to be a limited, exclusive community, that it is (or should be) sovereign and that is a community worthy of sacrifice, ultimately the sacrifice of own life. Neither language, nor ethnicity and religion, he argues are sufficiently held in common to explain what a 'nation' really is. Nation is therefore an aspect of the political and symbolic/ ideological order and also of the world of social interaction and feeling (Verdery, 1996).

Nationalism, then 'is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist' (Gellner, 1983). Politicians are adept at planting such inventions or imaginings in the minds of their people, especially in the times of loss or crisis of change. Nationalism in this perspective is the political utilisation of the symbol "nation" through discourses and political activities, as well as the sentiments that draws people into responding to this symbol's use. Nationalism is a quintessentially homogenising, differentiating, or classifying discourse: one that aims its appeal at people presumed to have certain things in common as against people thought not to have any mutual connections (Verdery, 1996)

Every emerging nation-state has some specific cultural policies that foster notion of 'imagined community' through which some sort of similarity could be foraged by all citizens as the common core of decency in the new national way of life in order to create the new national identity (Marriott, 1963). National elites, intellectuals and politicians, deploy such policies as solutions to a perceived problem of '(dis)integration' installing a heterogeneous population with a sense of shared national identity. In Nepal, the national projects of *desa banaune*[8] (nation -making) and *desh bikas*[9] (national development) that started in the early sixties under the umbrella of culturally unique Partiless Panchayat[10] Democracy were aimed at the formation of what (Anderson, 1983) called "imagined community". King Mahendra was the architect of those projects and he claimed that the concept of service to one's redeeming deity was applied to national service (*des seva*), and it was only by means of such service that 'nation building' (*desa banaune*), 'nation construction' (*desa nirman*), and 'nation development' (*desa bikas*) could take place. In addition, he claimed that such service is not motivated by self-interest (*swarth*); hence political parties and interest groups have no legitimate place in the nation-state of Nepal.

Arguing in that line King Mahendra banned political parties and dismissed the newly formed parliamentary democratic government and he replaced it with a new system of government

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[8] It is the Nepali translation of the concept of nation-building as found in North American academic discourse during the drafting of the Panchayat democracy and quickly became popular into Nepalese political discourse.

[9] Panchayat apologists believed that *bikas* (development) transcends difference of language, region, caste and ethnicity, creating a common terrain or social territory.

[10] It was considered as culturally unique system of government in the sense that it had its roots in the soil of Nepal and was capable of growth and development in the climate prevailing in the country.

that was composed of the king and four levels of elected councils, called *panchayats*, which were constituted at the village, district, zonal, and state levels of government. Arguing in favour of Panchayat government he claimed that the *Panchayat* systems and the kingship were the traditional forms of government in Nepal; these two political institutions were especially suited to promote unity and development in the Nepalese context. Only within the Panchayat system[11] of government, King Mahendra claimed that all Nepalese citizen are thought to have an "experience of their country" (*desa anubhava*), and it is in this experience their will as a people (*jana bhavana*) is formed. According to King Mahendra, parliamentary democracy is not rooted in this cultural experience it lacks 'Nepaliness (*nepalipan*), whereas Panchayat democracy, however, possesses Nepaliness, as does the kingship. Nonetheless, Burghart (1983) argues that 'it is now the natives of Nepal and the quality of Nepaliness, rather than the king's influence, which is spread throughout the realm to its very borders with India and China, thereby delimiting territorially the polity'. In this manner the government of Nepal has legitimated itself as a nation-state that is equivalent to but different from the other nation-states of the world.

It is evident that the state's role in the imagining of the nation is paramount- necessarily so, if one construes ' the state' as a repertoire of agents, activities, and institutions those states acceptable forms and images of social life. The educational apparatus of schooling and textbooks along with other print, audio, and visual media through which versions of national past are authorised and disseminated is largely the state creation. Similarly, the rituals most explicitly concerned with representation of the nation are state ritual- coronation, inauguration, ritual of development; football matches play significant role in imagining the nation.

In Nepal, as else where, all these developments together characterise the advent of modernity. Nation - building and nationalism (i.e. ideologies that lead to the formation and legitimating of nation and nation-state) are typically modern phenomena [12](Hobsbawm, 1990, Anderson, 1991). Since the social, political and economic conditions of modernity demanded standardisation, uniformity and homogeneity, Nepalese governments after 1960 abolished customs duties within the country, improved transportation and communication systems to bring remote and isolated regions into easy contact with markets and metropolitan centre, adopted national currency and uniform units of measurements. Similarly, mail services

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[11] From Mahendra's proclamation promulgating the Panchayat constitution of Nepal it is clear that the purported failure of parliamentary democracy was evaluated in terms of the crises of nation - building, and crises of experience of country, crises that only Panchayat democracy could resolve.

[12] However, the idea of nationalism is found to be deep rooted among the Hindus of Indian sub-continent, the origin of which can be traced back to Lord Ram's legendary epigraph- *janani janamabhoomischha swargadapi gareeyasi* (one 's mother and motherland are even greater than heaven). That is, they consider their motherland as a sacred and pure entity

became systematic, buildings, streets and roads were named and given numbers, detailed censuses started to be conducted; small regional economies were transformed into interdependent parts of a larger, presumably more efficient, single 'national economic system.

Moreover, all the Nepalese were forced to speak, read, and write Nepali language and they were even encouraged to speak the standard dialect of the Nepali language with correct accent. And basically through the education - system and mass media, both either state-run or state- controlled, the ruling nationalist elites launched a social engineering project to metamorphose the heterogeneous populations of the country into a unified community having the same historical symbols, deriving from the same ancestors, and, irrespective of social and culture differences and other inequalities, pursuing the same 'national' interest of des *nirman*, *des bikas* and *des anubhava*.

During that period Nepali state had to resolve a paradox: the dominant national ideology of Panchayat regime claimed that within the national boundaries there was one integral, undivided nation, while at the same time the governments were trying to do away with diversity in order to establish homogeneity (process of nation-building or *des nirman*). In other words, they were trying to 'turn a myth into reality' (Bhattachan, 1996).

Schoolbooks offer us a window on how this ideology aimed to construct or imagine the Nepali national community. The segment of the curriculum on social studies and civics explicitly communicates a clear message about the unity of Nepalese society ('we are all Nepalese'), the Nepalese character (peace-loving and brave), common Nepalese heritage (from Mt. Everest to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Lord Buddha) and Nepalese political system (Parti-less Panchayat System). The aim was clear that stressed national unity over ethnic, linguistic, and regional difference (Pigg, 1992).

If we agree upon the definition of the nations as 'imagined communities', these text books along with other print, audio and visual media have provided the stuff with which the Nepali nation could be imagined during recent decades (Onta, 1996:232). But it should be understood that these sorts of imagining mean not fabrication or falsity but a process of creation. Analysing a text book content of grade eight on civics, Pigg(1992:501) has nicely narrated the way in which the school children could imagined the future Nepalese national society.

> .... in a section on national society and the character of the Nepalese, the book has an illustration composed of recognisable ethnic types (see plate 9.1) background are Tibetan-like high mountain dwellers; in the middle are hill dwellers in ethnically distinctive costumes; and in the foreground are a Hindu man and woman of the Tarai, and a woman and a man who might be high-caste Newars or

Brahmin-Chhetreis. The latter man wears glasses, considered a sign of high status in Nepal, and the standard office garb of a civil servant. This arrangement conforms to elite views of increasing levels of what they call, in English, civilisation. It brings into a single evolutionary line a number of scales of social differentiation: habitat (mountain to plain); livelihood (nomadic herding through farming to office work; religion (Buddhist to more orthodox Hindu), race (Central Asian to Aryan).

Plate 9.1 What is the Message? Cultural Homogeneity or Diversity of Nepali Society?

The caption of the illustration read: 'descendants are we all of the same land, among kin who is of distant or close? If all have the same red blood, which is of rich or of poor', portraying the ethnic diversity of the country. However, the goal of such educational materials was to facilitate nation-building process by creating an unified society in the name of modernisation and development. This was the particular way in which the Nepali nation has been imagined through state produced educational textbook before 1990.

The oral transmission of narratives and iconography are also playing vital role in imagining the nation. National identities were, as it seemed to me, everywhere and nowhere, represented in maps, anthems, flags, and football matches. The widespread use of distinct Nepali national calendar (Bikram), 15 minutes time difference with India, national holidays, festivals, and uniform all link into the non-narrative but highly liturgies of Nepali nationalism.

National identities are expected to arise from ceremonies and practices, which draw citizen into the national spheres. Individuals acquire consciousness of national identity at the same time as they acquire the national language, an education, and other cultural resources. As the nation is embodied in education, secular rituals such as election, the media, and cultural institution, the nation is thus a component in each individual self-and other-awareness. Thus, all these including local government offices have provided the stuff with which the Nepali nation could be imagined.

9.3.2 Images of Nepali Nationhood in the Study Area

National identities can mean different things to different people even within the same nation. However, definition of national identities often refers to the sharing or commonality of a sense of belonging to a specific territory. National identity is defined as 'shared self-awareness (Poole, 1992 cited in Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996:16) and it draws attention to the sense of political community and common institution and rights which reflect and reinforce a feeling belonging to a bounded territory (Smith (1991:9).

For a nation to be hegemonic in the national identity, elite/official version of nationalism containing similar histories, images and representation must be shared across class or ethnic lines (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996:14). Instead mode of imagining of the nation at various levels is found to be variously compelling across caste, class, and gender and ethnicity.

A hill Brahmin certainly imagined the Nepali nation differently than that of a plain lower caste people. Ram Dev Musahar (an untouchable caste) in Gouriganj said ''I haven't seen raja (king), *mantri* (ministers), or *sansad* (parliament). The only part of the government I see is the police station at Gouriganj. And that is full of high caste people. They don't listen our voice and see us in different eyes as if we are not human being''. In similar way but in different fashion, a *madhise* cerebral of Gouriganj said ''raja, *mantr*i and *thula sarkari officers* (top government officials) all are *pahade*. Even in small place like Gouriganj all government staff are *pahade*. Everywhere there is hill people's domination. They always discriminate against madhise people and treat us as second class citizen''.

Thus, in first case, the lower *jats* and *jati* people imagined the Nepali nation in terms of high caste domination, while in the second case; *madhise* people imagined the country as dominated by the hill people in every government organizations. In other words, the Nepali nation is being constructed here in the imagination and everyday practices of ordinary people quite differently but with a similar trend- that is hegemony of hill people. How the imagining of the nation be sustained or what possible forms of imagined community would exist if it were imagined differently across the other arrays of social identities?

In Gouriganj area, there are a large numbers of government officials, constituting the broad base of the bureaucratic pyramid, live and work- the village level workers, school teachers, agricultural extension agents, staff of police station, bank, health post, custom office and others. This is the site where the majority of people of Gouriganj and similar other villages of Nepal come into contact with 'state', and this is where many of their images of the 'Nepal' are foraged. The other 'sites' where the country is imagined are the state sponsored

development programs and other state activities. The construction of road, extension of electricity and telephone line and establishment of border police station in the area represents such 'sites'. The spread of such activities across the landscape of the country becomes a means by which the reach of the Nepali State is represented.   In such case, the literal enactment of traversing the space of the nation comes to signify the ubiquity and traslocality of the state. The following case throws some light in this context

Case 9.1 When Blurred Boundaries Became
Distinct and Clear Boundaries Became Gloomy

One night of September, 1999 some cattle (oxan-2, Buffellos-3) of Santosh Kumar Singh and Bhatu Lal Singh of Dangi Tola[13] village disappeared from a locked cattle shed. The villagers searched the animals every direction but could not find. In the mean time they came to know that the cattle were stolen and kept in a village called Sonapur across the Nepal- India border. The Sonapur is a village unit of Thana Sikti in Arariya district of Bihar, India, where most of the villagers are reported to subsist on rubbery of 'things,' mostly animals from Nepal.

The thief *sarder* (leader), Kaila Minya sent a massage to the villagers that they could bring their cattle if they could pay Indian Currency of 20,000.00 rupees. Though they stole the cattle, they considered them as hostage and demanded the rupees. Moreover, the thief *sarder* also threatened the villagers that if they did not bring back their cattle paying the demanded money and tried to buy new from bazaar then, he further will be stealing their cattle. After that, some people of the village were sent to negotiate the price of 'hostage animals'. After a long negotiation talks, both parties agreed upon on a price of Indian Currency of 13,000.00 rupees and a week time to manage the required money.

In the mean time, one of the cattle owner, Santosh Kumar Singh who also worked in a Nepalese government office, started to mobilise local people as well as the local government offices specially police station and village development committee to bring back the animal by using force. Since all the villagers were more or less the victim of animal robbery, all agreed upon the idea and they also got support from police force.

One day at 3.00 o'clock in the morning, a group of about 300 people of both the *pahade* and *madhise* backgrounds marched to the Sonapur village, India. They were backed by police security. ''Policy did not appear in the front, we did all the things'', said one participant of the mission. ''After few hours of fighting with thieves, we burned all their houses, beat them seriously and brought back all the animals kept there'' said Sunder Yadav, who was the leader of the mission and the VDC chairman of the village. There were many animals of thieving from different places of Nepal. Some were returned back to the actual owner and the remaining were kept under the VDC authority and latter on they were sold and kept the money in the account of the VDC.

Field note (1999) in Gouriganj

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[13]   Dangi Tola, Deviganj, Chilara and Hadira are the border most villages of the study area. People of these villages are always in a state of fear of loosing of their cattle by some organised gangs of 'cattle theft 'residing across the borders.

The case narrated above seems to be simple but it attracted a wide range of audiences. When they brought back the stolen animals, there was a mixed response. Some were expressing their braveness and were proud with the work. Some people were worried about the counter attack by the Indians. Their logic was based on the assumption that they (people of Gouriganj) not only destroyed a *daka*(thief) village but ultimately an Indian village. Furthermore, it was difficult to distinguish between houses of *daka* and the public of Sonapur and so was the case of animals they brought. As a result, residents in border villages felt insecure in terms of their lives and property due to the potential threat of revenge in the similar fashion. The villagers started to form 'security troops' and provided security to the entire village at night. The event quickly spread over the regions and district administration sent extra police force and a temporary police camp was set up in Dangi Tola village. People of the area, then started to feel the presence of the Nepali State through such governmental activities.

After this event people of the study area became conscious about their nationality. They started to distinguish between India and Nepal. The distinct boundaries between *pahade* and *madhise* disappear and they all consolidated and identified as Nepali. They also became very conscious about the counter attack not only by the Indian *daka*(thief) but also by the other Indian public and united as if there is no difference among them. Just like the 'nations are formed in context with, and in contrast to, other nations', people of the study area started to differentiate distinctly themselves with their Indian counter parts and started to contrast with them. So this event acts as a 'war during which nation is imagined as a community embodying ultimate value' (Balakrishnan, 1996, Anderson, 1991). In this particular case, unlike Anderson's idea, the purity and fatality of national imaginings did not arise from the social organisation of vernacular language, or what he called 'print capitalism', but through the risks of membership in a community of life and death. Imagined nationhood, with its sacred affinities to religion, familial as well as kin bond, does not always seem to be deeply rooted in the every day life of modern society. Under normal conditions, individuals belong to and identify with, a vast number of overlapping associations, memberships in which they can be, to some degree, instrumentally evaluated.

Observing public discourse of the people in the study area after this event, it is revealed that they usually express their Nepali national identity in contrast to that of India through 'imaginary geographies'- by which the difference and distinction between 'Us' and 'Them', and between 'our place' and 'their place' are discursively imagined and articulated. Such imagined geographies can provide the basis for a shared identity, articulated through a sense

of sameness, common experiences, and truth about national habitus- the more or less shared set of dispositions, tests, gusters, and memories that qualify the nation as distinctive entity.

People use the terms *swadesh, afnodesh* (my country or homeland) within the national boundaries of Nepal and designate the terms *videsh, paradesh* or *paraidesh* (foreign land) out side the Nepalese border. These terms are equally applicable to India though they share many social and cultural features to the people of India. The boundaries between nations reinforce territorial segmentation at the same time as they reinforce notion of purity and sameness within the territory, and difference and impurity outside the territory. Some people of the study area have clear vision based on nationalism, the origin of which can be traced back to Lord Ram's legendary epigraph- *janani janamabhoomischha swargadapi gareeyasi* (one 's mother and motherland are even greater than heaven). That is they consider their motherland as a sacred and pure entity.

People of the study area presumably all over the Tarai imagined the Nepali nation in contrast to that of India. Though there are many similarities between plain people of Nepal and their neighbours across the border, people of Nepal differentiate themselves distinctly. Many of them have not seen King but they know about the monarchy and have put photograph of king and queen in their home. They have not been Kathmandu and Pasupatinath Temple but they have posters of it in their house walls. Nepal has its own standard time -- that is 15 minutes faster than that of India. We have own calendar called Bikram Sambat. House type and dressing pattern are also different. Though they speak same language let us say Rajbanshi but the Nepalese use more Nepali words while the Indians use more Hindi words in their discourses.

But the spirit of nation is also kept alive by the stuff of every day life. Michael Biling (1995), a sociologist has called it as 'banal nationalism'. It is expressed though flags- waved and unwaved, national anthems; rousing language (our country or our nation) and processions and celebrations of national days. Similarly it is the lingua franca that underpins our conscious and unconscious identity with nation. The SAF Game 1999 has provided an interesting case for creation of the national consciousness. People were found very much interested to know the position of Nepal in the game in general and football match in particular.

More or less every people residing within national boundaries have some imagery of the nation and the people of study area are not the exception. Obviously, not every one imagines the nation in quite the same manner. Caste, gender, class, and many other social and cultural attributes determine why he or she imagines the nation as he or she does. If the nation is imagined community then the people within one nation should imagine the nation in a similar

way but it is not the case in Nepal. Massimo d'Azeglio, a writer and former Prime Minister of Piedmont pointed out when the nation-state of Italy was created in 1861: 'we have made Italy, now we have to make Italians'. The case is similar with Nepal. Creating 'Nepal' a nation-state was one thing; making the people who lived there believed in it is quite another.

In this context, the empirical reality from field suggests that time has come to formulate balanced policies on the questions of national unity and inter-ethnic and inter-regional harmony in a long-term perspective. Government must have a comprehensive project of making 'national citizen' so that they themselves are reproduced in time enduring personality traits through child-socialisation practices.

9.4   National Integrative Measures and the Issues of Unfair Inclusion of Tarai

Nepalese rulers of past two centuries based their model of national integration on four key ideas: absolute Hindu monarchism, the supremacy of the Hindu ethos in national life; social integration through the Hindu social system based on caste division; and recognition of Nepali as the language of government, administration and more recent times, education.

Panchayat regime adopted some 'modern' integrative measures by enforcing a culturally unique system of government rooted in the 'soil and climate of Nepal', promulgating a new legal code abolishing laws based on caste rules and difference, standardising the system of education, improving the roads and communication with the help of foreign aid and introducing the land reform program. Nevertheless, it basically kept continuing the previous trends.

The Panchayat system continued to exclude groups from national life which did not fit within the strait-jacket of 'Nepaliness' established by the ruling hill high caste people and continued to establish traditional role of monarch as a symbol of national unity and as a centre of loyalty for various *jats* and *jatis* groups. Nepal, as a nation of 'unity in diversity', anchored by the key symbols such as the Hindu religion and the Nepali language, was integrated only in the sense that the hegemonic culture of hill high caste people remained dominant over the hill minorities and the *madhise* people in the Tarai.

The educational system encouraged nationalism and the creation of unified national society by enforcing the use of Nepali and building loyalty to king, country and Panchayat system (Pigg, 1992). But emotional identification with the state was tenuous for marginalized groups of the Tarai as well as the Mountains regions (Wheltpon, 1997:39). The northernmost valleys,

though politically within Nepal, are ethnically and culturally Tibetan. Similarly, at the other end of the country it is equally true that political and cultural boundaries are fail to coincide (Gellner, 1992:11). Hill minorities and Tarai people were grossly under represented in political decision making bodies of the state. When individual from the minorities did rise to prominence within the system, it was claimed that they did so by rejecting their cultural identity and by adopting that of the hegemonic order and other networks of *chakari* and *afno manche*(Bista, 1991). For example, the former Auditing Generals of Nepalese Government who actually was Jha, a Tarai caste, simply hide his original caste, and adopted a hill caste called Khatri in order to get promotion in such high government post. If he had continued to write his original caste, he wouldn't have been promoted in the post. He disclosed the whole story while giving an interview in local newspapers when he retired from the post (Personal Communication by Dr Bhim Subedi, 2000). Louise Brown (1996:75) has aptly narrated the Panchayat situation: ''manipulation of the symbol of nationalism, and exclusion from the political process of those who did not fit as a 'true' Nepali, made the Panchayat System, for all its rhetorical commitment to diversity and democracy, the political expression of only one ethnic group and, moreover, of only one elite section within that group''.

Historically the economy of Nepalese Tarai developed independently from that of *pahad*. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the pace and characteristics of this process had far more in common with development in Bihar and Bengal than it did with the slow hesitant processes underway in the hills (Regmi, 1984: 11-14). Regmi further writes: Indeed, the Tarai region was treated more as colonial possession serving the economic and other interest of Kathmandu based aristocracy and bureaucracies, who were invariably of hill origin, than as a constituent unit of newly, founded Kingdom. The question is not merely one of equality of status and privilege with the rest of the Kingdom, but basically of the economic integration of the nation (p13). In this way the economic history of Nepal has been a history of a clear geographical and political division between the *pahad* and the *madhes*. The hill traditionally, even before national unification under Prithivi Narayan Shah, has been the centre of political power and domination in Nepal. On the other hands, the Tarai's location in the Nepalese power structure has always, even to this days, remained, or been kept, on the periphery. It has been commonly regarded as colonial possessions.

The Panchayat regime took some steps to encourage national economic integration and to remove the Tarai-Pahad, north-south divide. In 1975, government divides the country vertically into 14 Zone and five development regions, the aim of which was to foster administrative and economic cohesion between the hills and the plains. But it was also not so effective as thought previously. The *pahad* remained chronic food deficit area where as the surplus of the Tarai was exported to northern India where better price could be obtained. The

underdevelopment transport system, the cost of portering and the poverty of the hill people made the hill-plain trade unprofitable. The logic of the market did not encourage the economic integration of Nepal, and neither did it feed the poor of the hills.

One of the major efforts of national integration taken during Panchayat regime was to encourage the migration of hill people to the plains. The Panchayat Pundits thought that the migration of hill people would 'Nepalese' an area hitherto settled by Indians. Resettlement was therefore seen as a means of national integration- and could be implemented on the cheap as its administrative and financial costs were relatively small (Gaige, 1975:85). The land reform of 1964 was believed to complement this process by enforcing the replacement of a number of landowners and tenants of Indian origin with hill people. The combine effect of resettlement and the politicisation of land in the name of land reform were to dilute, although not swamp, the share of Indians in Tarai society. It was some how achieved in the sense that the proportion of hills peoples in the Tarai population increased from 5 per cent of the total at the beginning of the century to 34-40 per cent by the end of the Panchayat era (Dahal,1992). Although the proportion of highlanders living in the Tarai increased, the region was still associated with the peoples of Indian origin and political elite was consistent in its efforts to exclude them from national politics. Subservience to the symbols of Nepali nationalism was a prerequisite for inclusion in the political system. Either the Tarai people acquiesced or they were consigned to the political fringes (Brown, 1996:77-80). In brief we can say that, Nepal's efforts at strengthening the process of integration during the Panchayat System had proceeded along traditional lines and had so far been symbolic rather than real and earnest.

The democratic Constitution of 1990 can be taken as a 'break through' from the historical model of national integration which has promised to 'maintain the cultural diversity of the country' and to promote 'healthy and cordial social relations amongst the various religions, castes, tribes and communities and linguistic groups' by aiding 'to conserve and promote their language, literatures, scripts, arts and cultures (Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990). But those arguing for greater recognition of Nepal's multi-linguistic and culturally pluralistic population insisted that the monopolisation of politics and economic life by high caste hill people rendered the promises of the Constitution an empty gesture. My field materials also suggest those tribal minorities, low caste, and Tarai people are grossly under-represented in the parliament. They have little influence within the unofficial power structure and enrolment of these people not only in higher education but in school education too is very low. Nepali, though it is the first language of only 53.22 per cent of the population (CBS, 1991) is still the only acceptable language of government and it remains the language of the education system, even though this might handicap many children for whom Nepal is not their mother tongue.

Hindu is still the state's religion despite the fact that many Nepalese are both Hindus and Buddhists, and about 13 percent follow other religions.

The one-decade long democratic practise had little effect upon the lives of the poor Nepali. The deceleration made by the Constitution about the equality of the people did not have any immediate impact upon the distribution of resources and upon the empowerment of women. It neither did facilitate the entry of marginalised *jats* and *jatis* into the mainstream political system. Rather on the contrary, my field experiences suggest that emphasis is not given upon the similarities between communities but it is somewhat upon the differences between them in the contemporary Nepal. Inevitably, this is bound to have a significant impact upon the notion of a single 'Nepaliness'. A distinct process of cultural fragmentation is therefore perceptible as individual groups manoeuvre in order to carve them a niche in a new democratic order. *Jats, jatis* and regional identities are not strong enough to pose an imminent threat to political stability, but the compartmentalisation of society is accelerating along with the increasing perception of fundamental social and economic equalities.

9.5   Towards a New Model of National Integration

The recognition of diverse social and cultural life forms or we may call pluralistic society since 1990 was the major departure from the past efforts of nation-state building in Nepal. The new Constitution of 1990 changed the previous definition of Nepal as 'an independent, indivisible and sovereign monarchical Hindu Kingdom' to 'a multi-ethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu and Constitutional Kingdom'[14]. Having been ruled under the feudal and authoritarian regime for two centuries, the country is now asked to hold together under a multi-party democracy. The feudal authoritarian rule of the past two centuries sought to maintain and promote national integration in one way. Under the new dawn of multiparty democracy, national integration might be achieved in different way. In the light of managing multiplicity of cultural and social life forms giving due consideration to each of them, this study was an attempt to depict some patterns of cultural identities that would make Nepal a nation-state rather than merely a state. I came to a conclusion that cultural homogeneity is not the only ways of achieving national unity and integration, rather it could be brought in more encompassing level to adopt a policy of letting ''a hundred flowers bloom''. In other words, national unity might come from embracing diversity rather than imposing uniformity.

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[14] The Constitution of Nepal 1962 (third amendment in 1980:2) and The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990:3.

Traditional three pillars of Nepali nationalism: Allegiances to the monarchy, to Hinduism and to the Nepali language are, to some extent, important to the hill elite because they are symbols which either bind or diffuse and disparate the communities. The efficiency of such symbols, however, will be hard to sustain in an emerging democratic society marked by growing political consciousness(Brown,1996:219) and they are seen to be in decline[15] according to the result of the Census of 1991(Shah, 1993). In this context Brown (1996) further writes ''there is no strong pan-tribal organisation of Nepal's hill minorities, and nor is there a secessionist Tarai movement- but the prospect of either, or both, is very real if the democratic system is unable, or unwilling to incorporate their political demands and, just as importantly, if it proves unable to alleviate their absolute poverty''. The traditional glue of caste and Hinduism served well in the past but today it is challenged by many people particularly of the hill ethnic groups and the "ex-untouchables". Similarly, from the ancient period, kingship has been a central pivot of political as well as socio-cultural life. In the absence of a tangible state apparatus, the crown became the primary foci of loyalty for all communities as well as personification of the state (Shah, 1993). But this once seemingly invincible institution is today dramatically challenged by Maoist parties in the name of *jana uddha* (People's war) and it has been heard voices of republicanism from main line political parties too.

Many observers (Shah, 1993, Sharma, 1992, Bhattachan, 1998, Bhattachan and Pyakyural, 1996, Brown, 1996) agree that unless Nepalese government generates new forms of incorporation (social justice, equality in economic opportunities, representation in political decision making and a common basis of national identity), the long-term stability of Nepal is questionable. The present democratic government, therefore, not only has to cope with a daunting economic crises but also with the mammoth task of redefining the basis of national integration and finding new means to draw diverse *jats*, *jatis*, and regional communities into a national frame work in which they feel that they are genuine, and equal participants.

Let us draw examples from my study area. As I have mentioned in introductory case, an ethnic and regional fault-line runs between Nepal's *pahad* and the *madhes*. I found that the relationship between these two groups is marked by deep suspicion. The *pahades* regard the *madhises* as Indian in their cultural orientation and political loyalties. *Madhises*, in their part, blame the *pahades* as internal colonisers and exploiters of the Tarai who treat them as second class citizens. The *madhises* protest their under-representation[16] in political decision making

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[15] There has been a net decline of 5.14 percent among Nepalese who say that Nepalese is their mother tongue- from 58.36 percent in 1981 to 53.22 percent today. Similarly, there has been a net decline of 3.0 percent among the Nepalese who say that their religion is Hindu- From 89.5 percent in 1981 to 86.5 percent in 1991.

[16] The Tarai proper has a share of 19.6 percent of total area and 42.8 of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 1991). The region's representation in the national legislature has ranked between 15 and 22 percent (Gurung, 1998)

process, in government employment and land distribution and resettlement policies which favours the hill migrants. The unsettled question of citizenship rights for *madhises* rankles the political leaders of Tarai.

In addition, the exclusion of the Tarai population from the national politics is an extraordinary paradox at a time when the Tarai is fast becoming Nepal's economic heartland. In most of the nation political power is the preserve of those from the most economically advanced areas. In Nepal this link is apparently reversed; the advent of the twenty-first century country's political periphery is its economic centre and political centre is its economic periphery. If this trend remained continue, it will be the major threat to remove *pahad-madhes* divides and ultimately raise the 'big' question of national integration.

Here is clearly a need for innovative cultural policy which are apt as uniting people of the Nepali state in a national context and it should at the same time give the country respect in the eyes of the external world. A policy of cultural pluralism or pluralistic mosaic might be one such comprehensive project of national integration in Nepal. The policy of letting '' a hundred flowers bloom'' instead of the idea of "melting pot" might be an appropriate strategy for Nepalese context. In this connection my argument is that Nepal can only emerge as a nation- state in real sense by full embracing, rather than suppressing, its religious, linguistic, *jat*, *jati*, and cultural diversity. If national unity depends on the acceptance of a framework in which multiple cultures or flowers are allowed to compete without one dominating the whole system or garden, then it may require the renascence and embracing of all sort of cultural differences or 'sprouts' of the country or garden. And, I think Bista(1991) is correct in his claim that '' pluralism is not necessarily a problem for the development of a ...nation''.

Historically speaking, the credit goes to Prithivi Narayan Shah being the first to recognise the cultural plurality of Nepal he had created. At the time of consolidation of the country, the king recognised and respected the different traditions of the tribal groups, which he brought under the authority of Gorkha. His idea of cultural pluralism becomes more apparent when he equally treated the entire religious realms as being equivalent universes and equally respected the tutelary deities of each conquered realm. In this context, Burghart, 1984: 105) writes,

''The centre of Prithivi Narayan's realm was the temple of Bhavani and the cave of Gorakhnath at his ancestral home of Gorkha. By the grace of these two deities he conquered 'Nepal', ruled by the Mall kings of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhadgaon, but in 'Nepal', Prithivi Narayan received the blessing of Taleju, the tutelary deity of the disposed Malla rulers. Similarly the temples of Janakpur and Barahaksetra in the eastern Tarai districts, which were sanctuaries of worship for the vanquished kings of Makawanpur and Vijayapur, continued to be supported by the royal family and countries on tour on the region''.

Taking aspiration from this historical tradition, one should search for Nepal's distinct national identity in learning to take pride in its own remarkable history and in the process of Nepalization through which a cultural and religious syncretism has emerged. In this way, Nepali state could gradually develop an all-Nepali identity in which every one can pride while at the same time allowing local variation to flourish. For this, a policy of muti-culturalism or the plurality of Nepali culture must be accepted as officially. Once this basic cultural paradigm is accepted, the concept of hegemonic/subordinate or majority/minority would either loss its lustre or gradually become meaningless. The linguistic, religious, regional *jat* and *jati* identities would no longer simply remain 'ethnic identities' but submerge themselves into a new national identity of people while maintaining their local variation. In essence, it means that a Gurung, Rai, Rajbanshi, or Tharu should be able to maintain his distinct local identity while at the same time he could feel pride to attach his identity with Nepali state.

Rituals are crucial conformers and producers of collective identification in any society; they simultaneously create a sense of identity and justify power structure. Some state ritual such as SAF Game 1999 was very successful to engage people all over the country generating a collective identity of Nepali nation through various types of game competition. Let us take another example from the field. A religious ritual called Chhaith, is celebrated collectively all over the Tarai region of Nepal. During this festival, Lord Surya, the sun God, is worshipped. In this particular ritual, first a setting sun is worshipped and then the raising sun with great joy and devotion. Devotees, basically women offer various delicious items of food, fruits, and flowers to the sun during the evening and morning time in ponds and rivers.

Though it is traditionally celebrated by caste Hindus of *madhise* people, nowadays it is equally popular among the hill people as well as the *adhivasis* of the Tarai. I found a great integrative strength in this ritual to glue the people of different social and cultural categories. I observed people of different categories irrespective of their caste, and other backgrounds were taking part in the ritual. If we promote such occasions in a national perspective, then it would certainly act as bridging the gap between hill and plains people of Nepal.

The issue of master symbols which are apt as uniting people of the state in a national imagined community and which at the same time gives the country respect in the eyes of external world is also crucial. Nepalese identity attached with Himalayas and birth place of Lord Buddha and bravery of Gorkha soldiers can be taken as such symbols to which Nepal is internationally renowned for. But for many Nepalese, the identity of Gorkha bravery might be a stigmatised identity in the sense that they (Gurkha soldiers) show their braveness not for their own *matribhumi* (motherland) but in the war of Falklands and India and Pakistan as

vada ko sipai(mercenaries). Instead, the symbolism of crown and Nepali language can better glue the people together. I think professor Gopal Singh Nepali is correct in his claim that ''kingship is the empirical representation of national unity''. I found that the crown is the legitimising force in the eyes of the people of the study area. Similarly, multi-lingual policy might be a vehicle for preserving and articulating the national sprit and the historical experience.

My field experience suggests that nationalisation of local customs; rituals and cultural practices might be an important glue to integrate people of Tarai in the national mainstream. This means generating awareness and creating pride in indigenous traditions, heritage, and personalities in a national perspective. In addition to *daura suruwal* (current national dress) adopted from typical hill culture, we have to learn feeling pride on all the regional, *jat* and *jati* dresses as a national heritage[17] of the country. Among others Rai's, Limbu's, and Magar's military courage, Sherpa's mountaineering skill and the different cultural traditions of Tarai like paintings of Mithila; Thuru's, Dhimal's and Rajbanshi's quintessential cultural uniqueness could be propagated as national heritage. The national pantheon must therefore include personalities and events, rituals, historic as well as mythical, from all communities in order to bring them in a single national framework in real sense.

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[17] This idea was particularly aroused when I saw colourful and different types of Norwegian national dress at 17th of May 2000. In addition, in a brief discussion with few people during that day I found that everyone was proud of having colourful national dresses.

Glossary

adhibasi/adhivasi   Groups of people who recognised as the first settlers of a particular area or region; aboriginal or indigenous inhabitant(s)

afno manche   'one's own person' (someone in your kin group or personally linked to you in some other way who may be relied upon for assistance)

asal hindustan   'real/pure land of Hindus': what Prithvi Narayan Shah hoped for Nepal

bahun   general term to refer the Brahmins of Hill origin

baniya   plains caste(Merchant)

bigha   land measurements unit in the Terai region, comprising 8,100 square yards, or 1.6 acres, or 0.67 hectare. A *bigha* is divided into 20 *kathas* and a kathas is divided into 20 *dhurs*

bhotiya(bhote)   often derogatory) label for peoples of Tibetan or related language and culture

bazaar   any place goods are exchanged, colloquially used to refer to towns with markets

chamar   plain caste (Leatherworker)

chhetri   dominant hill caste, formerly known as Khas

chudhari   revenue collector in the Tarai responsible for a revenue unit known as a *praganna*

damai   ex-untouchable hill caste(tailor)

dasain   a national festival in honour of Goddesh Durga Bhawani, celebrated for ten days until the full moon in the month of Aswin(October-November)

des/desa   country

dharma   religion; duty; 'even essential nature'

dhobi   ex- untouchable plain caste (Washermen)

dhoti   traditional male garment in the Tarai and India, wrapped around the upper legs

dom	ex- untouchable plains caste (variously described as swineherds, basket-makers and sweepers)
jaisi	lower status of hill Brahmins, the offspring of Brahmin men and Brahmin widows
janajati	'ethnic community' (a newly popular term for originally non- Hindu or 'tribal ethnic groups)
jat	the groups who traditionally belong to Varna Syatem. The Varna system is based on five primary social classification: The Brahmin (priest), the Kshatriya (warrior, administrator), the Vaisya (merchant), the Sudra (labourer), and the untouchables (or polluted)
jati	the groups traditionally outside the Varna system. In this sense, the term *jati* can be equated with ethnics or non-*jat* and non-Hindu groups for descriptive purposes
jimidar	a functionary responsible for revenue collection in the villages of Tarai region
kami	ex-untouchable hill caste (Blacksmiths)
khas/khasa	old name for the group now know as Chhetri and sometimes used for hill people as whole; today the term is generally restricted to the *matwali* Chhetri of far west Nepal
khas kura	'the language of the Khas: old name of Nepali
kipat	form of communal land tenure prevalent among some particular groups of people, such as Limbus of eastern Nepal
lalmohar	royal decree
mal	revenue collection and land registration office
Madhes	the Tarai or lowlands of Nepal
madhise/madhesiya	plain people of Indian origin
mahapatra	funeral priest among the plain caste people
marwari	caste originally from Rajasthan (India), now famous traders all over the country
matwali	traditionally alcohol-consuming groups

mauja	village, sub-division of district in the Tarai
mohi	status of legally recognized tenant
mosahar	ex- untouchable plains caste (labourers)
pahade/pahari	inhabitants of the hill areas or people of hill origin inhabiting in the Tarai region
parbate	in strict sense it refers hill Brahmin, Thakuri and Chhetri *jats* and their associated low status artisan *jats*
parganna	revenue division in the Tarai
prajatantra	democracy
puja	worship
purana	narrative text accepted as Hindu scriptures
purdha	the practice of enclosing women
rajbanshi	ethnic group based in the eastern Tarai, also known as Kuch (Kooch)
rajput	plain caste equivalent to Thakuri caste of the hill
rana	family name adopted by Jung Bhadur to claim descent from the Ranas of Mewar in Rajasthan
rastra	nation
Sagauli	village in Bihar (India) where the 1815 treaty ending the Anglo-Nepal War was signed, older spelling is "Sugauli'
sarki	ex-untouchable hill caste (cobblers)
tagadhari	'wearing of sacred thread' (label for high, 'twice-born' castes)
Tarai	lowlands of Nepal separating the Himalayan foothills from the border with India
thakuri	high hill caste from which rulers usually come; concentrated particularly inn the far west Nepal and in the Kathmandu Valley
tharu	tribal ethnic group found in the Tarai

tihar   autumn 'Festivals of Light'

tika   mark placed on the forehead as part of religious worship

topi   cap, particularly the style typically worn in the hills

varna   the four 'estates' or 'orders' into which Hindu society is traditionally divided: Brahmins (priest), Kshatriyas (rulers, warriors), Vaishyas(herders, tradesmen. Agriculturalist) and Shudras (servants)

vikram
samvat   Vikram Era (currently in official use in Nepal, reckoning from 57 B.C.; V.S for short

yadav: large plain caste(farmers, herders)

zamindar   a landlord

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