

Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal

Volume 1: Introduction



National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) has embarked on an ambitious project to produce the *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal*. Since this is a large-scale project, it is evident that the list of subjects to be covered will be long. The following subjects have been decided for the next five years: (a) Origin and history, (b) Language and literature, (c) Customary law and tradition, (d) Natural resources and economic status, and (e) Political representation and participation. There are many other important subjects that the Encyclopedia will cover: women, migration, heritage conservation, indigenous lands, culture and customs, traditional knowledge and skills, biodiversity and environmental protection, etc. In addition, other relevant topics will also be studied later.

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Government of Nepal
National Foundation for Development of
Indigenous Nationalities
Sanepa, Lalitpur



National Foundation for Development of
Indigenous Nationalities

Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal

Volume 1: Introduction

**National Foundation for Development of
Indigenous Nationalities**

Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal

Part 1: Introduction

Krishna Hachhethu

With

Ajaya Chepang, Aruna Limbu and Sita Mademba



Publisher

Government of Nepal



**National Foundation for Development of
Indigenous Nationalities**

Sanepa, Lalitpur

Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal

Volume 1: Introduction

Coordinator:	Gyanendra Pun Magar (Member Secretary)
Translation from Nepali by:	Mahesh Raj Maharjan
Publisher:	National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Sanepa, Lalitpur, Nepal Phone no. +977 + 1-5183252/5183174 Email: mail@nfdin.gov.np URL: www.nfdin.gov.np
Copyright©	Publisher
First Edition:	2025 (2082 vs)
No. of Copies:	300
Price:	Rs. 500
ISBN:	978-9937-9912-2-3

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Foreword

Inclusive democracy is an integral part of building a “New Nepal” as envisioned by the Constitution of Nepal 2015. The four pillars of inclusive democracy, adopted as an appropriate political system for a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-religious Nepali society, are republicanism, secularism, federalism, and proportional representation. In a country like Nepal with diversity, building a nation through social change, economic development, and political stability is not possible without the participation of all caste/ethnic, linguistic, gender, and regional communities. Keeping this in mind, the then parliament on January 18, 2002, enacted the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) Act 2002.

Adivasi Janajatis (indigenous nationalities) of Nepal, which constitutes 35.4 percent of the country’s population, is the largest community among the various ethnic groups of Nepal as defined by the constitution. NFDIN has been carrying out its responsibilities of ensuring identity, well-being, and rights of this community in various ways. One of its main tasks is to produce knowledge related to Adivasi Janajatis and disseminate in many areas and among the wider sections of society by publishing it so that it can contribute to changing the society and formulating state policies. NFDIN has been carrying out this responsibility since its establishment. In a sense, the inception of *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal* is a continuation of such work. But in another sense, this is a special and unique work which will remain important and useful to the society and the country forever.

There is no dearth of literature on Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. We are grateful to native and foreign scholars for informing the world about the existence of this community through their research and publication. But what most foreign experts and Nepali non-indigenous scholars have written have their own limits. In retrospect, their narratives are non-indigenous and are criticized for not adequately reflecting the sentiments, desires, and thoughts of the concerned communities. There are some literature resulting from the hard work of indigenous writers, but most of these do not seem to be free from ethnic urges and prejudices. The lifestyle of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal is constantly and rapidly changing. On the one hand, indigeneity in their daily lives is rapidly eroding; while on the other hand, a new awareness is also emerging about the importance of identity. It is necessary to explore such new dimensions that are not found in previously published works. The Encyclopedia in making will review the history of Nepal’s Janajatis from an indigenous perspective, will portray their current situation, and will provide suggestions on future steps to be taken for their development.

Potential readers, users, and beneficiaries of the Encyclopedia can be anyone. Five types of individuals/organizations have been targeted. One, the general public (both Nepalis and foreigners), for whom language will not be a barrier as it will be published in Nepali, English, and mother tongues. Two, the new generation, especially future researchers, for whom it will be a very important reference material. Three, media professionals, who will play a key role in disseminating the knowledge contained in the Encyclopedia far and wide. Four, stakeholders, organizations, and activists involved in the Janajati movement, for whom the Encyclopedia will serve as a guide. And five, policymakers, who play an important role in formulating the country's policies, plans, and programs.

Producing an Encyclopedia is a challenging but an important endeavor. It is being carried out by a team led by Prof. Krishna Hachhethu. The skill, hard work, and perseverance of the study team for preparing this first volume (Introduction) in a short period of three months is very commendable. We would like to congratulate the team (including about 25 researchers for each volume) in advance with the hope that such enthusiasm, energy, and hard work will continue in the days to come, and we are confident that the other volumes of the Encyclopedia planned for the next four to five years (such as Origin and history, Customary law and tradition, Natural resources and economic status, and Political representation and participation) will be completed on time.

The Encyclopedia can contribute in multiple sectors, so NFDIN has seriously taken it as its "dream project." NFDIN has been providing all kinds of support to the study team, including physical facilities and financial resources. However, NFDIN is aware and vigilant that this is an academic exercise, so NFDIN has not exercised any control over or given direction to the study team, respecting their academic autonomy and independence, whether in deciding the outline and contents of the Encyclopedia, in selection of researchers, or in application of research methods. The views contained in this book are entirely the authors' own and do not represent the opinions and thoughts of NFDIN.

Finally, we would like to thank all the individuals and organizations that have directly or indirectly supported us in preparing this first volume (Introduction) of the Encyclopedia. We are confident that we will continue to receive this kind of support in the coming days.



Resham Gurung

Vice Chairperson

National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities

Sanepa, Lalitpur, Nepal

September 2025

Acknowledgements

Making the *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal* is a “dream project” of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN). This commitment has been publicly expressed by the Vice Chairperson of NFDIN, Resham Gurung, since the early days of his tenure. The newly appointed Member Secretary, Gyanendra Pun Magar, has also strongly backed up this endeavor. For this, the personal and institutional support and cooperation provided by the Chairman of the Indigenous Nationalities Commission, Hon. Mr. Ram Bahadur Thapa Magar, and the Chairman of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, Mr. Gelje Lama Sherpa, are appreciable. Producing an Encyclopedia is a difficult and challenging task, but it is also an opportunity. I express my gratitude to NFDIN, its officials, and its employees for entrusting me as the driver of this noble work.

The work of Volume 1 of the Encyclopedia began in March 2025. Various experts provided moral support and intellectual input during the initial brainstorming on its outline, structure, and content. For this, I am grateful to Dr. Chunda Bajracharya, Mr. CK Lal, Dr. Janak Rai, Mr. Jitpal Kirati, Prof. Krishna Khanal, Dr. Kunsang Lama, Prof. Nirmalman Tuladhar, Dr. Pratyoush Onta, Mr. Rajendra Maharjan, Dr. Suchita Pyakuryal, Dr. Sumitra Manandhar Gurung, Dr. Taramani Rai, and Prof. Yogendra Gurung.

The suggestions given by Mr. Jitpal Kirati (former Vice Chairperson of NFDIN), who has extensive knowledge, experience, and scholarship on indigenous peoples, by carefully examining the initial draft of this first volume (Introduction) proved to be very useful in revising the draft, for which I am grateful to him. I would like to thank the officials of various Adivasi Janajati organizations for providing their individual and institutional comments, suggestions, and feedbacks on the revised draft.

All the employees of NFDIN, including Research Officer Ms. Sarina Gurung, have supported and well received the work of developing this Encyclopedia. I am indebted to Mr. Ajaya Chepang and Mr. Ram Maden of NFDIN for studying the initial draft and pointing out errors in it. I would also like to thank Mr. Ajaya Chepang, Ms. Aruna Limbu, and Ms. Sita Mademba for their time and involvement in the study team and for fulfilling their assigned responsibilities. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Mahesh Raj Maharjan for translating the Nepali version into English.

I apologize if, due to the pressure and haste of working on the second volume (Origin and History) scheduled for the upcoming year, I missed the names of individuals who helped in this first volume. I am solely responsible for any errors in this book, which I hope will be pointed out by its reviewers and readers so that these can be corrected in subsequent editions.

Krishna Hachhethu

September 2025

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Abbreviations

CA	Constituent Assembly
CA-I	First Constituent Assembly
CA-II	Second Constituent Assembly
CNAS	Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies
ILO	International Labor Organization
INC	Indigenous Nationalities Commission
LAHURNIP	Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples
NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
NFDIN	National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities
NSO	National Statistics Office
SIRF	Social Inclusion Research Fund
VDC	Village Development Committee

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal

Introduction

National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN) has embarked on an ambitious project to develop the *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal*. Since this is a large-scale project, it is obvious that the list of topics to be covered will be long. The following subjects have been decided for the next five years: (a) Origin and history, (b) Language and literature, (c) Customary law and tradition, (d) Natural resources and economic status, and (e) Political representation and participation. There are many other important areas that the Encyclopedia will cover in the future: women, migration, heritage conservation, indigenous land, culture and customs, traditional knowledge and skills, biodiversity and environmental protection, etc. In addition, other relevant topics will be studied later, if resources, including human resources, become available. For now, work on the Encyclopedia can be expected to continue for a long time.

Why is the *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal* needed? Its necessity, justification, importance, and potential contribution to the state and society are outlined in the following ten points.

(1) Whether we call it NFDIN's duty, function, or whatever, its main task is to generate knowledge and disseminate it throughout the country as much as possible

and also among different sections of the society so that it could contribute to social change and state policy formulation. NFDIN has been fulfilling this responsibility since its inception. What knowledge and what kind of knowledge? The very name NFDIN indicates that it should be beneficial for the development of Adivasi Janajatis (indigenous nationalities) of Nepal. In a sense, making this Encyclopedia is a continuation of the work that NFDIN has been doing for a long time. But from another perspective, this work is of special and unique nature, whose importance and usefulness for the society and the country will remain forever.

(2) There is no dearth of literature on Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. Thousands of articles and hundreds of books have already been published on this community. They will be very useful materials for making the Encyclopedia. But from an academic perspective, many outstanding books are in English; only a few are in Nepali. Books written in English have their limitations. One, linguistic limitation: they are not accessible for those who are not proficient in English. Two, content limitation: most of them focus on one particular group; therefore, there is no information about others. And three, time limitation: the details and analysis contained therein are bound by the time period of the author's research, which consequently misses contemporary topics. The Encyclopedia in making will be broad and comprehensive

in every aspect. It will be written in a simple style in both Nepali and English. In addition, the respective ethnic organizations will be encouraged to translate and publish it into their own respective mother tongues. Therefore, readership of this Encyclopedia will increase. In terms of content, it will contain a description of the overall situation of all Adivasi Janajatis as well as of each group. It will review their history, depict their current situation, and provide suggestions on the steps to be taken in the future for their upliftment.

(3) There are many articles and books in Nepali language about Janajatis of Nepal. Most of these works have come out with the emergence of Janajati movement of the 1990s, and more specifically from the second successful People's Movement of 2006 while responding to Janajatis' demands/agendas during the time of making of the new constitution (2008–2015). These works, which emerged in the course of constructing their own ethnic narratives, contain some mixture of emotion, desire, urge, prejudice, and exaggeration. While preparing the Encyclopedia, an effort will be made to get rid of these to the extent possible. Knowledge will be sought through scientific research methods, and information and data obtained for this will be objectively analyzed and presented.

(4) Making the Encyclopedia scientific and objective does not mean that it will deviate from its goals. The need of the hour is to deconstruct something—for example, the hierarchical social inequality between castes (*jat*) and ethnic groups (*jati*) created by the old Civil Code (Muluki Ain) of 1854, and the structural discrimination and exclusion imposed thereafter. At the same time, something needs to be reconstructed—for example, restructuring of the state in a way that addresses ethnic identity and identity-based rights. The Encyclopedia will provide the necessary intellectual nourishment for such deconstruction and reconstruction. It is

expected that the state, sooner or later, will follow this mission.

(5) NFDIN has a sweet memory in this regard. It has grouped the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal into five categories, including the endangered one. The state adopted it and turned it into a policy. As a result, members of ten Adivasi Janajatis within the endangered category have been receiving a living allowance of Rs. 4,000 every month. It is expected that such commendable work will continue. Many provisions in the constitution related to Adivasi Janajatis are inactive. There is no shortage of those who doubt the intentions of those in power for this inactivity. However, it is a fact that data, information, and knowledge required to implement for some important provisions of the constitution (such as the formation of special structures and review of the boundaries of provinces) are lacking. We believe that this gap will be fulfilled by the Encyclopedia. Today's research is tomorrow's policy and the day after tomorrow's result.

(6) Stakeholder organizations and activists also have a role to play to hold the state accountable for addressing the legitimate agendas of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. It can be expected that the knowledge generated from the Encyclopedia will be useful in matters such as how to refine Adivasi Janajatis' demands/agendas to make them practical and realistic, and what strategies need to be adopted in the changing circumstances.

(7) There are some contradictions. For example, the number of Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act 2002 is 60 (including one recently added, Ranatharu), but the census reports released by the National Statistics Office (NSO), a government institution, does not include data on seven of the listed Adivasi Janajatis (Barha Gaunle, Chhairotan, Marphali, Siyar, Tangbe, Thudam, and Tin Gaunle Thakali). Instead, 14 Adivasi Janajatis that were not listed in the Act appeared in the 2021

census. Among them were the Janajatis that were previously included as Rai but were mentioned as a separate group in the latest census, which included Aathpahariya, Bantawa, Chamling, Khaling, Kulung, Lohorung, Mewahang, Sampang, Thulung, and Yamphu, while Bahing, Nachhiring, and Pun were previously included in some other ethnic groups. Accordingly, the number of Adivasi Janajatis has now reached 71. If this trend continues, the number is likely to increase in the coming days. The task force formed under the convenorship of Om Gurung had increased this number to 81. Therefore, there is confusion about the actual number of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. Is it only 60 as listed in the Act, or is it less (because some are not mentioned in the census) or more (because the number has been increasing with each census)? It can be expected that the Encyclopedia will help to solve this problem.

(8) Another problem that has surfaced is that the jurisdiction of Adivasi Janajati Ayog (Indigenous Nationalities Commission [INC]) and NFDIN overlaps in some aspects, as the mission of both is the same: institutionalization of identity and rights of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. But these are two distinct types of institutions. The core function of one (NFDIN) is to generate knowledge, and the main responsibility of the other (INC) is to play a role in transforming the knowledge produced into state policy. For this purpose, too, it can be expected that the knowledge generated from the Encyclopedia will be useful.

(9) The work of synthesizing and integrating previously published works on Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal—such as books, reports, and articles, which are important but scattered—into a single thread will be carried out, besides adding missing topics or new contents. Through this, the reader will gain basic information and knowledge about the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal within a single collection.

(10) Who are the target readers of the Encyclopedia? Who are the consumers, users, and beneficiaries of the knowledge produced by it? Its readers can be of all kinds, but it is mainly targeted at five types of individuals and institutions. One, the general public (both Nepalis and foreigners)—there will be no language barrier for them, as it will be published in Nepali, English, and the mother tongues as well. Two, the new generation—especially future researchers, for whom it will serve as a foundation for indigenous studies. Therefore, it will be a very useful reference material for them. Three, the media—which will play an important role in spreading the knowledge produced by the Encyclopedia far and wide. Four, activists—this Encyclopedia will be a basic document for the stakeholder organizations and activists involved in the indigenous movement. Five, policy makers—such as government at all levels (local, provincial, and federal), legislature, planning commission, political parties, administration, public organizations, intellectuals, non-governmental organizations and international donor organizations, and foreign missions that are directly or indirectly involved in formulating the country's policies, plans, and programs.

How is the *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal* being prepared? What are its research methods? How much human resource is required for this? What are its action plans? The answers to these questions are presented in a formulaic manner in the points below.

One, the existing knowledge is the main source for this Encyclopedia project. A review of important and quality books published on Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal will be undertaken. The knowledge scattered across these various works will be synthesized and integrated.

Two, of course, the fund of knowledge will be increased by building on the foundation

of existing knowledge. Two things need to be added here. First, it is necessary to correct the shortcomings seen in previously published works. For example, some authors have considered Chhantyal as descendants of a Thakuri clan, while others have called it a descendant of Magar. But a latest work on this community asserts that Chhantyal is neither Thakuri nor Magar, but instead an indigenous group distinct from these two (Chhantyal 2077 vs). Second, the lifestyle of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal is constantly and rapidly changing. For example, on the one hand, indigeneity is rapidly decreasing in their daily lives; on the other, a new awareness is also emerging about the importance of identity. Such new dimensions that are not found in previously published works will be explored. The sources required for this will be collected through two methods: by conducting field studies in their homelands, and by discussions with experts and stakeholders.

Three, international laws and declarations will be used as important documents for theoretical aspects of identity and identity-based rights. Some important work on the statuses, movements, issues, relations with the state, etc., of indigenous groups in other countries will be useful for comparative purpose as well.

Four, in order to obtain information about the relationship between Adivasi Janajatis and the Nepali state, a number of relevant documents will be collected and reviewed. Relevant documents may be constitutions and laws of Nepal, manifestos of political parties, policies and programs of the government, resolutions passed by the parliament, court decisions, periodic plans, and censuses.

Five, other important sources for this study are documents extracted from time to time from the three organizations directly concerned with the Adivasi Janajati movement in Nepal (INC, NFDIN, and Nepal Federation

of Indigenous Nationalities, NEFIN), and the organizations affiliated with them. They will provide information on what the Adivasi Janajati movement was like in the past, what it is at present, and what its strategy will be in the future.

Finally, other sources required for this study are reports published at various times by international organizations and donor agencies operating in Nepal. In addition, a critical study of similar reports published by Nepali non-governmental organizations will also be conducted.

Apart from those mentioned above, the door will be kept open to using all types of research methods as needed.

A tentative work plan for the first phase (five years) of the production of the *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal* has been prepared, which is as follows:

1. Introduction (FY 2024/25)
2. Origin and history (FY 2025/26)
3. Language and literature (FY 2026/27)
4. Customary laws and traditions (FY 2027/28)
5. Natural resources and economic situation (FY 2028/29)
6. Political representation and participation (FY 2029/30)

A detailed outline of the human resources and budget required for this work has not yet been prepared. Apart from the preliminary work on introduction (a report prepared by a team of four members in three months), about 25 persons (principal researcher, subject-specific or thematic experts, desk researchers, field researchers, research assistants, and administration-accountant) are required for each year for each topic. The duration of recruitment for each year will vary: some will

be for one year, others for 6 months, and some other for 3 months.

Background

Identity-based all-round development is the common mission of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. Its main goal is to deconstruct the hierarchical social structure, economic exploitation, and political power monopolized by a dominant caste group, rooted in Vedic order and sanctioned by the old Muluki Ain 1854. The goal is also to tear down the walls of structural exclusion imposed in the course of building a mono-lingual, mono-ethnic, mono-religious, and mono-cultural state. Therefore, identity-based all-round development is a multidimensional task, as pointed out below.

First is to make Adivasi Janajatis capable—in the face of modernization, democratization, and globalization—to cope up with the changes in lifestyle and economic situation—not by forgetting, devaluing, or destroying things related to identity, but by preserving their languages, literatures, cultures, and traditions. For Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal, development is not only physical construction, but also protection and promotion of their own unique social and cultural traditions.

Second is to establish an economy based on social justice by adopting progressive measures such as affirmative action and reservations—that is, promoting fair and equitable distribution of new opportunities that emerge in the economic sector.

And third is to establish an inclusive state by increasing representation and participation at every level and in every institution of governance and administration.

Production and dissemination of knowledge are essential for construction of a new society, economy, and political structure that is connected to identity-based all-

round development. It is expected that the Encyclopedia will assist in this mission.

Though this is a first attempt at developing the Encyclopedia, it is not starting from scratch. It attempts to review and integrate scattered materials, add missing topics, and weave them into a single whole, building on the foundation of existing knowledge.

Overview of Literature on Ethnic Groups

Many books and articles have been published on the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal from various perspectives at different times. Some of the non-Aryans depicted in religious epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are living within the present borders of Nepal as Adivasi Janajatis. Some of them (e.g., Chepang and Kushunda) trace their origins to the story of Rama in the Treta Yuga, while some (e.g., Rajbanshi) trace their origins to the Mahabharata in the Dwapara Yuga. Some Janajatis turn to genealogies (*vamshavali*)—such as Gopal Vamshavali, Bhasha Vamshavali, Wright Vamshavali, and clan genealogies—to evidence their existence since ancient times. Religious texts of some groups (for example, Mundum of Kirat) contain detailed descriptions of social, cultural, and religious aspects of the concerned group. Some groups have also presented legends, myths, lore, and oral history to claim that they have been in the land of present-day Nepal since ancient times.

Some ethnic groups of Nepal cite written travelogues to prove their indigenous identity—such as the travelogue of the Chinese traveler Huan-Tsang's visit to Nepal during the Lichchhavi period. *Lichhavikalka Abhilekh* (Inscriptions of Lichchhavi Period) (2053 vs) and *Madhyakalka Abhilekh* (Inscription of Medieval Period) (2056 vs) compiled by Dhanavajra Bajracharya contain descriptions

of some Janajatis. Other important documents in this category are books written by anthropologists, diplomats, and others working at the British mission/embassy in Nepal after its unification—such as Kirkpatrick (1969/1811), Hamilton (1986/1819), Hudson (1972/1874), Wright (1972/1877), Oldfield (1981/1880), Landon (1928), and Levy (2024/1905–1908). Perhaps the last foreign researcher who did this kind of work was Toni Hagen, who spent a long time visiting every corner of Nepal and documented the information he obtained in detail in his book (Hagen 1960). These texts provide a comprehensive picture of Nepal; they also provide detailed descriptions of the origin, history, customs, culture, and social and economic condition of many of the ethnic groups of Nepal.

Since 1950, with the end of the Rana regime and establishment of multiparty democracy, Nepal opened itself to the wider world, and the work of writing ethnographies of specific ethnic groups began, mainly by foreigners, especially by Western anthropologists. Some important books for which field research were conducted during the first democratic period (1950–1960) and which were published later are Fürer-Haimendorf (1972) on Sherpas, Hitchcock (1966) on Magars, and Pignede (1966) on Gurungs. During this period, ethnographic books by some Janajati scholars were also published—for example, Gopal Singh Nepali (1965) on Newars, Iman Singh Chemjong (1967) on Kirats, and Santabir Lama (2025 vs) on Tamangs.

The partyless Panchayat system, introduced in 1960, replaced the multiparty democracy established only a decade earlier. Despite the adverse political situation, academic work continued, although it was monitored and controlled by the then authoritarian regime and its rulers. Despite limited academic freedom, foreign scholars made a great contribution to the continuity of the study.

Foreign scholars conducted field research on specific ethnic groups living in specific areas, and books on their ethnographic descriptions were published. Due to personal interest as well as perhaps geographical accessibility, many foreign anthropologists wrote about the Newar ethnic group of various places: for example, Gellner (1992) on Newars of Lalitpur and Levy (1990) and Paris (1997) on Newars of Bhaktapur. This also applies to a large number of studies and publications on the Tamang people: for example, Hofer (1981), Holmberg (1989), Fricke (1993), Fisher (2001), and March (2002). After Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Sherpa conquered the Mount Everest for the first time in 1953, the Sherpas became a mysterious and exotic people. Several foreign anthropologists went to the settlements of these people and conducted field trips and collected information, which they have described in their books: for example, Ortner (1978, 1989), Fürer-Haimendorf (1984), Adams (1996), and Fisher (1990). In 1959, Tibet was annexed by communist China. Dalai Lama and his followers then crossed the Himalayas and took refuge in India through Nepal. Some Tibetan refugees stayed in Nepal. Then, Khampas launched an unsuccessful armed rebellion for an independent Tibet using the Himalayan region of Nepal as their base. These events might have also motivated to do research on the Himalayas and the Himalayan peoples of Nepal, especially by anthropologists from the West. As a result, notable books on Thakali and Mustang were published: e.g., Peissel (1967), Georg (1996), Ramble (2008), and Vinding (2008). The various ethnic groups in the British army (e.g., Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Rai) were another subject of curiosity. As a result, in-depth books on Limbu were published: e.g., Caplan (1970), van Driem (1987), and Sagant (1996). Academic works have also been published on Rai: e.g., McDougal (1979), Hansson (1991), and Gaenzle (2002). Some scholars have written

on Magar: e.g., Hitchcock (1966), Kawakita (1974), and Molnar (1981). Important books on Gurung have been published: e.g., Andors (1976), Macfarlane (1976), Messerschmidt (1976), Ragsdale (1979), and Pignede (1993). Some in-depth studies on Tharu have been conducted and published: e.g., Krauskopff and Meyer (2000) and Guneratne (2002). Books have also been published about some minority ethnic groups—for example, Caughley (1982) on Chepang and Snellgrove (1992) on Dolpo.

It is also necessary to appreciate the contribution of native scholars to the academic work on Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. *People of Nepal* (1967) by Dor Bahadur Bista—which was later published in Nepali as *Sabai Jatako Phulbari* (2002)—is probably the first in which many ethnic groups of Nepal could see themselves, albeit concisely. Another important book in this line is *Hamro Samaj Ek Adhyayan* (2039 vs) by Janak Lal Sharma. It includes the socio-cultural lives of major ethnic groups of Nepal (e.g., Newar, Magar, Gurung, Tamang, Tharu, Sherpa and Kirat [Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar], Thami, and Dhimal) in some detail. A more detailed description is available in the books titled *Nepal ko Jatiya (Samajik) Sanskar* (2060–2079 vs) edited by Prem Khatri in eight volumes. *Tribal Ethnography of Nepal* (1994), written in two volumes in English by Rajesh Gautam and Asoke K. Thapa-Magar, is another important work. Later, two separate books with the same title *Nepal ko Adivasi Janajati*, written by Tamla Ukyav and Shyam Adhikari (2057 vs) and Madhusudan Pandey (2060 vs), came out in the market in the style of *Sabai Jatako Phulbari*.

A new trend appeared with the entry of Harka Gurung into the work of knowledge production on Janajatis issues—the beginning of indigenous narrative of Nepali society, economy, and politics. Before him, writers on these issues were mainly non-indigenous—foreign scholars and Nepali writers of Khas

Arya background. Although books written by Iman Singh Chemjong were published in the early days of the Panchayat period (i.e., in the 1960s), these were mainly focused on the Kirat land and the Kirat people. But Harka Gurung's writings covered a wider section of peoples, Adivasi Janajatis in particular, and have also given reliable details about the homelands of these peoples. He visited each nook and corner of Nepal and informed the society about the various ethnic groups; his observations and experiences were later compiled and published in more than a dozen books. The indigenous narrative initiated by Harka Gurung has been continued by other indigenous scholars.

It is worth mentioning here that Harka Gurung's entry into the academic field took place in a different political background. The People's Movement of 1990 led to the fall of the authoritarian partyless Panchayat system and the re-establishment of multiparty democracy. In a democratic environment with unfettered freedom of speech and writing, the scope of study and research on Janajatis expanded. It did not get limited to socio-cultural issues, like it had been during the Panchayat period. After 1990, there was rise of awareness among indigenous peoples; a number of ethnic organizations were established; the scale of ethnic movements grew up rapidly; the Maoists "People's War" further advanced ethnic agendas; and against the backdrop of the successful People's Movement of 2006, the dream of building a "New Nepal" with inclusive democracy was envisioned. The international environment was also favorable. In 1989, ILO 169 was adopted; the United Nations declared 1994–2004 as the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People; and in 2007 the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted.

In the changing and favorable environment that emerged in the national and international arena, the subject of study and research related

to Nepal's Janajati groups also expanded. Search of knowledge was not just limited to slogans but expanded to important areas such as identity, collective rights, ethnic autonomy, indigenous people's rights over natural resources (water, land, and forest), right to self-determination, customary law, linguistic and cultural equality, secularism, reservation and affirmative action, proportional inclusive representation, inclusive democracy, and federalism, identity-based federalism in particular. Many indigenous activists also wrote on these issues. Academics also somehow appeared as activists. From the time of establishment of the NEFIN in 1991 to the second People's Movement of 2006, its leaders—Suresh Ale Magar, Parashuram Tamang, Bal Krishna Mabuhang, and Om Gurung respectively—were also academic by training. Many academics from indigenous backgrounds, including Harka Gurung, contributed to the creation of indigenous discourse on the above-mentioned issues. Some of the names that come to the forefront who made significant contributions to the creation and expansion of indigenous discourse on Nepali society and state are Krishna Bahadur Bhattachan, Mahendra Lawoti, Til Bikram Nembang, Sitaram Tamang, Parashuram Tamang, Ganeshman Gurung, Om Gurung, Mukta Singh Lama, Chaitanya Subba, Amrit Yonjan, Balkrishna Mabuhang, Sumitra Manandhar-Gurung, Bhagiraj Innam, Sanjay Sherchan, and Shankar Limbu. Books written by each of these authors are available in the market. All of them have also written countless articles, and these have been published in various journals and edited books.

Among the non-indigenous writers who write in the same spirit on the themes, thoughts, and ideas as the scholars of the indigenous background mentioned above are Govinda Neupane (2000), Khagendra Sangraula (Prasai 2079 vs), and Yug Pathak (2074 vs). In the changing political environment after 1990, the contents of research carried out by new as well

as established scholars, both native and foreign, became broader. During the Panchayat period, studies on ethnic groups used to focus on the language, culture, and customs of a particular group. But studies conducted now focus more on the awareness of Adivasi Janajatis, the agenda they carry, and their political movement. Two books on Tharu published after 1990 that are based on field research can be taken as an example: Guneratne's *Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal* (2002) and Fujikura's *Discourse of Awareness: Development, Social Movements and the Practices of Freedom* (2013). Both of these books have given sufficient space to the Tharu ethnic awakening and movement. Another example is the edited book titled *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom* (Gellner et al. 1997), which collected articles by foreign scholars who have been continuously engaged in research on Nepal (e.g., Allen, Burkert, Campbell, Gaenzle, Gellner, Hutt, Macfarlane, McDonough, Michaels, Pfaff-Czarnecka, Ramble, Russell). Each article describes the issues of new ethnic awakening and movement that emerged after the re-establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990 among the ethnic groups they previously studied (e.g., Newar, Gurung, Tamang, Tharu, Rai, and Bote).

There have also been institutional efforts to produce indigenous knowledge. Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) of Tribhuvan University and Nepal Academy are worth mentioning in this regard. The scope of study of these institutions is wide, and one is ethnic studies. Both have conducted research on various castes and ethnic groups since the Panchayat period, and this has continued after the re-establishment of multiparty system. Books written by academics involved in CNAS were on Bote, Dhimal, Kisan, Koche, Kumal, Meche, Rai, Rajbanshi, Satar, Tajpuriya, Tharu, etc. Similarly, Nepal Academy has published ethnographic profiles of about a

dozen ethnic groups (e.g., Bote, Chepang, Dhimal, Dura, Hayu, Kirat, Kumal, Kushunda, Lapcha, Limbu, Nubri, Tamang, Tharu). The latest notable work at the university level is a comprehensive research on social inclusion conducted by the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University (TU). The findings of the study were published in three different forms—surveys; caste/ethnic and linguistic maps (atlases); and ethnographic profiles (Gurung et al. 2014), which covered 42 caste/ethnic groups, including some minority groups and Dalits. Some research-oriented non-governmental organizations (e.g., Martin Chautari, Social Science Baha, and Nepal Center for Contemporary Studies) have also conducted sporadic studies and publications on ethnic issues. NGOs run by ethnic activists did not confine their role only to street protests but also participated in seminars/workshops with advocacy on issues of ethnic concerns. Indeed, they produced books on contemporary issues for advocacy and lobby. As an example, Lawyers' Association for Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), on the one hand, has been continuously advocating for the rights of Nepali indigenous peoples and, on the other, has been conducting research on indigenous issues from a legal and political perspective. The number of books published by this organization on indigenous issues has reached about three dozen.

INC, NEFIN, and NFDIN are both creators as well as consumers of knowledge on indigenous issues. The main scope of INC is to depict the current social, economic, and political situation of the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal and to recommend the government about the steps that need to be taken for recognition of their identity and identity-based rights. This is reflected in their annual report submitted to the President of Nepal every year. In this sense, these reports are important documents. In addition, INC has also been engaged in

research and publication. Apart from these, INC sometimes organizes debates and discussions on the issues of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal

The largest number of research, debate, discussion, and publication work on indigenous issues has been done by NEFIN and its affiliated organizations, although many of the books published by these institutions cannot be considered academically sound. This is natural, because the main utility of the knowledge acquired by these organizations is to mobilize stakeholder groups in favor of the agenda they carry; to lobby political parties, parliament, and foreign donor agencies; and to put pressure on the government. At one time, NEFIN, with the financial support of DFID, had conducted a large-scale project called Empowerment of Indigenous Peoples, and a part of this project was research. Recently, NEFIN has also published two books (Chhantyal and Thami 2077 vs; Chhantyal and Rai 2075 vs). But for NEFIN, academic work is like seasonal farming: it wakes up when the donor provides financial support and sleeps at other times. This also applies to the organizations of ethnic groups affiliated to NEFIN, although some of them (e.g., Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Newar, Rai, Thakali, Thakali, Tharu) have their own research departments or centers. They publish bulletins, magazines, and journals, and they also have human resources required for it. An example of how intensive, high-quality, and thorough work can be done if necessary financial resources are mobilized is the *Newa: Sanskritik Gyankosh* (Newa Cultural Encyclopedia) (Malla et al. 2080 vs), recently published in five volumes by Nepalbhasa Academy. But at present, most of the Janajatis organizations have not been able to continue their research activities. The main reason for this is lack of financial resources.

NFDIN is an institution that has its own financial resources, although they are limited. Regular activities of NFDIN include providing financial support to programs of Janajati

organizations; providing grants to small research projects; and publishing bulletins, journals, and books. NFDIN has been carrying out academic work in keeping with its name—sometimes at a rapid pace, sometimes at a slow pace—and is currently in a state of revival. NFDIN has now embarked on an ambitious project, namely, the creation of *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal*. Through study, research, and publication, NFDIN has done remarkable work in three areas: (1) preparing ethnographic profiles of Adivasi Janajatis, in which ethnographic profiles of 32 groups have been published so far (Bahra Gaunle, Baram, Bote, Chepang, Chhantyal, Dhimal, Dura, Gurung, Hayu, Jhangad, Jirel, Kumal, Lepcha, Limbu, Magar, Majhi, Marphali, Mughal, Newar, Pahari, Rajbanshi, Raji, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Surel, Tamang, Tangbe, Thakali, Thami, Tharu, Tin Gaunle Thakali, and Yakkha); (2) Preparing and publishing ethnic and linguistic maps or atlases; and (3) Preparing dictionaries and grammars of the languages of backward indigenous nationalities.

Until recently, especially before the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015, there was no shortage of financial resources for knowledge production work on Adivasi Janajatis and other marginalized communities of Nepal. Many donor organizations (e.g., DANIDA, DFID, FINIDA, GTZ, NORAD, SNV, Swiss Development Cooperation, UNDP, USAID, World Bank) had invested directly or indirectly, and individually or jointly. Many established authors and hundreds of new researchers benefited from the Social Inclusion Research Fund (SIRF), which was funded by NORAD for a decade. There has also been a lot of debate on the issue of social inclusion. Some donors have conducted large-scale research projects at their own initiative and published the results; for example, *Unequal Citizens*, published in collaboration with the World Bank and DFID (2006) and *Nepal Human Development*

Report, published periodically by UNDP since 1998 (e.g. UNDP 2009). These donors do not seem to be active now; as a result, the work of producing indigenous knowledge has slowed down.

The works reviewed above can be categorized into three types of knowledge production. The first are ethnographic profiles, which provide information on the origin, settlement, dress, lifestyle, language, religion, culture, lifecycle rituals, ethno-biological knowledge, economic status including occupation, customary law, traditional self-government, representation and participation in governance, etc., of the concerned indigenous group. *Mesocosm* (1990) written by R.I. Levy about Newars of Bhaktapur and *Ethnography of Thakali* (2078 vs) written by Chan Bhattachan are some examples.

The second are works not about a particular group but about the common suffering (e.g., ethnic and linguistic discrimination and oppression, exploitation in the economic sector, backwardness and deprivation of opportunities, political exclusion) and common aspirations (e.g., identity and identity-based rights, pursuit of equal opportunities in economic development through reservations and other progressive measures, including affirmative action, and inclusive democracy with secularism and identity-based federal structure) of all Adivasi Janajatis. Analytical texts that highlight these issues include, for example, Govinda Neupane's *The Ethnic Question of Nepal* (2000) and David Gellner's edited volume *Ethnic Activism and Civil Society in South Asia* (2009).

The third type of works are statistical studies on ethnic groups that paint a picture of their political economy. Since 1992, immediately after the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990, the Department of Statistics has been publishing ethnic and linguistic data. This has certainly helped in identifying the locations of Adivasi Janajatis. Such mapping has also been done by NFDIN (Gurung et al. 2006a, 2006b)

and the Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology of Tribhuvan University (Tamang et al. 2014). These books can be useful in reviewing the boundaries of the provinces of federal Nepal and in mapping the territories of special structures. Most importantly, the periodic study of the Human Development Index (which also includes the poverty index) conducted by UNDP Nepal since 1998 has shown that most of the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal are socially backward, economically marginalized, and politically excluded. This has been further confirmed by other research, such as *Unequal Citizens*, a joint publication by DFID and the World Bank (2006).

Besides correlation between knowledge production and social awareness, use of the knowledge produced and formulation of law and policies are interrelated. In this context, the existing literature on Janajatis can be viewed from three aspects. First, the initial knowledge production on Janajati groups in Nepal was limited in content to the social and cultural aspects of a particular group; the narrative was non-indigenous, as the authors were mostly foreign researchers and a few Nepali scholars of Khas Arya background. Access was also limited, as most of the texts were written in English. At that time, the literacy rate of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal except the Newars was low, and the number of people from these communities who had attained higher education could be counted on the fingers of one hand. However, the knowledge produced in the early period has served as a foundation for researchers, and such knowledge has been reproduced and also increased by building on it and adding new themes.

The period after the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990 can be considered a renaissance in the production of indigenous knowledge. The society has been changing, along with it the construction of Janajati narrative. The community that was

disparaged as *matawali* (alcohol consumers) in the past has now gained the prestigious status of Adivasi Janajati. As another example, at time of its inception, the name of the umbrella organization of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal was just “Janajati Mahasangh” (Federation of Nationalities). But after the realization that Adivasis (indigenous people) are entitled with and deserve specific rights and privileges, the adjectival term “Adivasi” was added to the original name, and therefrom it became “Adivasi Janajati Mahasangh” (Federation of Indigenous Nationalities). Writers, researchers, and scholars from indigenous backgrounds played a significant role in this shift. Based on the knowledge produced, indigenous issues (such as identity, community rights, linguistic and cultural rights, and ethnic autonomy) were promoted, and this, in turn, helped fuel the rising Janajati movement. Its impact has also been seen in state policy-making. After the second successful People’s Movement of 2006, all periodic plans prepared by the National Planning Commission have included policies, plans, and programs related to Adivasi Janajatis. Mother tongues have found a place in government media (such as Gorkhapatra, Radio Nepal, and Nepal Television). The work of developing curricula in mother tongues is increasing day by day, and some public schools have already started using such curricula. Another notable achievement was the ratification of ILO 169 by the parliament of Nepal in 2007.

Some of the agendas that emerged during the construction of the indigenous narrative have been adopted in various articles and clauses in the new constitution promulgated in 2015: for example, affirmative action (Article 18[2]), secularism (Article 4), religious freedom (Article 26), education in mother tongue (Article 31[5]), mother tongue also as an official language in government/administration at the provincial and local levels (Article 7[2]),

multilingual policy (Article 51[c7]), and living with identity (Article 51[j8]). The provisions for representation of ethnic groups in governance and elected bodies are mentioned in the following articles: special structures including special, protected and autonomous regions (Article 56[5]), composition of House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly (Articles 84[2] and 176[1b], respectively), constitution of the federal and provincial councils of ministers (Articles 76[9] and 168[9], respectively), political parties (Article 169[4c]), INC (Article 261), appointment and nomination of officials of constitutional bodies including ambassadors (Articles 282 and 283), and reservation in government services (Article 285). All of these are related only to non-territorial inclusion, not to territorial inclusion. Therefore, there is dissension of Adivasi Janajatis on some provisions of the new constitution—especially on the design of provinces (name, number, and borders) of federal Nepal. The new constitution has not accepted the common aspiration of Adivasi Janajatis to create identity-based provinces in line with territorial contiguity of ethnic settlements of the respective groups. However, some important agendas that emerged in the course of intellectual exercises as well as the Janajati movement (such as proportional representation, inclusion, secularism, multilingual policy, reservation, affirmative action, social justice) have been reflected in the articles and clauses of the new constitution.

In conclusion, the production and application of academic knowledge (debates, research, and publications) have provided intellectual nourishment for the rise of ethnic awareness, setting agendas of indigenous communities, accelerating the indigenous movement, and responding to some agendas of Adivasi Janajatis by the Nepali state (Onta 2006: 332; Hachhethu 2023). Thus, this has established that knowledge is power. Inspired

by this, the work of preparing the *Encyclopedia of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal* has begun so that the scattered knowledge in this regard can be integrated and viewed through a single lens. It is also important due to the fact that after the promulgation of the new constitution there has been a slack of research on Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. This needs to be overcome. The surge in the creation of indigenous discourse after 1990 should be revived. The Encyclopedia can make a significant contribution to such a revival.

Introduction: Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal

According to the 2021 census, there are currently 142 castes and ethnic groups in Nepal, including Muslims and Punjabis who do not belong to any caste (*jat*) or ethnic group (*jati*). What is caste? What is ethnicity? Which ones among those listed in the census belong to which category, caste or ethnic group? In the context of Nepal, these questions do not pose a definitional problem. Those which are placed in hierarchical order based on Hindu scriptures such as Vedas, Puranas, and Manusmriti (e.g., Hill Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Thakuris, Sanyasis, and Dalits; and Madhesi Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Kayasthas, Pachpanniyas [Yadavs, Shas, etc.], and Dalits) fall into the caste category. On the contrary, others who live on the principle of equality (i.e., without caste hierarchy) fall under Janajati category. There are some exceptions to this categorization. For example, both the Hindu and Buddhist Newars have caste hierarchy, although such hierarchy is different from the four varnas (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra). Newar has been included as a Janajati. It is argued that Newar is a community that originated on the basis of social equality. Before Jayasthiti Malla divided this community on the basis of occupation during the Malla period, there

was no ranking of high and low castes in this community. Another contested group is Khas Matawali, or Matawali Kshetri. Khas Matawali, who live in the hills west of Karnali River (i.e., the area below the Jadan of the present Karnali Province and the hilly areas of the Sudur-Paschim Province), worship *masto*. Initially, they were nature-worshippers and were Buddhists before embracing Hinduism (Mainali 2075 vs: 35). Like many other Adivasi Janajatis, Khas Matawali use shamans for treatment and religious purposes. Many researchers, including Harka Gurung (2004: 421), believe that these followers of shamanism were Hinduized only after the 12th century, and have asserted that the Khas Matawali also fall within the Janajati category. But in practice, in laws and regulations, and in governance, Khas Matawali are placed with the Kshetri caste within the Khas Arya.

In Nepal, *jati* (ethnic group) and Janajati are synonymous. But there is no common understanding on the definition of Janajati between the scholars of indigenous background and the state. According to the definition put forward by NEFIN in 1994, Adivasi Janajatis are (a) socially egalitarianism, (b) non-Hindu, (c) having their own language and ancestral territory, (d) deprived of tribal resources, and (e) excluded from policy-making. This seems to have influenced the five-member task force formed under the convenorship of Santa Bahadur Gurung to establish NEFIN. According to the Gurung task force, “those who have their own mother tongue and traditional customs but do not fall within the four-varna Hindu caste system are considered Janajatis.” In addition, the following nine characteristics are required to be registered as a Janajati:

1. who have a distinct collective cultural identity;
2. who have their own traditional language, religion, customs, and culture;

3. whose traditional social structure is based on equality;
4. who have their own traditional homeland in specific geographical regions;
5. who have their written or oral history;
6. who have a “we-feeling” within their communities;
7. who do not have an influential role in the politics and governance of modern Nepal;
8. who are indigenous peoples of Nepal;
9. who call themselves Janajatis. (NFDIN 2059 vs: 16–17)

This robust definition of Janajatis made by NEFIN and the task force was not acceptable to the state. The then parliament and government defined indigenous people loosely. While formulating the NFDIN Act, the above-mentioned Point 4 (having traditional homeland in specific geographical regions), Point 6 (having a sense of “we-feeling”), Point 7 (being politically excluded), and Point 8 (being indigenous to Nepal) were rejected. By adopting only Points 1, 2, 3, and 5, the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous/Nationalities Act 2002 has defined Adivasi/Janajatis as follows: “Indigenous/Nationalities’ means a tribe or community as mentioned in the Schedule having its own mother tongue and traditional rites and customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or unwritten history.” Since the Schedule in the Act lists 59 groups, this Act can also be considered a rigid document, although there is a provision in the Act that the list can be expanded or shortened. But from another perspective, due to the flexible definition of Adivasi/Janajatis in this Act, there is no specific legal and religious restriction on being a Janajati or an Adivasi or both (Adivasi Janajati). NEFIN and the Gurung task force’s insistence that Adivasi Janajati must be non-Hindu risked narrowing

the scope of Adivasi Janajatis. Of the 26 ethnic groups included in the 1991 census, most of the people (minimum 57 percent of Thakali to maximum 100 percent of Dhanuk and Gangai) from all 22 Adivasi Janajatis (including Newar, Magar, Gurung, Tharu) registered their religion as Hindu (Subba 2060 vs: 19). However, the NFDIN Act relaxed the definition of Adivasi/Janajati. Now, there is no restriction regarding religion to be an Adivasi Janajati. Whether Hindu or Buddhist, Newar is no longer restricted to obtaining the title of Adivasi Janajati. Since even those without a traditional homeland can be Janajatis, Adivasi Janajati now includes ethnic groups like Santhal that arrived in Nepal later than the Khas Arya did. The currently nomadic Raute and the Raji, Bankariya, and Kushwadiya who were in a similar situation until some time ago were also included in the list of Adivasi Janajatis. According to the Act, non-indigenous groups are also eligible to be a Janajati. At the same time, it is no longer a requirement to be a Janajati to be indigenous. Since there is no provision for needing to belong to an excluded group, even a caste or ethnic group belonging to other than Janajati could be placed as an Adivasi.

Around this time, in the 1990s, there was a hot debate on: Who is Janajati? Who is Adivasi? Are all Janajatis entitled to be Adivasis, or can only some Janajatis be Adivasis? Can or cannot groups other than Janajatis also be Adivasis? This debate resurfaced more extensively and intensively for about a decade during the 2006 second People's Movement and also during the time of making the new constitution (2008–2015).

Literally, Janajati and Adivasi do not mean the same: they have different meanings. A Janajati is an ethnic group formed on the basis of equality. Within it, no individual, family, or lineage is divided into higher and lower levels based on birth. A Janajati may or may not be an Adivasi. Because the word “Adivasi” refers

to a period of history that is mixed with human and geographical characteristics of a particular ethnic group, the synonymous word *bhumiputra* (son of the soil) is also used. In principle, groups other than Janajati can also be Adivasi.

It is mentioned somewhere above that at the time of its establishment in April 1991, the name of the umbrella organization of ethnic groups was simply “Nepal Janajati Mahasangh”, and the word “Adivasi” was not attached. Sometime after its establishment, the word “Adivasi” was added but with a slash (/) and its name became “Nepal Adivasi/Janajati Mahasangh.” This name with a slash (/) is also carried by the NFDIN Act 2002. The choice of word speaks for itself. Initially, there was no clarity as to whether the terms “Janajati” and “Adivasi” were same or different. Later, the name was corrected and the slash (/) was removed. Since then, its name has been “Nepal Adivasi Janajati Mahasangh” (Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities). In addition, it was claimed that all Janajatis of Nepal are Adivasis. This claim has also received legal recognition. In the new constitution, there is no slash in the name of the constitutional commission formed for this purpose; it has been clearly named *Adivasi Janajati Ayog* (Indigenous Nationalities Commission). Now these two words (Adivasi and Janajati) are used together rather than separately, whether in media reporting or in writings or in government documents. That is, in the context of Nepal, it has been socially recognized that a Janajati is an Adivasi and an Adivasi is a Janajati.

But the dispute has only subsided, not resolved. The new constitution recognizes that groups other than Janajati may be or have been Adivasi. For example, in Article 18(3) concerning affirmative action, the word “Adivasi” has been used just before “Adivasi Janajati.” The background to this is the Khas Arya movement that climaxed during the drafting of the constitution. The activists of

this movement, especially Khas Arya scholars, claimed that the Khas Arya were also Adivasi of Nepal (Upadhyaya and Siwakoti al. 2070 vs). Is this claim consistent with international laws and practice?

According to ILO 169, indigenous peoples (Adivasis) are those who have been living in the country since before the formation of a modern state and the fixation of its borders. The formation of the present-day Nepali state began with the unification by the Gorkha King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768, and its international borders were fixed by the Sugauli Treaty with British India in 1816. From this perspective, the claim of the Khas Arya to their Adivasi status has some validity. But the Janajatis find this ridiculous and put forward two arguments. One is that the Khas Arya, and especially Brahmins, are communities that entered Nepal only after the Muslim invasion of India in the 12th century, and many ethnic groups had been living in this region as natives since long before that. This interpretation, made by some Western historians and anthropologists who have researched in Nepal, and others such as Dor Bahadur Bista, has been followed by Janajati leaders: those who have existed since time immemorial are Adivasi, and the Khas Arya who arrived later are non-Adivasi. Perhaps it was with this in mind that Harka Gurung once said that the Himalayan ethnic groups are Janajatis only, not Adivasis (2004: 422). However, if this criterion (those who have existed since before and those who arrived later) is taken as the only basis, a question may arise regarding the Adivasi status of some of the groups listed as Adivasi Janajatis by the NEFDIN Act. This is because there is a history of Khas Arya settlement in this country long before some ethnic groups entered Nepal later. However, the counterargument is that a particular ethnic group (e.g., Santhal) who have historically resided in a particular land in Nepal are the first inhabitants of that area and

hence are Adivasi. This also applies to other ethnic groups that arrived in Nepal after the Khas Arya.

The other argument why Khas Arya cannot be Adivasi is more convincing; it is the qualification required to be indigenous (Adivasi) as laid down by ILO 169. Indigenous peoples are those who have been excluded from the mainstream. Tagadhari (Brahmin, Kshetri, Thakuri, and Sanyasi) within the Khas Arya have been a socially high-status, economically prosperous, and politically dominant community in state power since the unification of Nepal. Janajati is a socially oppressed, economically deprived, and politically excluded group that qualifies as Adivasi according to the ILO 169 criteria. To be an Adivasi, two integral attributes must be combined. One is historical continuity of settlements in specific areas within the country; the other is being excluded from state power, that is, being marginalized. NEFIN and the Gurung-led task force have followed this concept exactly while defining the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. Both history of settlement and state of exclusion apply to the Adivasis of Nepal.

According to ILO 169, indigenous peoples have special rights in various areas (e.g., self-government; right to self-determination; customary law; linguistic, religious and cultural rights). The Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal have been classified into five categories: endangered, highly marginalized, marginalized, disadvantaged, and advanced. One purpose of this classification is to ensure that those who are at the bottom should receive priority when getting benefits of affirmative action and reservation. Generally, tiny Janajatis are at the bottom, so they should be the first to receive benefits from the state. In addition, the Constitution has also made provisions for minority representation in local government and the upper house of the federal parliament. Out of the 59+1 Janajatis listed, 39 groups

with a population of less than 0.5 percent can be candidates and be elected as members of the National Assembly from the rural or urban municipalities and provinces in which they reside. The attraction to these benefits has led to fragmentation within the Janajati groups and the emergence of new small Adivasi groups. The number of ethnic organizations affiliated with NEFIN, formed initially by representatives of only eight ethnic organizations—Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Newar, Rai, Sherpa, Sunuwar, and Tamang—has now reached 56. NFDIN Act lists 59 + 1 (including Ranatharu) as Adivasi Janajatis. The Om Gurung-led task force had increased the number to 81. This has also had an impact on the census. The number of castes and ethnic groups has increased with each subsequent census: 59 in 1991; 98 in 2001; 125 in 2011; and 142 in 2021. The number of Janajati groups has also increased rapidly through these censuses: 26 in 1991; 44 in 2001; 46 in 2011; and 71 in 2021. Twelve new ethnic groups with geographical and linguistic differences from the Rai that were previously included under the Rai have been added as separate groups to the 2021 census.

Due to the benefits derived from reservation, affirmative action, and proportional representation, Tharus, who were included in both the larger groups of Janajati and Madhesi in the first and second Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, have recently severed ties with them and established a separate political identity. For the same purpose, Ranatharu was born by splitting off from Tharus. There is also politics behind this split. Madhesis and Tharus, who live side by side and have territorial contiguity in the Tarai, were the ones who strongly opposed the new constitution. If and when there were to be a reconciliation and brotherhood between these two, the course of politics could be different. It is to prevent such a situation from happening that the political parties, parliament, and government legally

split Tharus from the Madhesi community when they had the rein in their hands. With the same initiation, a new group like Ranatharu, which has a small population, was created as a splinter group within Tharus. Besides, the factor behind the increasing number of small Janajatis is also the politics within the political parties and NEFIN. NEFIN was previously led by activists from the majority Janajatis (e.g., Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Tamang, and Tharu). But since the new constitution was drafted, it has been led continuously by people from minority Janajati groups (Pasang Sherpa, Nagendra Kumal, Jagat Baram, and Gelje Lama Sherpa). When selecting the NEFIN leadership, the role of political party leaders with Janajati background often becomes prominent. There is also informal and tacit understanding among the tiny Janajatis to hold the leadership post of NEFIN. Out of a total of 56 organizations affiliated with NEFIN (each with only 1 vote in the general assembly), only 8 are majority ethnic groups (that is, those exceeding 1 percent of the country's total population); the rest are minorities.

On the one hand, the number of Janajatis is increasing, while on the other hand, the clock is also turning reverse. That is, tiny Adivasi Janajatis are going extinct. Seven of these groups (Bahra Gaunle, Chhairrotan, Marphali Thakali, Siyar, Tangbe, Thudam, and Tin Gaunle Thakali), though placed in the NFDIN's list of 60 indigenous nationalities, are not in the census record. Similarly, 12 Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act (Bankariya, Bahra Gaunle, Chhairrotan, Larke, Marphali Thakali, Mugali, Phree, Siyar, Surel, Tangbe, Thudam, and Tin Gaunle Thakali) were not included in the list of 98 minorities with less than 0.5 percent population prepared by the Government of Nepal in 2014.

Traditional Homeland (*Thatthalo*)

Based on topographical locations of their settlements, all Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal, large and small, can be divided into four groups: Himalayan, Hill, Inner-Tarai, and Tarai Janajatis.

Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis

Among the Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act, those belonging to the Himalayan group are Bahra Gaunle, Bhote, Byansi, Chhairrotan, Dolpo, Larke (Chumba/Nubri), Lhomi, Lhopa, Marphali Thakali, Mugali, Sherpa, Siyar, Tangbe, Thakali, Thudam, Tin Gaunle Thakali, Topkegola, and Walung. Some ethnic names, or ethnonyms (e.g., Bahra Gaunle, Bhote, Byansi, Dolpo, Marphali Thakali, Mugali, Thakali, Tin Gaunle Thakali, and Topkegola), are derived from place names (toponyms). Conversely, toponyms may have been derived from ethnonyms. Most Himalayan ethnic groups are numerically tiny minorities. There are three ethnic groups with a population of less than a thousand—Topkegola, Walung, and Lhomi. Except for Sherpa, none have a population exceeding sixteen thousand. According to information obtained from field studies, the populations of some other Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis, excluded from census, are also very low—for example, the number of Tin Gaunle Thakali is 1,163 (Gurung et al. 2068 vs: 7), of Bahra Gaunle is 3,965 (Pun 2068 vs: 3), and of Marphali Thakali is about 2,500 (Rai and Hirachan 2067 vs: 3).

The Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis are minorities; this is undeniable. But not including some of them even in the census and reporting their populations as less than their actual populations is certainly a matter of investigation. At the outset, there was no practice of writing surnames in Tibet. Nepali Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis of Tibetan

origin also did not have surnames in the past. When it became mandatory to mention surnames on government documents (such as land ownership certificate and citizenship certificate), they became confused. This was especially so after the implementation of land reform in 1964. At that time, the situation was tense due to certain events—for example, annexation of Tibet by communist China in 1959; Dalai Lama and his followers crossing the mountains of Nepal to become refugees in India; some Tibetan refugees staying in Nepal; and Khampa rebellion using the mountainous regions of Nepal as a refuge. Some of the Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis who did not have the practice of writing their surnames adopted risk-free surnames/names of other Adivasi Janajatis near their settlements (for example, the surname Sherpa in the east, Lama/Tamang in the middle, Gurung/Lama in the west, and Bista/Lama in the far west). Therefore, some of the Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis must have been included in the census record of other Adivasi Janajatis. Another possibility is that due to the misunderstanding of census enumerators, some of them may have been included in the “Other” or “Unspecified” category (the numbers of which are 5,888 and 4,436, respectively, in the 2021 census). Whatever the reason may be, not being mentioned in the census and not even being included in the list of minorities prepared by the government mean being deprived of the services and facilities that a minority group is entitled to receive from the state.

The linguistic data shown in Table 1 is encouraging in terms of identity. Except for Thakali and Byansi, most people of Himalayan Janajatis have associated their ethnicity with their own mother tongue. There could be many reasons for this—for example, being deprived of infrastructure development and not having frequent contact with other ethnic groups. Whatever the reason might be, their attachment to their mother tongue indicates

that Himalayan ethnic groups are relatively more conscious of their identity and culture.

Nepal's Madhesh and Madhesis are an extension of the Gangetic civilization of the south, while the Himalayan cultures are an extension of the Tibetan culture of the north. There should be no hesitation in saying this because the cultural geography was formed before the demarcation of the state's borders. The Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal, who extend from Kanchenjunga Mountain in the east to the Byas Mountain in the west, are of a homogeneous nature; their differences are basically only in territory and language (Gurung 2004: 426). There are also some differences among them. Many practice polyandry (although it has now declined considerably),

some do not. Similarly, Thakalis practice cross-cousin marriage; in Sherpas it is forbidden.

Facial features, dress, food, lifestyle, and lifecycle rituals of all Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal are similar. All are of Mongolian origin, while their mother tongues are from the Tibetan-Burmese language family. All follow a mixture of nature worship, Bon, and Buddhism in their religious practices. There is a saying: Where there is Bhote, there is a monastery. For Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis, the monastery is not only a religious place but also an educational institution and a traditional healing center.

The traditional occupations of all Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis are animal husbandry (e.g., yak, goats, sheep), agriculture (buckwheat,

Table 1: Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis

S.N.	Name	Male	Female	Total population	Mother Tongue (2021)
1	Bahra Gaunle	Not included in the 2021 census data			
2	Bhote	7,982	7,836	15,818	12,895 (81.5%)
3	Byansi	2,884	2,834	5,718	1,706 (29.8%)
4	Chhairotan	Not included in the 2021 census data			
5	Dolpo	2,833	2,985	5,818	3,244 (55.7%)
6	Larke (Chumba/Nubri)	2,154	2,260	4,414	4,284 (97.1%)
7	Lhomi	170	185	355	413 (116.3%)
8	Lhopa	657	733	1,390	2,348 (169.0%)
9	Marphali Thakali	Not included in the 2021 census data			
10	Mughal	933	1,131	2,124	2,834 (133.4%)
11	Sherpa	64,405	66,232	130,637	117,896 (90.3%)
12	Siyar	Not included in the 2021 census data			
13	Tangbe	Not included in the 2021 census data			
14	Thakali	5,620	5,121	11,741	4,220 (35.9%)
15	Thudam	Not included in the 2021 census data			
16	Tin Gaunle Thakali	Not included in the 2021 census data			
17	Topkegola	312	330	642	
18	Walung	234	247	481	545 (113.3%)

Source: NSO (2023).

barley, corn, etc.), and cross-border trade. The traditional barter trade declined after the Nepal–China border was closed following the annexation of Tibet by China in 1949. However, citizens of both countries across the border have continued to trade in some form through certain checkpoints. But it is not as vibrant as before, and the Nepali Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis have resorted to alternative means. Currently, the main sources of income of most of them are tourism-related hotels, trekking, and travel agencies.

Customary law and self-government are traditions of all Janajatis. However, the jurisdiction of traditional institutions has been shrinking day by day since the emergence of elected local governments in the 1960s. But this practice is still stronger in the Himalayan region than in the hills and Madhesh. In Himalayan Adivasi Janajati settlements, there is often a customary institution led by an elected chief (*Mukhiya Pratha*). The names given to these officials may vary according to the place and language, but the nature of their work is the same. Under the leadership of the chief, social relations are established; rules/procedures regarding the use of natural resources such as water, land, and forest are made; assistance is provided at times of need; disputes in villages are settled and justice is delivered. Generally, cases of disputes do not reach the court, police, or administration. This indicates that the jurisdiction of customary law and self-governance among the Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis is deep and extensive.

Hill Adivasi Janajatis

There are 24 Adivasi Janajatis of Hill origin listed in the NFDIN Act. They are listed alphabetically as follows: Bankariya, Baram, Bhujel, Chepang, Chhantyal, Dura, Phree, Gurung, Hayu, Hyolmo, Jirel, Kushunda, Lepcha, Limbu, Magar, Newar, Pahari, Rai, Raute, Sunuwar, Surel, Tamang, Thami, and

Yakkha. There are only a few majority groups (that is, having more than 1 percent of the total population of the country) of Hill Janajatis: for example, Magar, Tamang, Newar, Rai, Gurung and Limbu. There are many minorities. Among them, there are five endangered Adivasi Janajatis that do not even have a population of one thousand: Bankariya, Kushunda, Surel, Raute, and Phree. There are six other tiny groups that do not even have a population of ten thousand: Hayu, Lepcha, Dura, Jirel, Baram, and Hyolmo. Similarly, there are four Janajatis with a population of less than fifty thousand: Chhantyal, Pahari, Yakkha, and Thami. The remaining three Janajatis (Sunuwar, Chepang, and Bhujel) have a population of around one lakh.

Table 2 shows a mixed picture of the mother tongues of Hill Adivasi Janajatis. While some languages are on the verge of extinction, many are reviving. According to one study, 20 languages in Nepal are facing extinction, and among them are Dura, Kushunda, Hayu, and Raute that are spoken by a very small minority Hill Adivasi (Subba 2060 vs: 17). Some other languages (Bankariya, Baram, Chhantyal, Pahari, and Sunuwar) are also heading toward this direction. This is because, on the one hand, the speakers of these languages are numerically very few, and on the other hand, according to the 2021 census, only less than half of these ethnic groups have linked their identity to their own mother tongue. The picture of other languages is brighter. Most people from the majority Hill Adivasi Janajatis (such as Gurung, Limbu, Newar, and Tamang) as well as some minority Hill Adivasi Janajatis (such as Chepang, Hyolmo, Jirel, Lepcha, Thami, and Yakkha) have listed their mother tongue in the census. Nepalbhasa and Limbu are developed languages since long, with their own script, grammar, and literature. This trend is now followed by other languages (e.g., Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Thakali, and Sherpa). The

Table 2: Hill Adivasi Janajatis

S.N.	Name	Male	Female	Total population	Mother Tongue (2021)
1	Bankariya	83	97	180	866 (47.8%)
2	Baram	3,720	4,139	7,859	1,539 (19.6%)
3	Bhujel	58,328	61,917	120,245	13,086 (10.9%)
4	Chepang	42,758	41,606	84,364	58,392 (69.2%)
5	Chhantyal	5,699	6,264	11,963	4,282 (35.8%)
6	Dura	2,576	3,005	5,581	1,991 (35.7%)
7	Gurung	254,267	289,523	543,790	328,074 (60.3%)
8	Hayu	1,486	1,583	3,069	1,133 (36.9%)
9	H Yolmo	4,927	4,892	9,819	9,658 (98.4%)
10	Jirel	2,933	3,098	6,031	5,167 (85.7%)
11	Kushunda	115	138	253	23 (9.1%)
12	Lepcha	1,769	1,809	3,578	2,240 (62.%)
13	Limbu	250,060	214,644	414,704	350,436 (84.5%)
14	Magar	949,105	1,064,393	2,019,498	810,315 (40.2%)
15	Newar	656,144	685,219	1,341,363	863,380 (64.4%)
16	Pahari	7,542	7,473	15,015	5,946 (39.%)
17	Phree	429	492	921	—
18	Rai	308,743	331,931	640,674	144,512 (22.6%)
19	Raute	289	277	566	741 (130.9%)
20	Sunuwar	38,197	40,713	78,910	32,786 (41.5%)
21	Surel	153	165	318	174 (54.7%)
22	Tamang	800,763	839,103	1,639,866	1,423,075 (86.8%)
23	Thami	15,931	16,812	32,743	26,805 (81.9%)
24	Yakkha	8,527	8,933	17,460	14,241 (81.6%)

Source: NSO (2023).

lingua franca of Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis is closer to their own languages. Their lingua franca (Bhote/Tibetan) is related to their culture. This also applies to the Tarai Adivasi Janajatis to some extent. They are connected to each other through the Hindi language. But the immediate neighbors of most of the Hill Adivasi Janajatis are the Khas Arya, not other Adivasi Janajatis. It is probably due to this

influence that people of one Hill ethnic group use Khas Nepali as a contact language when communicating with people of another ethnic group.

There are some similarities among the Hill Adivasi Janajatis; however, there are also many differences and diversity within them. The similarity is that most of Hill Adivasi Janajatis are of Mongolian origin. Newar is, in part, an

exception, as this ethnic group is a mixture of the Lhasa tribe (Mongol) and the Kashi tribe (Caucasian). In terms of language, the mother tongues of most Hill Adivasi Janajatis, including Newar, belong to the Tibeto-Burmese family. Some of their languages also have scripts; others do not. The ancient and traditional religion of Bon or Buddhism is common to all of them, and their religious rituals are a mixture of nature worship, Bon, and shamanism. Newars do not have shamanism; they have a mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism. All Hill Adivasi Janajatis have been victims of Hinduization—the extent may vary, some more, some less. However, they have preserved their traditional religious customs. Their practices of ancestor worship and clan worship have nothing to do with the Hill Brahmins; they use their own priests in this regard. For example, Hindu Newars have Rajopadhyaya and Achaju (Karmacharya) and Buddhist Newars have Gubhaju (Bajracharya) as their priests. Similarly, Tamangs have Lama, Gurungs have Dhyabre, Magars have Bhusal, Jirels have Bopo, Sunuwars have Meyambo, and Chepangs have Pandey as their respective priest.

Geographical proximity and distance have created cultural proximity and difference between one Hill Adivasi Janajati and another. All the Kiratis of the eastern hills (Limbu, Rai, Sunuwar, etc.) follow Kirat religion, and their religious scripture is Mundum/Mundhum. There is similarity in lifecycle rituals between them. For example, they bury their dead. Gurungs and Magars of the western hills have similarities in their facial features, costumes, lifestyles, and rituals. Marriages are performed between cross-cousins, which is also the case among Tamangs. In addition, Bankariya, Bhujel, and Chhantyal living in ancient Magarat or Tamuwan have also adopted this type of marriage. But this practice is not found among other Hill Adivasi Janajatis (such as Kiratis and

Newars). Danuwars, Jirels, Sunuwars, Surel, and Thami, who are geographically connected, have similarities in their cultures and rituals. Paharis, who were originally connected to Newar, have facial features, lifestyles, food, and lifecycle rituals similar to Newars.

Except for Newars, most of the Hill Adivasi Janajatis live in the high hills (*lek*). Until recently, the main food staples of Bankariya, Chepang, and Kushunda were yams, tubers, and games from hunting in the forests. The livelihood of some people of the Raute group is still based on this. The traditional occupation of other Hill Adivasi Janajatis living in the high hill regions, including Magar and Gurung, is agriculture and animal husbandry. The occupational identity of Newar also includes trade and business. In addition to agriculture, the main income of Rai, Limbu, Magar, Gurung, etc., who have gotten recruited in the armies of Nepal, India, and Britain is their regular salary and pension. The livelihood of some tiny Adivasi Janajatis who do not have sufficient farms (such as Baram, Hayu, Pahari, and Thami) is linked to wage labor. The auxiliary occupation of all Hill Adivasi Janajatis, big and small, is making and selling household products made of bamboo.

Almost all Hill Adivasi Janajatis have their own traditional institutions—for example, Newar's Guthi, Magar's Bheja, and Gurung's Nalsabha. All have a headman system—for example, Subba of Limbu, Rai of Khambu, and Mulmi of Tamang. Before the system of elected local government began in the 1960s, the lives of these ethnic groups were governed by their own customary institutions, the rules and regulations made from them, and the decisions made by their community leaders. The jurisdiction of these customary institutions and their leadership was wide—for example, holding meetings on matters of public importance; mobilizing people for free labor for construction of roads, canals,

resting places, and other public welfare works; facilitating use of natural resources for private or public purposes; collecting land taxes/rents; and settling disputes and administering justice in villages. These functions have now basically shifted to local governments; however, in one form or another, these customary institutions are still alive and are working to make the social life of the concerned communities conform to traditional rules.

Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis

The six Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act are Bote, Danuwar, Darai, Kumal, Majhi, and Raji. All these are minority groups. The populations of Kumal and Majhi exceed one lakh, while the remaining four are less than that. Raji, with a total population of only 5,125, are among those with the least population. The Darai language is close to extinction. Only 6.5 percent of Darai have registered it as their mother tongue. The Kumal and Majhi languages are also heading toward the same direction. The situation of Bote, Danuwar, and Raji languages is different, because more than 60 percent of each have linked their identity to their own language.

These Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis (i.e., living in the middle part between the hills and the plains) have many things in common, as well as some differences. All are of Mongolian descent. There is a natural relationship

between descent and language; that is, being of Mongolian descent generally means speaking a language of the Tibeto-Burmese family. An example of this is the Himalayan and Hill Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. This also applies to the Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis; that is, they are of Mongolian descent and their language is of the Tibeto-Burmese family. There is a problem here. The above-mentioned Inner-Tarai languages do not have a written tradition. They are only oral languages, and other nearby languages have influence on them. For example, the Kumal language in the western hills has been influenced by the Tamu and Magar languages of the Tibeto-Burmese family, but the Kumal language in the eastern Tarai has been influenced by the Mithila language of the Indo-Aryan family. This also applies to the Danuwar and Majhi languages. Of course, Danuwars of Hill origin are of Mongolian descent while those of Tarai origin are Caucasian. Unlike other Adivasi Janajatis, Danuwars of Tarai wear the sacred thread (*janai*). The facial features, dress, lifestyle, and food of Majhi of Hill origin are similar to those of Hill Adivasi Janajatis, while the culture and customs of Majhis of Tarai origin are similar to the way of life of Madheshi. Such regional differences within a Janajati group have made it difficult to identify the specific traditional homeland of the Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis.

Table 3: Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis

No.	Name	Male	Female	Total population	Mother tongue
1	Bote	5,500	5,678	11,258	7,687 (68.3%)
2	Danuwar	39,572	43,212	82,784	49,992 (60.4%)
3	Darai	9,065	9,630	18,695	1,215 (6.5%)
4	Kumal	62,259	67,443	129,702	18,435 (14.2%)
5	Majhi	54,783	56,569	111,352	32,917 (29.6%)
6	Raji	2,483	2,642	5,125	4,247 (82.8%)

Source: NSO (2023).

Geography has played a role in the regional differences within the same ethnicity. Some of the people of the Inner-Tarai are related to the Hill ethnic groups and others to those of Madhesh. Despite this difference, they have attributes of indigeneity. The identities of Kumal and Majhi are occupational. The traditional occupation of Kumal, whether they live in Madhesh or in the hills, is making and selling pottery. Similarly, the ancestral occupation of Majhi is ferrying passengers across rivers—whether they are of Hill origin or Tarai origin. Like Kumal and Majhi, the Danuwar, Darai, Bote, and Raji live on river banks. The main occupation of all of them is ferrying and fishing. The other main occupation is agriculture. However, since most of these people do not have cultivable land—and even if they do, it is very little—they also work as laborers to earn a living. Making household items from bamboo is their secondary occupation.

The facial features, physical structure, dress, food habits, and rituals of all these Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis are similar to each other. Malaria-resistant gene is found in all these groups. Adivasi Janajatis of Inner-Tarai are more Hinduized. Almost all have listed themselves as Hindus in the census. Despite this, all have also continued their ancient religion (nature worship). They worship rivers, streams, forests, earth, air, and sky and, like many Hill ethnic groups, believe in shamanism. They perform ancestral worship and clan worship through priests of their own group.

Another indigenous characteristic of Inner-Tarai Adivasi Janajatis is that they all have their own customary institutions. For example, Majhi people have the Majhesewa and Mukhiya tradition, whose head is called Mijar in Kumal, Darai, and Majhi vocabulary. The jurisdiction of Mijar is extensive. It includes enforcing customs and traditions for their villages and ensuring their compliance, mobilizing stakeholders in small-scale development work, leading

social and cultural activities, settling disputes within households and between villagers, and punishing the guilty and providing justice to victims. However, since the advent of local government, the role and jurisdiction of Mijar has been greatly reduced.

Tarai Adivasi Janajatis

Among the indigenous Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act, 14 belong to the Tarai group. They are Dhanuk (Rajbanshi), Dhimal, Gangai, Jhangad, Kisan, Kushwadiya, Meche (Bodo), Rajbanshi (Koch), Ranatharu, Satar (Santhal), Tajpuriya, and Tharu. The largest population is that of Tharu, followed by Rajbanshi, whose population is 132,564. All others are minorities. The population of Kisan is extremely small (1,479). Kushwadiya and Meche are also very small minorities.

The linguistic statistics of Nepali Tarai Adivasi Janajatis, as shown in Table 4, are noteworthy. This is comparable to the situation of Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis. Out of 18 Himalayan Adivasi Janajatis, 16 have shown pride in their linguistic identity (Table 1). Similarly, among Tarai Adivasi Janajatis, about two-thirds of Gangai and Kisan and more than 80 percent of the remaining 10 groups have shown pride in their linguistic identity by registering their mother tongue in the census. This means that the Nepali state has been working for a long time to assimilate speakers of other languages into the Nepali language, but the Himalayan and Tarai Adivasi Janajatis have not accepted it.

The descents of Tarai Janajatis are different—some (Dhimal and Meche) are of Mongolian origin, while others are Australoid (Santhal). Some (Kisan) are of Indo-Aryan language family, while others are of Tibeto-Burmese family (Tajpuriya) or of Austro-Asiatic family (Santhal).

The main occupation of all Tarai Janajatis is agriculture, and secondary occupations are

Table 4: Tarai Adivasi Janajatis

S.N.	Name	Male	Female	Total population	Native speakers
1	Dhanuk (Rajbanshi)	126,671	125,434	252,105	—
2	Dhimal	12,144	13,499	25,643	20,583 (80.3%)
3	Gangai	20,354	21,092	41,446	26,281 (63.4%)
4	Jhangad	22,493	24,347	46,840	38,873 (83.0%)
5	Kisan	700	779	1,479	1,004 (67.9%)
6	Kushwadiya	1,703	1,640	3,343	—
7	Meche (Bodo)	2,441	2,752	5,193	4,203 (80.9%)
8	Rajbanshi (Koch)	64,372	68,192	132,564	130,163 (98.2%)
9	Ranatharu	41,001	42,306	83,308	77,766 (93.4%)
10	Satar (Santhal)	27,847	29,463	57,310	53,677 (93.7%)
11	Tajpuriya	9,957	11,032	20,989	20,349 (98.6%)
12	Tharu	880,513	926,611	1,807,124	1,714,091 (94.6%)

Source: NSO (2023).

animal husbandry and production of household items made from forest wood. Some Janajatis led a nomadic life until recently—for example, Jhangad, Kushwadiya, and Meche. Their traditional occupation is also hunting. Since they are almost landless, wage labor is another source of income.

Tarai Janajatis have some things in common. They are all black in appearance. They live in the southern plains of Nepal, which is connected to India. Across the border, they have people of their own kind. Previously, most of the Tarai was covered with forest. Tharus are scattered throughout the plains of the country. Tharu activists claim the entire Tarai and the inner Tarai as their ancestor land. Except for Tharus, settlement of most of the Tarai Janajatis (e.g., Dhimal, Gangai, Jhangad, Kisan, Meche, Rajbanshi, Satar, and Tajpuriya) are in the same location: Eastern Tarai (i.e., the plains of Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari districts of Nepal).

The origin of Tarai Janajatis is less controversial like that of Himalayan people.

The origin of Himalayan janajatis is often traced to Tibet, China, on the northern border of the country, while Tarai ethnic groups are traced to India in the south. However, the context is different. Nepal was unified in 1768, and its borders expanded until the war with British India in 1814–1816. Before that, there was Vijayapur kingdom in the eastern Tarai. Even before that, there was Rajbanshi-ruled Koch Bihar kingdom, whose borders extended from the eastern Tarai of Nepal to the northeastern part of India, bordering the Brahmaputra River. The history of Rajbanshi is connected to this. But the question of whether the history of settlements of other Tarai Adivasi Janajatis currently residing in the eastern Tarai of Nepal is similar to that of the Rajbanshis or different remains unanswered. Another explanation is that after the unification of Nepal, a policy was adopted to attract laborers from Muglan to increase revenue from the Tarai (i.e., by expanding arable land through clearing of forests) (Mainali 2082 vs), and as a result, herds of people from the southern border entered

Nepal. It is a matter of which interpretation is closer to the truth, but the reality is that the above-mentioned Tarai Adivasi Janajatis were the first inhabitants in the place in which they now live. Therefore, they are indigenous to that territory of Nepal.

Another characteristic of indigeneity of Tarai Adivasi Janajatis is their traditional religion (nature worship) and the rituals they practice. They are not Buddhists, unlike many Janajatis, nor are they shamanists. Tarai Adivasi Janajatis have been caught in the grip of Hinduization, and like other Hindus, they celebrate Dashain and Tihar, and most of them have identified themselves as Hindus in the census. But they do not have a caste system, nor do they worship idols. Caste system and idol worship are inseparable aspects of Hinduism. But they are not found in the society of Tarai Janajatis. Tarai Janajatis prohibit Hindu priests from worshipping their ancestors and clans. These functions are performed by priests of their own community. Their gods are formless—stones and mounds of earth. Being nature worshipers, they worship the earth, rivers and streams, forests, air, sky, fire, plants, and animals.

Another indigeneity of Tarai ethnic groups is their customary institutions. Their family and collective life is based on their own customary system. Every group has their own headman—for example, the Raja of Kisan and Meche, Majhi of Santhal, Devania of Dhimal, and Badghar of Tharu. Under their leadership and supervision, local disputes are resolved, social norms are formulated, free labor is provided for development related to welfare of the community, and lifecycle rituals are carried out. However, since the establishment of elected local governments, the role and jurisdiction of traditional community leaders have reduced.

Political Economy

Overall, what is the current status of each of the 59+1 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act? What are their populations? What are the statuses of their mother tongues? Where are their settlements (accessible or remote)? What are their literacy rates? What are their main occupations? What are the structures of their houses (hut or mud or concrete)? How much land do they have? What are their per capita incomes? What is their access to essential services required for livelihood, such as education, health and drinking water? How much access do they have to basic services such as roads, electricity, transportation, and communication? How many of them have benefited from other physical development? What are their representations in the state machinery, i.e., governance and administration? Perhaps based on some or all of these human development and poverty measures (e.g., National Planning Commission, n.d.: 18, considers literacy rate, pukka housing, land ownership, occupation, language, population, educational attainment at graduation level or above), NFDIN in 2004 classified Nepal's Adivasi Janajatis into the following five groups: endangered, highly marginalized, marginalized, disadvantaged, and advanced (Table 5).

This classification has generated a new dimension to the research, debate, and discussion on Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. In the past, it was customary to lump all the Adivasi Janajati groups in the same category: Adivasi Janajatis vs. state and Janajatis vs. Khas Arya. Now, there is a need to look at it from another dimension, because there is inequality among Adivasi Janajatis. There is a historical background to this. With the re-establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990, the indigenous movement increased, and opportunities for benefits also expanded. At the forefront of the

Table 5: Classification of Adivasi Janajatis

Classification	Adivasi Janajati
Endangered	10 groups: Bankariya, Hayu, Kisan, Kushunda, Kushwadiya, Lepcha, Meche, Raji, Raute, and Surel
Highly marginalized	12 groups: Baram, Bote, Chepang, Danuwar, Dhanuk, Jhangad, Lhomi, Majhi, Santhal, Siyar, Thami, and Thudam
Marginalized	20 groups: Bhote, Bhujel, Darai, Dhimal, Dolpo, Dura, Gangai, Kumal, Larke, Lhopa, Mugali, Pahari, Phree, Rajbanshi, Sunuwar, Tajpuriya, Tamang, Tharu, Topkegola, and Walung
Disadvantaged	15 groups: Bahra Gaunle, Byansi, Chhairrotan, Chhantyal, Gurung, Hyolmo, Jirel, Limbu, Magar, Marphali Thakali, Rai, Sherpa, Tangbe, Tin Gaunle Thakali, and Yakkha
Advanced	2 groups: Newar and Thakali.

movement and among those who benefited from the opportunities were leaders of the majority groups within the Adivasi Janajatis. Later, the minority groups also became aware, and one sign of this was the rapid increment in the number of organizations of those Janajatis groups joining NEFIN. On the one hand, one form of the movement (Adivasi Janajatis vs. state and Janajatis vs. Khas Arya) continued to advance, while on the other hand, a new debate began within the Adivasi Janajatis that priority should be given to those who were at the bottom in the classification for obtaining benefits. From there, the issue of who is ahead and who is behind, relatively speaking, among the Adivasi Janajatis gained currency. Two narratives have emerged simultaneously. One is the traditional narrative—Khas Arya are dominant and Adivasi Janajatis are marginalized. The other is a new narrative—who are advantaged and who are disadvantaged within the Janajati groups.

Overall, Janajatis lag behind the Khas Arya in every field. A recent study on their representation in the state machinery run by government treasury shows this. The presence of Janajatis in the judicial sector, educational institutions, civil service, banks, and public institutions is lower than the proportion of

their population. Their representation in the above-mentioned institutions is 10 percent, 11 percent, 17 percent, 19 percent and 27 percent, respectively. But in the police and army, Janajatis are represented almost in proportion to their population size. Another notable thing is that most Adivasi Janajatis are in clerical and non-ranking positions. Their presence in higher-level positions is gradually thinning out (Adivasi Janajati Ayog 2082 vs). The absence of Adivasi Janajatis at the leadership level means that their position in policy-making and decision-making processes is still in a state of deprivation.

The narrative that Khas Aryas are dominant and Janajatis are excluded is also confirmed by the statistical results of earlier studies carried out before what INC did. According to previous studies, all Khas Arya belong to included communities and most Janajatis to excluded groups (Bennett and Parajuli 2013). Similarly, Khas Aryas are broadly classified as “affluent” while most Janajatis as “poor” (Gurung et al. 2014). These studies have also revealed another side of the truth—some of Adivasi Janajatis are included and are advantaged groups, while most are excluded, therefore disadvantaged.

Bennett and Parajuli (2013) has classified all the castes and ethnicities mentioned in the

2001 into four categories: highly excluded, excluded, included, and highly included. This study does not take into account the measurement of cultural inclusion/exclusion. The report, which was prepared on the basis of a multidimensional index by integrating the four items—income generation, education, nutrition and health, and involvement in state governance—shows the status of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal, as shown in Table 7.

Table 6: Representation of Adivasi Janajatis in government offices

S.N.	Service	Total	Janajati
1	Civil service	60,905	14,488 (16.9%)
2	Public institution	18,126	4,822 (26.8%)
3	Judge	304	34 (10.1%)
4	Teacher (government schools)	64,537	10,764 (11.3%)
5	Police	101,868	34,640 (34.0%)
6	Army	(not available)	— (32.5 %)
7	Banks (government-owned)	7,842	1,524 (19.4%)

Source: Adivasi Janajati Ayog (2082 vs).

Leaving aside the cultural exclusion aspect, if one looks at it from the perspective of political economy alone, the number of ethnic groups that fall into the included group is small—10 are included and 3 are highly included, out of a total of 13. Newars and Thakalis, who were depicted as advanced Janajatis groups in the NFDIN report, naturally fall into this category. In addition, Chhantyal, Gurung, Limbu, Sherpa, and Yakkha (categorized as disadvantaged group) and Darai, Dhimal, Dura, Gangai, Rajbanshi, and Tajpuriya (categorized as marginalized group by NFDIN report) were also promoted to the included category. According to the findings of Bennett and Parajuli’s study, the number of excluded Adivasi Janajatis is high—19 excluded and 10 highly excluded, making 29 Janajatis in this category. They fall under the categories of endangered, marginalized, or highly marginalized groups in the classification by NFDIN.

Another comprehensive study, *Social Inclusion Survey 2012* (Gurung et al. 2014), also captured the present state of social, economic, and political situation of the Janajatis. This comprehensive study, using multiple measures of social inclusion, provided a picture of caste and ethnicity—particularly of Adivasi Janajatis—in Nepal (Table 8).

Table 7: Included and excluded groups within Adivasi Janajatis

Condition	Group
Highly excluded	10 groups: Chepang, Danuwar, Kushunda, Majhi, Pahari, Raji, Raute, Sunuwar, Tamang, and Thami
Excluded	19 groups: Baram, Bhote, Bhujel, Bote, Byansi, Hayu, Hyolmo, Jhangad, Jirel, Kisan, Kumal, Kushwadiya, Lepcha, Magar, Meche, Rai, Santhal, Tharu, and Walung
Included	10 groups: Chhantyal, Darai, Dura, Gangai, Gurung, Limbu, Rajbanshi, Sherpa, Tajpuriya, and Yakkha
Highly included	3 groups: Dhimal, Newar, and Thakali.

Source: Bennett and Parajuli (2013).

Note: The study includes all groups (such as Khas Arya, Madhesi, Dalit and others), including Adivasi Janajatis. However, in order to be consistent with the way NFDIN has classified the Adivasi Janajatis into 5 groups, only the Adivasi Janajatis are depicted in the table above.

Table 8: Affluent and poor groups within Adivasi Janajatis

S.N.	Topic	Affluent	Poor
A. Access to basic services			
1	Education	Byansi and Thakali	Kushwadiya
2	Health	Thakali	Baram, Chepang, Hayu, Lepcha, Magar, Tamang
3	Drinking water	Tharu	Baram Bhote, Kisan, Limbu, Tamang
4	Electricity	Thakali, Walung, Hyolmo, Newar, Sherpa	Chepang, Kushwadiya, Raute, Santhal
5	Housing	Hyolmo, Sherpa, Newar	Baram, Chhantyal, Danuwar, Jhangad
B. Economic situation			
6	Above average land area	Limbu, Gangai, Lepcha, Chhantyal	Kisan, Kushwadiya
7	Spending more than average	Walung, Sherpa, Thakali, Newar	Chepang, Kushwadiya, Kisan, Raji, Raute
8	Employment (in government service)	Newar, Dura	Kushwadiya

Source: Gurung et al. (2014).

Note 1: The study included all castes and ethnic groups, including Adivasi Janajatis, other groups (e.g., Khas Arya, Madhesi, Dalit), and others. However, the above table depicts the status of only Adivasi Janajatis in order to align with the classification by NFDIN within Adivasi Janajatis.

Note 2: The terms “top” and “bottom” used in the study have been interpreted as “affluent” and “poor” for the purposes of this study.

Table 8 shows that Newar and Thakali are at the forefront of the list of “affluent” Janajatis, which is exactly in line with the findings of the study conducted by NFDIN. Other Janajatis are also ahead in specific areas—for example, Byansi in education, Tharu in drinking water, Sherpa in housing and income, and Limbu in land. Some majority groups (such as Magar and Tamang) also fall on the list of “poor”—especially in the areas of health and drinking water. Most of the minority and tiny minority groups fall in this category. Out of the 8 items listed in Table 8, Kushwadiya comes first in the group that lags behind in many areas, followed by Baram, Chepang, Kisan, and other tiny minority groups.

This state of Adivasi Janajatis, some affluent but many poor, few included but many excluded, is also reflected in the political sphere. One

example is the unequal representation among the Adivasi Janajatis in the central legislature. Table 9 shows the representation of Adivasi Janajatis in parliament based on the results of the last seven general elections, held from 1991 to 2022.

If representation in parliament is considered as the only basis, then some Janajati groups (e.g., Gurung, Limbu, Newar, Rai, Sherpa, Thakali) are privileged to be kept in the included category, because their representation in parliament is more than the proportion of their respective populations. The representation of other majority groups (such as Magar, Tamang, and Tharu) in the parliament is less than the proportion of their populations. However, the faces of these groups are visible in every parliament. Some minority groups (such as Bhote, Bhujel,

Table 9: Representation of Adivasi Janajatis in central legislature

Representation	Adivasi Janajati
Over-representation in proportion to ethnic population	Gurung, Limbu, Newar, Rai, Sherpa, Thakali
Under-representation in proportion to the ethnic population	Magar, Tamang, Tharu
Two or more representatives	Bhote, Bhujel, Chhantyal, Danuwar, Majhi, Meche, Pahari, Rajbanshi, Santhal, and Sunuwar
Only represented once	Baram, Chepang, Darai, Dhimal, Gangai, Jhangad, Jirel, Kumal, Lepcha, Tajpuriya, and Thami
So far unrepresented	Bote, Byansi, Dura, Hayu, Hyolmo, Kisan, Kushunda, Kushwadiya, Raji, Raute, Walung, and Yakkha

Source: Vollan (2015); Election Commission (2074 vs, 2079 vs).

Chhantyal, Danuwar, Majhi, Meche, Pahari, Rajbanshi, Santhal, and Sunuwar) have had the opportunity to be represented in parliament more than once. Other minority groups that have been represented in parliament only once are Baram, Chepang, Darai, Dhimal, Gangai, Jhangad, Jirel, Kumal, Lepcha, Tajpuriya, and Thami. In the case of groups that have records of representation two or more times and also of groups who were represented even if just for one time, this became possible due to the progressive provisions in the CA elections. Out of the 601 members of the CA, 365 (56%) were elected through proportional representation. When the proportional quotas were distributed according to the populations of caste or ethnic groups, 37 percent of seats went to the Adivasi Janajatis. An additional Janajati-friendly provision was that out of the 26 members nominated by the government, those caste/ethnic groups who were not elected through the first-past-the-post or proportional representation would receive priority. But after the new constitution was promulgated in 2015, the number and percentage of members elected through proportional representation has now decreased—110 in number and 40 in percentage. As a result, the presence of

Adivasi Janajatis in parliament has decreased significantly. In the general elections held in 2017, among those elected two or more times (see Table 8), only 2 persons from the Meche were elected through proportional representation. Then, in the last parliamentary election held in 2022, only 1 Bhote from the same group (category 3 of Table 9) got an opportunity. Another bitter truth is that 12 very tiny minority Janajati groups (such as Bote, Byansi, Dura, Hayu, Hyolmo, Kisan, Kushunda, Kushwadiya, Raji, Raute, Walung, and Yakkha) have not yet been able to represent their people in the parliament.

Janajati Movement and Agendas

There is inequality among Adivasi Janajatis—this is a harsh reality. Another harsh reality is that all Adivasi Janajatis are marginalized in one way or another. People from these groups have been marginalized, especially since the expansion of the Gorkha kingdom and the unification of Nepal in 1768. Before that, various ethnic groups had their own small chiefdoms—for example, Limbuwan and Khambuwan in the east, Tamsaling and Nepal Mandal in the center,

and Tamuwan and Magarat in the west. Similar chiefdoms existed in the Tarai—Chaudandi and Vijayapur in the east, Tirhut and Simraungarh in the center, and Tharuhat in the west. From this perspective, the unification of Nepal is the victory of the Gorkhali of Hindu Khas Arya and the defeat of the Janajati and Madhesi peoples. Thereafter, according to the Janajati and Madhesi narrative, Nepal was transformed into a mono-ethnic state. The Janajati and other groups were marginalized. The country is multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious, but the nature of the state is different. Some glimpses of how state-building took place in a different path than nation-building did are mentioned below.

Monopoly in governance

At one time, Magar and Gurung had presence, albeit negligible, in the Gorkhali/Nepali government. When Dravya Shah established the Gorkha chiefdom in 1559, when Prithvi Narayan Shah territorially unified Nepal in 1768, and when Bahadur Shah expanded the Gorkha kingdom, Gurungs and Magars of east of Kaligandaki River who geographically lived in close proximity to the rulers had assisted them. Perhaps for this reason, for some time before and after the unification, the faces of these ethnic groups were seen among the nobles of Nepal. But they quickly disappeared, because after the war between Nepal and British India in 1814–1816 was over, the palace did not require people of “martial races.” The state power then went completely into the hands of a single caste group: Brahmin, Kshetri and Thakuri.

Diversity transforms into inequality

Nepal is a diverse country. But this diversity was legally transformed into inequality when the first Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana, issued the Civil Code (Muluki Ain) of 1854. It restructured the society by arranging

ethnic groups in a caste hierarchy in accordance with Vedic Hindu beliefs and traditions. The basic tenet of Hindu society is the caste system where some are by birth placed in the upper strata and others in the lower strata. This was not the first attempt to create a society based on caste-based inequality; however, before this, it was only applicable to a specific ethnic group and region. The task of dividing the society into 64 levels was first done by Jayasthiti Malla in the early medieval period, but this was applied only to the Newars and in the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal Mandal). This was copied by King Ram Shah of Gorkha. But after the promulgation of the Muluki Ain in 1854, a social structure and political economy based on such inequality was implemented throughout the country. The Muluki Ain gave the Janajatis a lower status than the Tagadhari (who are now legally recognized as Khas Aryas: Brahmins, Kshetris, Thakuris, and Sanyasis). Even among the Matawalis, some were classified as “enslavable” and others as “non-enslavable.” An attempt was made also to expand this system within each ethnic group to institutionalize a stratified social structure based on the caste system. Although the new Muluki Ain issued in 1963 replaced the old Muluki Ain of 1854, making all Nepali citizens legally equal, the legacy of the old Muluki Ain remains—that is, society treats some as belonging to a higher caste and others as belonging to a lower caste. In recent times, the gap between Khas Arya and Janajatis has deepened and widened with the rise of “Hill Nationalism” (*Parbate Rastrabad*). The term “Pahadi” is a place-specific term; it includes both Hill caste and Hill ethnic groups. The term “Parbate” is applicable only to one community—that is, the group that falls under the Hindu castes of Hill origin (i.e., Khas Arya and Hill Dalit).

Hill Nationalism (Parbate Rastrabad)

The main slogan of Hill Nationalism, born and raised during the Panchayat period, was “One king, one country” and “One language, one dress.” This is *khaskaran* of languages, religions, and cultures of Janajatis, and it, therefore, pushed the Janajatis towards further exclusion. *Khaskaran* manifested itself in four different forms. The first is Hinduization. Prithvi Narayan Shah, the campaigner of unification and “nation builder”; Jung Bahadur Rana, the founder of the Rana oligarchy that lasted for 104 years (1846–1950); and Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah, the proponent of the partyless Panchayat system (1960–1990) and the “promotor of modernization”—all these three kings had the same mission: to make Nepal the only Hindu state in the world and to become a Hindu emperor himself. In fact, Hinduization of Nepali society has been going on for a long time. It was started by the Brahmins who entered Nepal after the Muslim invasion of India in the 12th century. It was nurtured by the then Kshetri and Thakuri kings and princes. Non-Hindus joined it—some because of compulsion, some by greed, and others by choice. This process continued unabated. As a result, although the number of Hill and Madhesi Hindus, including Dalits, in Nepal is only about 60 percent, the number of Hindus, including those who converted at some point in time, has reached 81 percent, according to the 2021 census. The ethnic groups that constitute 37 percent of the country’s total population are hereditarily non-Hindu; that is, their traditional religion is nature worship, Kirati, Buddhism, Bon, and/or shamanism. The number of followers of these religions is decreasing day by day. In other words, Hinduization has affected the traditional religions of Adivasi Janajatis.

The second form of *khaskaran* is the Khas-Nepali “linguistic conversion” of Nepali society. The name of this language was Khas, Sinjali, and Gorkhali before it officially became

Nepali. The efforts of making it the only official language started in 1867 during the reign of Chandra Shamsheer. However, other mother tongues were also used in various fields—especially in traditional educational institutions and in literature. But from the beginning of the Panchayat period, the medium of education became only one language: Nepali. Newari and Hindi languages, which were then in use as optional subjects in schools, were later removed from the curricula. Radio Nepal stopped broadcasting news in Nepalbhasa and Hindi languages. After the ban in government work, in schools, and in the media, mother tongues naturally declined. Nepali is the mother tongue of the Hill castes (i.e., Khas Arya and Dalit), whose population is 39 percent only. But according to the 2021 census, 48 percent of the population of Nepal consider this language as their mother tongue. This means that other mother tongues are declining. This decline is less among the Himalayan and Tarai Janajatis, but more among the Hill Janajatis. Only the Nepali language was able to flourish under the patronage of the state, and it also quickly gained recognition as a lingua franca. Thus, the Nepali language displaced other mother tongues. As a result, non-Nepali mother tongues were discriminated.

Three, manifestation of *khaskaran* was also evident in the division of Nepal into 14 zones and 75 districts in 1961. Before this time, there was overlapping of ethnic territory (ancestral settlements) and political constituency (109 parliamentary constituencies created for the 1958/59 general elections). The 1958/59 election results showed that if this had been kept as it were, the inclusion of excluded groups, including Janajatis, would have been better. Madheshi and Janajatis, whose presence in the state power was almost zero until 1950, suddenly entered the parliament and the government formed after this parliamentary election in significant numbers. But the new

political and administrative structure, in which the country was divided into 75 districts, dispersed indigenous people from their historical homeland. The way parliamentary constituencies were drawn—112 constituencies during the Panchayat period after the 1980 referendum, 205 constituencies during the Second Democracy (1990–2002), and 165 constituencies after the proclamation of the new constitution—made indigenous voters a minority in many places. As a result, the door to parliament became narrow. An example shows that the concept of 75 districts has also symbolically devalued the identity of Adivasi Janajatis. Earlier, if someone from the eastern hill was asked “Where are you from?”, it was common to say “From Limbuwan”, and this meant the hilly region east of Arun River (i.e., Pallo Kirat, which is the homeland of Limbu). But after the creation of 75 districts in 1961, when the same question was asked, the answer became “From Taplejung.”

The fourth form of *khaskaran* is the land reform of 1964. It took away the *kipat* (traditional community land), especially of the Kiratis of the east. Limbuwan was incorporated into the unified Nepal not through conquest in a war but through an agreement. A key provision of that agreement was to continue the *kipat* system. But this was violated by the 1964 land reform. According to one author, the abolition of *kipat* dispossessed the Kiratis from their land and disempowered them (Subedi 2016). The main beneficiaries were the Khas Aryas who had migrated from the western hills to the eastern hills at different times with one or another state-granted assignment (Parker 2013).

In the Janajati discourse, *khaskaran* is viewed as a campaign to make Nepal a monolithic state. The main goal of the Janajati movement is to restructure the Nepali state by deconstructing it. It has appeared in different forms in different periods. Even before 1950,

some ethnic groups (Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Newar, Rai, Tamang) revolted—under the leadership of some courageous personalities (e.g., Lakhan Thapa, Sukh Dev Gurung, Supati Gurung, Ram Lihang Rai, Siridhewa Limbu). But the state brutally suppressed these rebellions. The fact that Janajatis consider Lakhan Thapa the first martyr also means putting the history of indigenous resistance on record. After the establishment of democracy in 1950, freedom of speech and right to organize were granted. Various ethnic organizations were established around this period—such as the Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha, Kirat League, Tamang Samiti, Magar Sudhar Sangh, and Limbu Sudhar Sangh. These organizations were oriented for internal reformation within the community—that is, to create awareness against illiteracy, ignorance, social taboo, harmful practices (e.g., child marriage, witchcraft), and alcohol consumption within their respective groups—rather than for rights-based movements. But all this quickly faded away, because under the partyless Panchayat system (1960–1990), not only were political parties banned, but even ethnic organizations were not allowed to open.

But in the latter half of the Panchayat system, that is, in the 1980s, after the announcement of a referendum for a choice between existing partyless panchayat system and multiparty system, there was relaxation in favor of freedom of speech, of publication, and of association. In this changing political environment, ethnic movements were revived. Many ethnic organizations came into existence—for example, Manka Khala of Newars, Langhali Sangh of Magars, Tamudhin of Gurungs, Ghedung of Tamangs, Sewa Samiti of Thakalis, Yayokkha of Kirats, Chumlung of Limbus, Sewa Sangh of Sunuvars, and Sherpa Sangh of Sherpas. In terms of content, the ethnic organizations formed from 1950 to 1960 were directed at reformation within the respective community; while the organizations

that emerged after the referendum focused on community rights, i.e., linguistic, religious, and cultural rights. After the re-establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990, each of these organizations became very active during the drafting of the 1990 constitution. The extent of this activism is reflected in a statement by the Chairman of the Constitution Commission, Bishwanath Upadhyay—more than 70 percent of the suggestions received during public consultation on the contents of the constitution in making were related to language, religion, and culture. The result was seen in the choice of words—for the first time in the history of the country, Nepal was officially portrayed as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural country. But the practice did not correspond to the letters of the constitution. For instance, the Supreme Court invalidated the decision made by the local governments of Kathmandu, Dhanusha, and Saptari to make their respective mother tongues as the official language in their local governments. Nevertheless, the right to protect and promote the mother tongue was placed in the fundamental rights section of the constitution.

A new impetus, vitality, and trend appeared in the Janajati movement since the establishment of the Nepal Janajati Mahasangh in 1991. Before that, the ethnic campaigns were divergent and focused only on the interests of their own ethnic group. The seeds of the feeling that they should be connected with each other, however, were visible. As a result, the terms “Magurali” (the initials of Magar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu) and “Setamagurali” (with initials of Sherpa and Tamang added to “Magurali”) had been in use even before the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. But it took a concrete form when NEFIN came into existence. All the ethnic groups got a common platform, and NEFIN became an instrument to take the joint movement forward. As a result, the Janajati movement gained momentum.

The original slogan of the Janajati movement in the latter half of the Panchayat was *Bhasa, dharm ra samskriti ko samrakshan* (Protection of language, religion, and culture), but with the reinstatement of multiparty system, it was upgraded to *Pahichan, pahunch ra pratidinidhito* (Identity, access, and representation). In the wake of the second People’s Movement of 2006, the concerns of Janajatis were also taken up by political parties and the state in tangible and intangible forms, and these were included in important documents—such as the 12-Point Agreement between the Maoists and seven mainstream political parties in November 2005, the Proclamation of the House of Representatives in May 2006, the Comprehensive Peace Accord in November 2006, and the Interim Constitution of 2007. The provisions mentioned in the above documents were adopted more or less by each subsequent document, according to which Nepal was transformed into a multilingual, secular, inclusive, and republican state. The CA was responsible for institutionalizing this in the long term.

The main slogan of the Janajati movement after the second People’s Movement of 2006 was making a new Nepal through restructuring of the state. Before this, it was only confined to the slogan of identity, access, and representation. After the general elections of 2008, the CA was responsible for restructuring of the state. A Janajati caucus was formed within the CA and became active. Outside the CA, Janajati organizations and activists organized under the umbrella of NEFIN worked to pressurize for progressive, radical, and revolutionary change. There was good coordination between the Janajati caucus and NEFIN, and both made great efforts to make the forthcoming constitution Janajati-friendly. In the meantime, the issue of state restructuring from the perspective of Adivasi Janajatis expanded and broadened—for example, identity, community

rights, ethnic autonomy, indigenous people's first right to natural resources (water, land, and forest), right to self-determination, customary law, linguistic and cultural equality, secularism, reservation and affirmative action, proportional representation, inclusive democracy, federalism and, above all, identity-based federalism. These themes, which reflect the vision of the Janajati people regarding the restructuring of the state, are documented in 11 agreements reached repeatedly between different ethnic organizations of the Janajati peoples (e.g., Limbu, Tharu, Tamang) or NEFIN and the then government during the first CA (2008–2012). The atmosphere at that time was in favor of Janajatis and other marginalized communities. However, a constitution could not be made by the first CA, and consequently the second CA elections were held in 2013.

During the second CA, the momentum of Janajati movement declined for a number of reasons. During the first CA, its Janajati members were overwhelmed by Adivasi agendas, but in the days that followed, especially during the second CA, they became more party-oriented. Outside the CA, Janajati activists were also divided. Most NEFIN officials were from tiny Janajati groups, and they were influenced by the leaders of their respective parties. Therefore, prominent leaders of the Janajati movement, most of whom were from the majority Janajatis, tried to organize outside NEFIN and create pressure. But actually Adivasi Janajatis were divided, and that meant the movement was weakened. On the one hand, Janajati members of the second CA were not active, unlike what they were in the first CA, and on the other hand, activists outside the CA were also divided. Therefore, the political environment was opposite of what it was at time of the first CA. From the perspective of Adivasi Janajatis, the constitution that was promulgated in such adverse circumstances was not Janajati-friendly. It was not in

line with Adivasi Janajatis' aspiration and vision; therefore, there was opposition and disagreement of the Adivasi Janajatis on many provisions of the constitution (LAHURNIP 2016; Note of dissent by Adivasi Janajati Members of the Constituent Assembly in the Preliminary Draft of the Constitution of Nepal, 2072).

Since the announcement of the new constitution, the Janajati movement has been gradually weakening. In this unfavorable situation, the strategy of Adivasi Janajatis seems to be concentrated on exploration of revision of the constitution so that the issues left out could be addressed through amendments, while protecting the rights granted by the constitution. How soon or how late this will happen cannot be guessed at the moment. But ten issues are presented in a formulaic manner below regarding what the agendas of the Janajati movement for the future are or may be.

- The word “multi-ethnic/national” should be added to the definition of the Nepali state. The previous two constitutions (the Interim Constitution of 2007 and the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal of 1990) clearly referred Nepal to as a “multi-ethnic” state.
- The provision of secularism should be unambiguous as in the Interim Constitution of 2007. Currently, it is bounded by the obligation to protect and promote Sanatan Dharma; that is, the spirit of secularism has been squeezed.
- Multilingual policies should be implemented not only at the local and provincial levels but also at the federal level.
- Collective rights of Adivasi Janajatis should be placed in the Fundamental Rights section of the constitution in the

same manner as is done for women and Dalits.

- Customary law and self-government of Adivasi Janajatis should receive legal recognition.
- Reservation and affirmative action should be limited to those who are marginalized on the basis of caste/ethnicity, religion, and gender. In the case of others—such as children, senior citizens, third gender, people with disability, helpless, infirm, destitute—these should be shifted to another provision, that of the right to social security.
- The first rights of Adivasi Janajatis over natural resources should be ensured by the constitution.
- Provision for inclusion should be upgraded to inclusion based on proportional representation at every level and organ of the state.
- The existing mixed electoral system should be changed to the proportional electoral system.
- To advance inclusion further with an element of political territory, the existing seven-province administrative federal

system should be replaced by a new design that conforms to the principle of identity-based federalism. That is, the names, number, and boundaries of provinces should be determined based on territorial contiguity of ethnic settlements.

This chapter has presented a comprehensive picture of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal in a nutshell. It has sketched a holistic picture by synthesizing the available materials. It has informed the state of indigenous peoples of Nepal, especially demography based on ethnicity, language, and homeland. It has given a glimpse of political economy of ethnic groups of Nepal. Besides, it has reviewed the Janajati movement and dug out the roots of discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion against them. It has also carefully analyzed what the new Nepal should be from the eyes of Adivasi Janajatis—that is, what is the restructuring of the state that Janajatis want, what is left out in the new constitution, etc. But this aggregated narrative is not enough to understand all Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. So, in the second chapter, a brief information will be given about the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act.

Chapter 2

Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal

This chapter provides a brief introduction to each of the 60 Adivasi Janajatis (indigenous nationalities) of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act. Important themes of each group—such as origin and history, customary law and tradition, natural resources and economic condition, and political representation and participation—will be studied in detail and published in the coming years. This is just the beginning, and it provides only a brief information about population and language, origin and homeland, ethnicity and linguistic family, religion and culture, and occupation and customary governance of each group. The presentation style is largely in line with the styles adopted by authors of some previously published books—such as Janaklal Sharma (2039 vs), Dor Bahadur Bista (2002), Rajesh Gautam and Ashok K. Thapa-Magar (1994), Madhusudan Pandeya (2060 vs), and Tamla Ukyav and Shyam Adhikari (2057 vs). However, the descriptions have been updated with addition of some new and important information extracted from censuses, social inclusion reports, ethnographies of various ethnic groups, etc.

Bahra Gaunle

Bahra Gaunle is an Adivasi Janajati listed in the NFDIN Act, but not recorded in the census. According to a study, the population of this

group is 3,965 (Pun 2068 vs: 30). Boundaries of their settlements are as follows: Ghiling village in the north, Jomsom in the south, Thorangla Pass in the east, and Dolpa district in the west. Four villages fall within this territory are Kagbeni, Muktinath, Jhong, and Chhusang.

Bahra Gaunle are of Mongolian origin and their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. They are Buddhists. In addition to religious and cultural activities, they depend on monasteries and lamas for education and health services. The tradition of the middle son becoming a lama and the middle daughter becoming a nun is still in place. Polyandry, which has been practiced since ancient times, is now voluntary.

The traditional occupation of Bahra Gaunle is agriculture and animal husbandry. Another traditional occupation is seasonal trade—especially selling Himalayan herbs in cities of Nepal and India during winter. They are now more involved in trade and tourism.

Bahra Gaunle have their own customary institution, which is led by Ghempa or Mukhiya. An assembly of village elders is held once a year, and the Ghempa is elected from that assembly. Also, during the same assembly, the official (Rolu) who manages irrigation is also elected. The jurisdiction of Ghempa is extensive: “Ghempa is responsible for managing every political, social, and cultural work of the village. It is the Ghempa’s job to

look after the affairs of the village, call village meetings, hold meetings to inform the villagers about information and other matters coming from outside the village, and administer justice if someone does something illegal” (Pun 2068 vs: 47).

Bankariya

Bankariya are an endangered Adivasi Janajati with a total population of only 180, according to the 2021 census. This group, which comes from a nomadic background, still does not settle in one place. Some booklets published before the 2021 census listed this group as living in Twangra Danda in Makwanpur district (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 21; Pandeya 2060 vs: 68; Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 97). This place is east of Chaurabesi, west of Sunkhola, and north of Chure hills. Now this group must have shifted its settlement, and the new place must have been in the higher parts of Mahabharat hills of Chitwan district, because according to the 2021 census, 45 percent of Bankariya are living in this district, and of the remaining, 22 percent are in Rolpa district, 19 percent in East Nawalparasi district, and 15 percent in Kaski district. Out of a total of 180 Bankariya, 86 (47.8%) have listed Bankariya language, which is named after their ethnonym, as their mother tongue.

There is a myth about the origin of Bankariya, according to which their ancestor was Lava (while the ancestor of Chepang was Kush). They were the sons of Ram and Sita from the Treta Yuga. If one believes in this myth, Bankariya must be of Aryan origin and their language must be Indo-Aryan. After all, myth is just a myth; the truth may be different. For example, Chepang are Mongolian in origin, Tibetan-Burmese in language, and Prakriti Dharma in religion. This may also apply to Bankariya, although no study has been done on

this. Nepal Chepang (Praja) Sangh has claimed that Bankariya are actually Chepang.

Bankariya are also comparable to Chepang in other respects—for example, in occupation. Chepang have entered the agricultural stage, but farming is still not Bankariya’s interest. Their main occupation is collecting wild tubers and herbs and taking them to the market to sell. Making and selling *doko* (basket), *damlo* (head strap for carrying load), *kokro* (crib), and *kucho* (broom) of bamboo is another source of income of both Bankariya and Chepang. According to a recent field study, half of the total population of Bankariya are Hindus, while the remaining half have converted to Christianity (Gurung and Gurung 2082 vs).

Baram

Baram are a minority Hill ethnic group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act. There is no written record about the origin and ancestry of this group. There are many oral histories, but one does not agree with the other. Some say that they entered Nepal from Tibet along the banks of Brahmaputra River, while others say that they came from Burma. According to another legend, Baram are a group that migrated east from Humla. There is also a myth about their ancestor’s involvement in the Mahabharata War of the Dwapara Yuga. Some believe that they are of Kirati origin, and especially of Sunuwar origin (Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 27). A recent study claims that their current settlement area in Gorkha district is their homeland. According to this, Baram’s traditional homeland is the area east of Chepe River and west of Budhigandaki River (Chhantyal and Baram 2072 vs: 2–3).

According to the 2021 census, the population of Baram is 7,859, and more than 80 percent of them live in Gorkha district. The number of Baram speakers is 1,539; that is, only 19.6

percent of this group speak their mother tongue—and that too, mainly by those living in Tarkukot village. This data clearly shows that Baram are a group that is very much affected by linguistic *khaskaran*. At the same time, religious conversion is also very high, because almost all Baram have declared their religion to be Hindu.

Baram are of Mongolian origin, and their language (Balkura) is of the Tibeto-Burmese family. They are now Hindus, but their traditional religion is Prakriti Dharma (Chhantyal and Baram 2072 vs: 64). They have *pujari* (temple priest) and *purohit* (domestic priest) of their own kind, who are called Dangre. This group believes in shamanism.

The main occupation of Baram has changed over time. This group, which used to hunt and live on wild tubers and fruits as hunter-gatherers, has long since entered the agricultural stage. Baram were once *kipatiya* (*kipat* owners), but later most of their lands were occupied by others through deceit. However, agriculture and animal husbandry have always been their main occupation. Even today, the economic status of most of the Baram is basically linked to grain crops and cash crops they produce and their marketing.

According to Chhantyal and Baram (2072 vs), Baram have a three-tier customary institution. The lowest is Khalak, and it is led by a Thari. The middle one is called Taku, which is headed by a chief. Balabang is the highest organization, and it is led by a Kaji. The jurisdiction of all three levels are similar: settling disputes within the family and among neighbors, creating social customs and conducting rituals accordingly, and mobilizing free labor for the public good. In all these activities, when the lower level is unable to make concrete decisions, the responsibility shifts to the higher level. But this traditional institution has largely declined, although its legacy is manifested in their community activities.

Bhote

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Bhote are a minority Himalayan Adivasi Janajati. There is no dispute that this group originated in Tibet. The word “Bhote” has multiple meanings in common usage. First, this is a common name that includes some other Hill groups, including Tamang. Second, it denotes all the Himalayan groups but does not include the Hill groups. And third, applicable here, it is a special group that does not include any other Himalayan group, because the original homeland of other Himalayan groups is in a specific geography, but the birthplace of Bhote cannot be determined as a specific place. Their habitat is the mountain ranges and slopes extending from Kanchenjunga in the east to the Byas mountain in the far west. In administrative terms, this group extends from Sankhuwasabha in the east to Bajura in the far west. According to the 2021 census, this group has a population of 15,818. The highest population density is in the upper reaches of Karnali (also known as Jadan). One-third of them live in Humla and Jumla. Then about a quarter are in the Sankhuwasabha district in the far east. About 8 percent live in the far-western Bajura district.

The ethnonym Bhote is enough to identify it. It is an Adivasi Janajati of Mongolian origin who originated in Tibet (Bhot, in Nepali) and have been living in the Himalayan region of present-day Nepal for a long time. The word Bhote is also a linguistic term. According to the 2021 census, Bhote language speakers number 12,895, which is 81.5 percent of their total population.

The dress, language, culture, rituals, and traditions of Bhote obviously resemble Tibetans. They are Buddhists. Their rituals are a blend of nature worship, Bon, and shamanism. The monastery is their sacred religious site and their religious leader is Lama. They also

receive education and health services from the monastery and the Lama.

The occupation of Bhote is in many ways linked to their geography. As they live in high Himalayan regions, animal husbandry is their main occupation. Agriculture comes only after that. Cross-border trade is another traditional occupation of Bhote.

Bhujel

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Bhujel are a Hill minority Adivasi Janajati. The origin and homeland of this group is considered to be the Bhuji area located in the Dhorpatan valley of Baglung district. However, not even one percent of the total population of this group is found in that district. This group is mainly found in the hilly and Tarai areas east of Karnali River. They are scattered across Nepal. According to the 2021 census, Bhujel population is 120,245, and their settlement by region is as follows: 31 percent in Koshi, 6 percent in Madhesh, 28 percent in Bagmati, 24 percent in Gandaki, 8 percent in Lumbini, 1 percent in Karnali, and another 1 percent in the Sudur-Paschim Province. Being a dispersed group, the number of native speakers of their language is obviously very low. According to the 2021 census, there are only 13,086 Bhujel speakers, that is, only 10.9 percent of their total population. Bhujel are also a group with high religious *khaskaran*. They employ Brahmin priests for all types of ritual works (Pandeya 2060 vs: 80).

The native language of Bhujel is Pukhgyal Ngur, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. Their religion is nature worship. Facial features, physical structure, and traditional settlements are considered as yardsticks of Bhujel's social and cultural affinity with Magar and Gurung. Ubhauri and Udhaulai are the main festivals of this group. The main occupations of this group are agriculture, animal husbandry,

and weaving *doko-namlo* (basket and head strap for carrying things) from bamboo. They are also found working as wage laborers.

Bote

Bote are a minority Adivasi Janajati categorized into the Inner-Tarai group. Although there is no written history about the origin of this group, there is no shortage of legends. According to one legend, Bote are the descendants of sage Vyasa of the Dwapara Yuga. Another story is that they were born from the *kush* grass. Some say their ancestors used to live on the banks of Koshi, Kaligandaki, and Seti rivers (Dhakal and Sapkota 2014: 1–2). Madi River, which flows through Tanahun and Kaski; Seti River; and the banks of Kaligandaki River are their ancestral homeland. Once nomadic, they are now scattered. Out of the total 11,258 Bote mentioned in the 2021 census, the largest number (28%) live in Chitwan district, followed by East Nawalparasi (22%), Tanahun (14%), Dang (6%), Palpa (5%), and Gulmi (3%). According to the 2021 census, there are 7,687 Bote language speakers, which is 68 percent of their total population.

Bote and other Inner-Tarai groups (e.g., Danuwar, Darai, Kumal, Majhi, and Tharu) are of Mongolian origin. They have their own mother tongue (Bote language), but no script. The language belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family. Bote are nature worshipers, so they worship air, water, soil, trees, stones, rivers, and caves. After Hinduization, they have been celebrating Dashain and Tihar festivals. In the 1991 census, 97 percent of Bote listed their religion as Hindu, but they have preserved some original religious and cultural affairs. Lifecycle rituals and clan worship are performed by nephews and sons-in-law; that is, they do not use Brahmin priests. There is an indigenous self-government for the social

and cultural sphere, and it is led by Mukhiya of their community.

Basically, Bote can be divided into two groups based on their main occupation: Pakhebote and Panibote. The main occupation of the first group is agriculture and animal husbandry, while that of the second group is ferrying and fishing. Since these occupations alone cannot ensure their livelihood, they also work as wage laborers.

Byansi

Byansi, also known as Shauka or Ranga, are a minority indigenous people that is listed in the NFDIN Act. Named after a place, the group is native to the Byans valley, and they live both on and across the border between Nepal and India. Within Nepal, their original homeland is in some remote places in the Himalayan region of Darchula district: for example, Chhangru, Dumling, Rapla, Sitola, and Tinkar of Byans Rural Municipality. Only about a quarter of the total Byansi population are currently living in their native places.

According to the 2021 census, the population of this group is 5,718, but the number of Byansi language speakers is only 1,706 (22.1%). This shows a high degree of linguistic *khaskaran* in this group. At the same time, religious *khaskaran*, that is, Hinduization, has also taken place. Some have written that Byansi are Hindus (Pandeya 2060 vs: 77). This claim seems unnatural, because in general the Adivasi Janajati people of Nepal, including Byansi, whose descent is Mongolian, whose place of origin is Tibet, and whose language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family are hereditarily non-Hindu.

According to one study, Byansi are nature worshipers and do not worship idols, but rather worship the Himalayas and the mountains (Sherpa 2078 vs: 10). Shamanism is at the heart

of their culture. But it is difficult to say what the religion of this group is, although according to the census, this group follows Hinduism.

The main occupation of Byansi is cross-border trade. Their main trading center is Taklakot in Tibet. Animal husbandry is also their traditional occupation. Only then does agriculture come.

Byansi have their own customary institution. Officials (such as Dhakpa and Lhewa) work according to their positions to make their society run according to customs and traditions, which is led by Bada. Another important function of this institution is to settle disputes that occur in the village and punish offenders.

Chepeng

Chepeng are a Hill ethnic group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act. The word “Chepeng” is a combination of *che* (dog) and *pang* (bow and arrow), meaning that Chepeng are a community that hunts wild animals and uses dogs for hunting. There are different speculations about their origin in Nepal. Some, using Hindu narratives, say that this group is a descendant of Lava, the son of Ram and Sita of the Treta Yuga, while others consider it to be the “hybrid” son of the sage Chevan. On the contrary, one group considers Chepeng as a group that split from Kirat. Some have written that their ancestral place is Pukunthali and Sunathali in Dolakha district. There is no documented history to prove any of these claims. But the names Pukunthali and Sunathali come when the Chepeng priest (Pande) recites *Bakham* (tantric wisdom) during *Chhonam* (*Nwangi*) festival. The present-day Chepeng territory is the contiguous highland region of the Mahabharat Range west of Kathmandu, administratively divided into the districts of Makwanpur, Chitwan, Gorkha, and Dhading. The Chepeng homeland lies between the southern part of Dhading, the western part

of Makwanpur, and the forested area north of Chitwan in the Mahabharat Range (Bista 2002 vs: 22).

According to the 2021 census, the population of Chepang is 84,364. They are of Mongolian origin and have their own language, but no script. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. More than two-thirds of Chepang consider their ethnic language as their mother tongue. In other words, this group has not been affected much by linguistic *khaskaran*. This group has not had much contact with other ethnic groups. According to the data from the 2021 census, more than 95 percent of Chepang live in the above-mentioned four districts; in other words, they have not left their homeland or migrated elsewhere. Perhaps for this reason, religious *khaskaran* has been avoided.

Chepang are nature worshipers. They believe in supernatural powers and formless gods, and worship natural things such as forests, mountains, and trees. Currently, widespread religious conversion to Christianity is taking place. According to the 2021 census, 40.4 percent of Chepang have declared their religion to be Christian. Despite christianization, nature worship and shamanism are dominant in the daily life and culture of Chepang.

Until recently, Chepang were identified as living in caves, and doing hunting and gathering wild tubers. Slash-and-burn farming is their another traditional occupation. Despite the continuity of these occupations, Chepang seem to have also been engaged in non-traditional occupations. Chepang who have entered the stage of agriculture and animal husbandry are called Pukunthali. Those who still live with traditional occupations are addressed as Kachhare.

Chepang's traditional self-rule that regulates personal life, family relations, and functioning of society can be viewed in two ways: one, related to the state, and the other, related to their culture. The first can be called

the headman system. In this system, there are officials such as Mijar, Dware, Gaurung, and Karwari in Chepang areas. Their main function was to collect taxes and punish offenders. But with the advent of modern administration and elected local government, the role of such headman has become secondary. The other is the customary institution. In Chepang society, this is managed by their fellow priest, Pande. The Pande has a multifaceted role. He is a priest for clan worship, a domestic priest for lifecycle rituals, and a shaman who performs *tantra-mantras* to ward off inauspiciousness and ill health.

Chhairotan

Chhairotan is a Himalayan Adivasi Janajati listed in the NFDIN Act. The ancestral home of this group is the Chhairo village, a part of five villages (Panch Gaun) of Mustang district. This group has never been mentioned in the census. The latest 2021 census was no exception. Earlier, in 2014, the Government of Nepal had released a list of 98 minority caste and ethnic groups with less than 0.5 percent of the population mentioned in the 2011 census, which also left out Chhairotan. Why did this happen? One reason may be that the population of this group is very small. The second possible reason is that they migrated to another place and were included in the "Other" or "Unspecified" category, whose numbers are 5,888 and 4,436, respectively, in the 2021 census. The third possibility is that this group was included within the Thakali in the census because their settlement, appearance, dress, and language are similar to those of Thakali.

The language of Chhairotan is also not included in the census. Therefore, it is not known what language they speak. The ancestral home of all Himalayan groups is Tibet, and their languages belong the Tibeto-Burmese

family. Chhairrotan cannot be an exception to this.

According to one writer, Chhairrotan are Buddhist (Pandeya 2060 vs: 23). This is applicable to all Himalayan groups. Like other Himalayan groups, the traditional occupation of Chhairrotan must have been animal husbandry. Animals raised in the Himalayan region include yaks, buffaloes, sheep, and goats. Later, after entering the agricultural stage, farming became the main and animal husbandry the auxiliary occupation. Animal husbandry is a multi-purpose occupation, from which come meat for eating, milk for drinking, and animals for transporting goods. Depending on the location, main agricultural products grown in the Himalayan region are barley, wheat, and potatoes. Cross-border trade is also a traditional business of those living on the border of Nepal and Tibet. This also applies to Chhairrotan.

Chhantyal

Chhantyal are a minority ethnic group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act. This group, who are Mongolian by origin and whose language is Tibetan-Burmese, is said to have entered Nepal via Tibet. Long ago, they crossed the Himalayas and came to Chhentung in Baglung through Karnali. Therefore, Chhentung is considered the origin and ancestral place of Chhantyal in Nepal. Where there is mine (copper mine in particular), there is Chhantyal—this saying indicates the settlement and migration of this group. They scattered initially in search of copper mines and later for livelihood, but their settlements are centered in the western hills (especially, Myagdi, Baglung, and Gulmi districts). Out of the total 11,963 Chhantyal mentioned in the 2021 census, two-thirds are located in Baglung, Myagdi, and Kaski districts. The rest

are scattered in Gulmi, Pyuthan, Rukum, and Surkhet districts.

Although there is no documented history to know their origin, some consider Chhantyal the descendants of a Thakuri clan (Subedi 1981), and some consider them a sub-group within Magar (e.g., Shris Magar 2067 vs). But other authors claim that the ancestors of Chhantyal are neither Thakuri nor Magar, but rather a separate ethnic group. In areas where this group is densely settled, Magar and Gurung, and also Brahmin-Kshetri, live as their neighbors. Chhantyal have a distinct identity, and Harichan Chhantyal's statement regarding this is as follows: "an adivasi (nation) having their own distinct language, culture, rituals, traditions, religion, homeland, unwritten history, ancestral occupation of copper mining, we-feeling, emotional and honest character, flat nose, wheatish complexion, Mongoloid facial and physical structure, who believe in/ worship natural objects such as *bhume*, clan, *siddha*, hunters, water and air, and formless gods and deities, and prefer to live in groups" (2077 vs: 12).

This broad definition identifies many characteristics of Chhantyal. In terms of religion, they are nature worshippers. Their gods and goddesses are formless. They worship air, water, soil, and forest. Panre is the priest of their own kind. Nature worship, shamanism, and Buddhism can go together. Perhaps that is why, according to the 2011 census, 64 percent of Chhantyal are Buddhists. But what is surprising is that the 2021 census showed that the number of Buddhist Chhantyal was zero, but the number of Hindu ones was 95 percent. This is impossible, so there is a flaw in the statistics. However, Chhantyal are also among the groups that have been greatly affected by *khaskaran* in religion and language. According to the 2021 census, only one-third of the people of this group have declared Chhantyal as their mother tongue.

The traditional occupation of Chhantyal is mining, especially copper mining. As mining became scarce, agriculture took its place as their main occupation. Their auxiliary occupation is animal husbandry. The traditional occupation of producing household goods made of bamboo and trading in bags and sweaters made of *allo* (Himalayan nettle) fiber has become an auxiliary occupation. Earlier, they did not settle in one place and were constantly moving in search of mines, so their livelihood was linked to hunting and gathering wild tubers. Their occupation is now oriented toward non-traditional income generation: for example, employment, especially in the police and military; foreign employment; and wage labor.

Despite Hinduization and “linguistic conversion” into speaking Nepali, Chhantyal have retained some of their originality. Their traditional institution is Thyamhi, which consists of officials like Thyamhi (chief), Tungwa, Panre, Nhare, and Sore. This institution settles village disputes, administers justice, manages natural resources, and makes customs for religious and cultural rituals. Rules, based on tradition and customary laws, used to be regulated by Milsomi (assembly/council) with the participation of all households. But in the changing circumstances, this traditional institution is not as active as before.

Danuwar

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Danuwar, an Inner-Tarai group, is a diverse ethnic group in itself. There are different speculations about the origin of this group. Some say they came from Rajasthan, India, and some others say from Simraungadh (Pandeya 2060 vs: 47). There is confusion about the homeland of this ethnic group in Nepal, because there is variation in many aspects, including their settlements. The diversity and differences within the Danuwar

group can be summarized in the following points.

Settlement: Out of the total 82,784 Danuwar mentioned in the 2021 census, about 40 percent live in the central Tarai districts (e.g., Siraha, Dhanusha, Sarlahi), while about the same number are scattered in the central hilly region (e.g., Sindhuli, Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok). The remaining 20 percent are located in the eastern Tarai districts (Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari), including Udayapur.

Origin: One type of Danuwar is of Mongolian origin and of Hill descent, while the other type is of Aryan origin and Madhesi descent. From this perspective, there are four types of Danuwar: Kachhad Lagan (in the middle of the Mahabharata mountains), Janai Lagan (in the Tarai), Rai, and Adhikari (the latter two live on the banks of the rivers and do fishing).

Language: The Danuwar language spoken by Hill Danuwar has Tibetan-Burmese features, while that of the Madhesi Danuwar has Maithili features.

Danuwar are at the forefront of preserving their mother tongue. The number of mother tongue speakers is 60.4 percent of their total population, which comes to 49,992. Danuwar are nature worshipers and follow shamanism. They believe in supernatural and invisible powers and use shamans a lot. But the 1991 census shows that there is a high pressure of Hinduization among this group in that 97 percent of Danuwar are Hindus. The main occupations of all types of Danuwar are agriculture, animal husbandry, and wage labor. Hunting and fishing are traditional secondary occupations.

Darai

Darai are a minority group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act. There are various views about the origin of this Inner-Tarai

group. Some have speculated that their ancestors came from Darbhanga in India. Some have said that their ancestral place is Madi Phant (Kaini 2063 vs: 2-3). In Nepal, Darai live in the Chitwan valley and the banks of Seti and Madi rivers in Tanahun district. The results of the 2021 census are consistent with this. Among the 18,695 Darai population reported in the census, almost half (47.3%) live in Chitwan district, while about one-third (23.5%) live in Tanahun district. The number of native speakers of Darai language is 12,156, which is 65.02 percent of the total Darai population. The linguistic *khaskaran* of Darai is less than that of some other groups. However, religious conversion is high, as most Darai people identify themselves as Hindus. According to the 1991 census, 99 percent of Darai are Hindus. Like other Hindus, Darai celebrate festivals such as Teej, Dashain, and Tihar.

Darai's facial features, lifestyle, culture, and customs are similar to those of other Inner-Tarai groups such as Bote, Danuwar, Kumal, Majhi, and Tharu. All of these groups are of Mongolian origin. Darai have their own language, but no script. The Darai language differs from that of other groups in that it belongs to the Indo-Aryan family (Kaini 2063 vs: 21). The traditional religion of Darai is Buddhism (Pandeya 2060 vs: 51), but they have been subjected to Hinduization. However, some indigeneity has been preserved: for example, maternal uncle or nephew serves as their priest. They believe in shamanism a lot.

The indigeneity of Darai is mainly expressed in two things: occupation and customary rule. Settlement is mostly in the hills and plains wherever there is plain or terraced fertile land with ample irrigation facilities. They depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

Mukhiya is the village headman in Darai settlements. The Mukhiya plays a leadership role in settling family disputes, establishing customs in the village, punishing offenders, and mobilizing the community for public welfare.

Similarly, those holding the position of Garau arrange for worship and provide traditional health care.

Dhanuk (Rajbanshi)

Dhanuk are listed in the NFDIN Act as an Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. Most of the people of this group are known as Mandal. The four main branches of this group are Sirodh, Madhaiya, Dudhwar, and Suri. Some people have surnames like Chaudhary, Mahato, Sada, Dhanuk, and Dhankar. Kurmi, Kewat, and Amat are clans of Dhanuk.

It is said that the origin of Dhanuk Mandal, which considers Dhanuk Muni as its ancestor, is the village of Dhaniya in the Rajasthan province of India (Pandey 2060 vs: 55). This group is present in large numbers in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh in India. According to Muktinath Mandal, Dhanuk have been living in Nepal since the ancient Mithila and Tirhut periods (Chaudhary, n.d.: 11). Bow and arrow is the symbol of this group. This group is Hindu. Although the mother tongue of Dhanuk is Magahi, many speak Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Urdu, or Awadhi.

The main occupation of Dhanuk is agriculture, but they are also involved in wage labor. Nowadays, their youth go to the Gulf countries for foreign employment.

Dhanuk Mandal have their own customary institution, whose head is called Manyajan. In addition, officials like Dewan, Bitdar, and Rorait are responsible for conducting customary traditional self-rule.

Although listed as an Adivasi Janajati, it is said that Dhanuk are a community belonging to the Hindu caste group. According to Ukyav and Adhikari, there are three types of Dhanuk: Mandal Dhanuk, Sur Dhanuk, and Rajbanshi Dhanuk. The first two are included in the

Hindu Madhesi caste (2057 vs: 18). Madhesh scholars Tula Narayan Sha and Krishna Sha also have said that although Dhanuk are legally a Janajati group, they are specifically a community that falls within the Madhesi Hindu caste (Interview, 10 July 2025). In India, Dhanuk are recognized as other backward caste (OBC). Out of the 252,105 Dhanuk mentioned in the 2021 census, about 88 percent live in central Tarai—a Hindu Madhesi belt—while only about 11 percent live in the villages of Jhapa and Morang districts, i.e., the homeland of Rajbanshi (Koch), which is described later in this chapter. If they attach Koch to the surname Rajbanshi, they belong to the Rajbanshi (Koch) group.

Dhimal

Dhimal are an ethnic group living in eastern Tarai, listed as an Adivasi Janajati of Nepal in the NFDIN Act. There is no written history of their origin, but there are many stories about their settlement in Nepal. One, there is a reference to the Dhimal jati and Dhimal kingdom (which falls within the territory of present-day Nepal) in the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the Dwapara Yuga. The second story is that in ancient times a kingdom in the mountainous part of present-day north-eastern India was defeated in the plains during expansion of its borders, and some of the defeated army settled there and over time they transformed into Dhimal. According to the third story, the descendants of the youngest of the Limbu brothers from the eastern hills who was lost in the plains while returning home were later known as Dhimal (Tumbahang 2015a: 110–11).

Dhimal are native to Jhapa and Morang districts of Nepal. According to the 2021 census, their population is 25,643, out of which 53 percent live in Morang, the remaining

41 percent in Jhapa. Dhimal settlement is separated by Maikhola River. East of the river lies Jhapa district, and those living there are called Purbeli Dhimal. And west of the river is the border of Morang district, and those living there are called Paschimeli Dhimal (Dahal 2036 vs: 3). The only difference is that they are separated by the river; in all other respects, both Purbeli and Paschimeli Dhimal are the same. For example, they speak the same language. According to the 2021 census, the number of speakers of Dhimal language is 20,583, which is 80.3 percent of their population.

Although black in complexion, the physical structure of Dhimal is similar to that of Kiratis of eastern hills. Perhaps that is why Dhimal is called the “Limbu of Madhesh.” Dhimal are Mongolian by origin and Kirati by descent. This group has its own mother tongue (Dhimal language), but no script. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. There is no word for religion in the Dhimal vocabulary (Dahal 2056 vs: 105), but the 1991 census has reported 72 percent of Dhimal as Hindus. Due to the influence of Hinduization, Dhimal celebrate festivals like Dashain and Tihar. In fact, Dhimal are not traditionally followers of any religion, but are only nature worshipers. According to the 2021 census, more than a third of Dhimal have declared their religion as Prakriti Dharma. They practice clan worship and ancestor worship, and they have their own priests, not Brahmins. They also believe in shamanism.

The traditional occupations of Dhimal, who prefer to live near forests and riverbanks, are hunting, fishing, and weaving clothes on looms. Their main occupation is agriculture with animal husbandry. In addition to grain crops, they now are engaged in cultivation of vegetables and fruits that are sold in the market.

Dhimal have their own customary institution called Majhiwarang. It is led by the village head

(Majhi). If a decision has to be made on a more serious matter, their society is summoned, which is called Chaurasi in Dhimal language.

Dolpo

Dolpo is a minority Himalayan group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act. The group seems to have been named after the name of the place where they reside (Dolpa district). Dolpo, who live both on and across the Tibetan border of Nepal and China, originated in Tibet, like other Himalayan groups did. In Nepal, their historical territory is the headwaters of the Bheri River that lie south of Tibet and north of the Dhaulagiri mountain. According to the 2021 census, their population is 5,818. Most of them seem to be content to remain in their own homeland, as about 90 percent of Dolpo live in Dolpa district. A few have moved to the neighboring districts of Humla and Mustang, and some to the country's capital, Kathmandu. Although they are not very keen on migration, the number of people who speak their mother tongue (Dolpo) is only 3,244, which is only 55.8 percent of their total population.

Dolpo are of Mongolian origin, and their mother tongue belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. They are Buddhists, and their culture includes Bon and shamanism. Every village where they live has a monastery. It is not only their place of worship but also an educational institution.

Agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade are traditional occupations of Dolpo. They grow buckwheat, wheat, naked barley, beans, and potatoes. Dolpo raise goats, sheep, and donkeys, and these are mainly used for three purposes: eating meat, consuming milk and dairy products, and transporting goods. Dolpo go to Tibet for trade in one season and to the plains of Nepal and India in another season.

This is a tradition that has been going on for a long time.

Traditional polyandry is still practiced by Dolpo, although it has declined considerably. They believe in ghosts and spirits. They rely on witch doctors for any health problems.

Dura

Dura are a very small minority Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. There are different opinions on the origin of this group. Some point to Tibet in the north, while others point to Chittorgarh in India in the south. Some say that the ancestral home of this group, who were previously known to be nomadic, is Dullu in Dailekh district. According to their ethnic organization, they migrated from Mongolia to Rudrabhot in Tibet, and from there, moving through various places in western Nepal, they have been living in Duradanda *mauja* of Lamjung district for thousands of years. Therefore, the homeland of this group is Duradanda *mauja*, within which lies Chandreshwor, Purankot, Sindure, Dhuseni, and Neta villages. According to the 2021 census, their total population is 5,581, and half of them are in Lamjung. Other dense settlements are in Tanahun, Kaski, Chitwan, and some places in Kathmandu.

The Dura people, who are of Mongolian origin, have their own mother tongue (Dura language), but there is no script. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. But according to the 2021 census, only about a third of their population speak the Dura language. Linguistic *khaskaran* is very visible in this group, so is Hinduization. Initially, Dura were nature worshipers; they worshiped the sun, water, fire, forest, etc., and they still do so. Now their religion is very mixed: there is animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and also shamanism. On the one hand, they worship nature, and on the other hand, some people call Hill Brahmins to perform pujas. But they call Lamas for ancestor

worship. They use shamans a lot. On the one hand, linguistic and religious *khaskaran* is common, but on the other hand, indigeneity has also been preserved. Festivals that express Dura's own distinct culture include Thado Bhaka, Ghatus (Sati, Bahramase, Kushunda), Krishna Charitra, and Chudka Rodi.

Hunting and gathering wild tubers for living are only found in history, when Dura used to move from one place to another as nomads. With advent into the agricultural stage, their main occupation is farming. Animal husbandry became a subsidiary occupation associated with agriculture. Now Dura's occupation has diversified, which includes joining the army, working in the cities and towns, and going for foreign employment.

Gangai

Gangai are a minority ethnic group classified as Tarai Janajati. They are listed as Adivasi Janajati in the NFDIN Act. Also known as Ganesh or Mandal, they are native to two Tarai districts, Jhapa and Morang, in eastern Nepal. The 2021 census listed their population as 41,446, out of which 74 percent live in Morang while the remaining 26 percent live in Jhapa.

Gangai are an ethnic group that entered Nepal from West Bengal, India, about 300 years ago (Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 225). This group has its own language, but no script. The number of speakers of Gangai language is 26,281; that is, 63.4 percent of the Gangai speak their mother tongue. The Gangai language spoken in Morang has Maithili characteristics, while that spoken in Jhapa has Rajbanshi characteristics. The physical features of Gangai (round face, hooked nose, wheatish complexion, and coarse hair) is similar to that of Mongolians, but they are Hindus. According to the 2021 census, all Gangai are Hindus. However, this group is different from other

traditional Hindus in that they have no caste-based hierarchy; everyone is equal. The deities of this group are Mahavir and Thakur.

The main occupation of Gangai is agriculture. Their landholdings are larger than those of average Nepali (Gurung et al. 2014: 63). Perhaps this is why people of this group are not seen in wage labor, unlike other Tarai groups such as Kisan, Jhangad, and Santhal.

Gurung

Gurung (Tamu) are a majority Hill ethnic group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act. According to one version of history, the settlement of this group in the present Tamu area was a result of the second phase of migration. The first phase took place from the north to the higher parts of the Himalayan region of present-day Nepal long before the border between Nepal and Tibet was fixed. It is estimated that the ancestors of this group arrived in the present-day Mustang district thousands of years ago. They lived there for a long time, in the stage of hunting and animal husbandry. During the transition period from this stage to the agricultural stage, they moved from the Himalayan region to the hilly region between Trishuli and Kaligandaki, that is, the Gandaki region (Gurung 2068 vs: 2–3).

The area between Trishuli River in the east and Kaligandaki River in the west (Gorkha, Lamjung, Tanahun, Kaski, Syangja, Parbat, Manang, and Mustang districts) is known as Tamuwan (*Tamu Hyul*). That is, these places are the Gurung homeland. Its four boundaries are Budhigandaki River in the east, Kaligandaki River in the west, Tibet in the north, and Devghat in the south (Gurung 2068 vs: 2–3). According to the 2021 census, more than half of the total 543,790 Gurungs live in their traditional homeland, Tamuwan. Out of the rest, about 10 percent live in the

eastern region; that is, Gurung migrated to those places during Nepal's expansion under Prithvi Narayan Shah. Gurung were in the Gorkha battalion in significant numbers at that time. More than a quarter of Gurung live in the large cities such as the country's capital city of Kathmandu, Chitwan, Butwal, and Bhairahawa, and migration of Gurung to these places is related to urbanization and search for economic opportunities associated with it.

Gurung are a Mongolian people. Their mother tongue is Tamu Kyui. It belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. Currently, the Khema script has been developed and used, and it has also been recognized by the Language Commission. The traditional religion of Gurung is Bon, and later they also adopted Buddhism along with Bon. This ethnic group is not immune to Hinduization. In the 1991 census, 58 percent of Gurung listed their religion as Hindu, while 41 percent as Buddhist. In the latest census of 2021, the number of Gurung embracing Buddhism increased to 54.4 percent. This can be seen as growing awareness of their identity. This group is continuing their original religion, culture, and rituals. They have three types of religious leaders (Khegi): Pachyu, Klehebri, and Lama. Among them, Pachyu treats people and tells auspiciousness and inauspiciousness; Klehebri performs ancestral rites; and Lama performs purification rituals. Khegis have been passing down ancient knowledge through the *Pye Tan Lhu Tan* (oral scripture).

The traditional occupation of Gurung has gradually changed over time in the following way: initially hunting, then animal husbandry, then agriculture and animal husbandry, and then recruitment in the army of Nepal and abroad, as well as foreign employment. Most Gurung have enough land to earn a living, and they earn a good income from the salary or pension they receive from their jobs as *lahure*.

Gurung have their own customary institution called Nal Sabha. In some places (for example,

in Bhujung village in Lamjung district), there is Bhadau Sabha. These customary institutions formulate rules to regulate the social, cultural, ritual and religious life of Gurung. These institutions are also involved in small-scale physical development (e.g., roads, canals, pastures) for the benefit of the community. Apart from these, there is also the village headman (Mukhiya), who plays many roles simultaneously, especially by adjudicating disputes in the villages. Rodhi is an indigenous multi-purpose institution of Gurung in which knowledge and skills related to social, cultural, economic, moral, and traditional values are transferred from the previous generation to the next generation. It also has a dance and entertainment component. There are many festivals of Gurung. Lhosar is one of their main festivals. In the changed circumstances (i.e., since the establishment of elected local governments), customary governance of indigenous peoples has declined. Gurung have also been affected by this.

Hayu

According to the 2021 census, Hayu (locally known as Vayu) are a very small and endangered ethnic group with a population of only 3,069. Some say that this ethnic group originated from Sri Lanka. However, with their Mongolian origin, Kirati descent, and mother tongue of the Tibeto-Burmese family, their ancestors could not have been from Sri Lanka. Since Hayu are of Kirati descent, it can be assumed that this ethnic group has been present in Nepal since before the Lichchhavi period. The homeland of Hayu in Nepal are Sukajor in Ramechhap district and Ratanchura in Sindhuli district (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 35; Pokharel 2070 vs: 37). More than two-thirds of Hayu live in Ramechhap and Sindhuli districts.

Hayu have their own language, which is called Vayu Bhasha, but this language does not have a script. According to the 2021 census, only about a third of their population reported their language as Hayu. The reason is clear; this group is highly affected by linguistic *khaskaran*. In addition, this group is being Hinduized. The ancient religion of Hayu is nature worship; also, since they are of Kirati descent, their traditional religion is Kirat.

Hayu were originally a nomadic people. Hunting and gathering wild tubers was their main occupation in that period. Now they have transitioned to the agricultural stage. Some Hayu appear to be engaged in wage labor for their livelihood, both in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Animal husbandry and production and sale of home-made clothes and household goods made of bamboo are subsidiary occupations of Hayu.

The customary institution of Hayu is called Palikem, which is led by officials like Jetha Budha, Gaurang, and Tahale. Settling disputes between people in their community and establishing social and cultural customs fall within the jurisdiction of Palikem. But now this customary practice does not seem to be popular.

Hyolmo

Hyolmo are a minority group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act. The ancestors of this group are Tibetan. In Nepal, their homeland is Helambu village, a high hilly area (*lek*) in the north-east of Sindhupalchok district. The ethnonym and toponym of this group are congruent. In the *lek* around Helambu, there are Bhote and Sherpa settlements, and in the valley below, there are Tamang and then Brahmin, Kshetri, and Dalit of Hill castes. Hyolmo's facial features, traditions, rituals, culture, and language are similar to those of Sherpa.

According to the 2021 census, the population of Hyolmo is 9,819, and the number of speakers of Hyolmo language is 9,658. That is, 98 percent of the Hyolmo people speak the Hyolmo language as their mother tongue. Though known as a migratory people, Hyolmo have preserved their language. Only 40 percent of their people are found in their ancestral land; the remaining 60 percent have migrated elsewhere. One-third of the total Hyolmo population have become residents of Kathmandu, about 13 percent have reached Ilam, and some live in Ramechhap and Chitwan.

Hyolmo are of Mongolian origin, and their native language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. The religion of this group is Buddhism, and there is a monastery in every settlement where they live. The monastery is not only a religious place but also an educational institution where Buddhism is taught. The head of the monastery is the Lama, and he plays many roles at once. He is a *pujari* and recites at the monastery. He is also a domestic priest who conducts lifecycle rituals of Hyolmo. He is a teacher who teaches Buddhism at the monastery. He is also an astrologer who tells about their people's fate and auspiciousness. He is also a doctor who treats the sick with Tibetan herbal medicine. Therefore, Hyolmo have great respect for the monastery and the Lama. The main festival of this group is Lhosar. The traditional occupation of Hyolmo is agriculture and animal husbandry.

Jhangad (Uranw)

Jhangad are a minority Tarai ethnic group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act. There are different narratives about their origin and their time of arrival in Nepal. One narrative links it to the arrival of Aryans in the Indus Valley more than 2,500 years ago and the migration of Dravidians.

Another narrative links it to the defeated group who were searching for a safe place after the Mughal invasion of India in the 14th century. The third narrative says that they entered Nepal as workers from Chhotanagpur, India (Uranw 2079 vs: 23). This statement is consistent with the policies, plans, and programs of the Shah and Rana rulers after the unification of Nepal to bring in laborers from India to expand the agricultural sector by clearing forests in Tarai. This also coincides with the period when some other Tarai janajatis (such as Kisan and Santhal) entered Nepal. Jhangad were one of the first inhabitants of the forests of eastern Tarai, where they live now, before the clearing of the Charkose Jhadi (a dense forest). The 2021 census also confirms this, according to which more than half of the total of 46,840 Jhangad live in Sunsari district. Their other settlements, in order of population, are as follows: Morang (16%), Parsa (7%), Jhapa (5%), Kapilvastu (4%), Siraha (4%), Bara (2%), Dhanusha (2%) and Rupandehi (1%). There are dense settlements of Jhangad in the forests and riverbanks of these districts. The native language of Jhangad is Oranw (or Kurukhmundari), and the number of speakers of this language is 38,873, according to the 2021 census, which is 82.9 percent of the total population of Jhangad.

Jhangad are of non-Aryan, Dravidian origin. Their religion is Sharana, meaning Sanatan Dharma (nature worship), which is different from the one associated with Hindu religion. They worship natural objects such as wind, water, soil, rivers, plants, trees, and forests, and they also worship their ancestors. For these religious functions, Jhangad use their own priest (Dhami).

Previously living in the forest and now living in the edges of forests and along riverbanks, Jhangad's traditional occupation is hunting, fishing, and collecting tubers and herbs. With the entry into the agricultural stage, a new

dimension has been added to their occupation. Their current main occupation is agriculture and animal husbandry. They also do wage labor to earn a living.

Jirel

Jirel, listed in the NFDIN Act, are a minority Adivasi Janajati. Their historical territory is the hilly area of the Wallo Kirat region (between Sunkoshi River and Likhu River). During the Kirat period, Jiri, Sikri, Jungu, and Kshetrpa within the Wallo Kirat were considered to be the stronghold of Jirel. At present, the densest settlement of this group is in Jiri and Sikri villages of Dolakha district, along with some surrounding villages. The 2021 census also shows the same. Out of the total 6,031 Jirel, three-quarters live in this district. The number of Jirel language speakers is 5,167, which is 85.7 percent of the population of this group.

Jirel, who are of Mongolian origin and Kirati descent, have their own language (Dakpong Bat), which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. Their ancient religion is Prakriti Dharma (animism). They later became Buddhists and have been Hinduized for some time. According to the 1991 census, 64 percent of Jirel are Hindus and only 30 percent are Kirati. Like other Hindus, they celebrate Dashain and Tihar. Despite this, they have preserved their indigeneity. For example, they employ the priest Phombo of their own kind for ancestral worship and nature worship. Death rituals are performed by Lama, although this practice is not found among other Kiratis. In addition to these three religions, a mix of Kirati and shamanism is found in the religious, cultural, and ritual activities of this group.

Jirel's traditional occupation is agriculture, mainly animal husbandry. In addition to grain crops, they also grow vegetables and sell them in the market. With the implementation of the

Jiri Multipurpose Development Project in Jiri in the mid-1960s with the support of the Swiss government, Jirel's sources of income have expanded. Now, they also do small tourism-related businesses.

Jirel have their own customary institution. This institution, formed under the leadership of Mijar, consists of officials such as Dware and Gorcha. Its main function is to collect land tax and cowshed tax, to settle family disputes, to solve disputes that arise in villages, to run the community according to traditional customs, and to mobilize local people for the public good.

Kisan

Among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act, Kisan is a tiny minority and endangered ethnic group. There is a legend and an oral history about their origin. According to the legend, Kisans are Nagvamshi (descendants of the serpent god), and in India they are called Nagesiya. According to oral history, the Raigarh kingdom of Kisan, which spread over some areas of present-day Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh of India, disappeared after it was taken over by the Mughal emperor. Some Kisans who fled after the Mughal invasion on the one hand and those who were imported as tea plantation workers in Bengal and Assam on the other hand eventually entered Nepal through the then border crossing of Nakalbanda in eastern Nepal.

There is no dispute that the ancestors of Kisan came from India. Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Bihar of India have dense settlements of Kisan. Nepal shares borders with West Bengal and Bihar. It is said that the ancestors of Kisan were brought by landlords of Nepal from a place called Chhotanagpur in India for farming (Mahato 2014). Regarding when they arrived in Nepal, a researcher, citing

an old-aged Kisan, has estimated it as about 200 years ago (Tumbahang 2015b: 137). This is in line with an event at that time. In the latter half of the 18th century, there was a famine in Bihar, and at that time the rulers of Nepal adopted a policy of importing agricultural laborers from India to expand the arable land by clearing the forests in the plains.

The homeland of Kisan in Nepal are a few villages in Jhapa district. The 2001 census also confirms this: out of the total 1,479 population of Kisan, 84 percent reside in Jhapa district. Kisans are scattered in various villages of this district (such as Mechinagar, Dhaijan, Bahundangi, and Shantinagar). About 1,004 Kisans speak their mother tongue, which constitutes 67.9 percent of their total population.

The mother tongue of Kisan is Sadri (Mahato 2014: 1). But government statistics has called it Kisan Bhasha (Kisan language), derived from the ethnonym. There is no consensus among the researchers on which linguistic family it belongs to. Some say it belongs to the Dravidian family (Yadav and Turin 2007; Pandeya 2060: 4), while others consider it a mix of Austro-Asiatic and Indo-Aryan families (Tumbahang 2015b: 140). The Central Department of Linguistics of Tribhuvan University and the Language Commission have considered it as belonging to the Indo-Aryan family.

Kisan are originally nature worshipers. But since they have been Hinduized for a long time, they are now known as Hindus. But there are no temples in their settlements. They perform religious rituals in forests and riverbanks. Their culture and customs are similar to those of Kisan across the border.

The history of Kisan in Nepal is linked to farming. This ethnic group, which entered Nepal as agricultural laborers, had land of about 15 bighas per family (Tumbahang 2015b: 153). At that time, the Tarai of Nepal was a malaria-ridden region. After malaria

eradication, there was massive migration from the Hills to the Tarai. In this process, Kisan were displaced from their land. Now more than half of Kisan have become landless. According to a survey conducted in 2012 based on the Human Development and Poverty Index, Kisan are living in miserable conditions in many areas (Gurung et al. 2014). Many Kisan do daily wage labor as well as sharecropping for their livelihood.

Kisan had their own customary institution. They had their own king (Mahato), ministers (Vakil), and soldiers. The Kisan society operated under their supervision, surveillance, and direction. In matters except of heinous crimes like murder and robbery, the task of providing justice and punishing offenders was done through this institution. But now this practice is not much in use.

Kumal

Kumal is a minority group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act. It is included in the Inner-Tarai group. It is difficult to determine their exact historical land. According to the 2021 census, out of the total 129,702 Kumal, half live in the western hilly districts from Dhading to Pyuthan. The remaining half are spread across the western Tarai districts from Chitwan to Kailali. Having settled in different geographical areas, they inevitably have linguistic diversity. The number of people who identify themselves as Kumal language speakers is small—only 18,435, which is only 14.2 percent of the total population of Kumal. This shows that Kumal are an ethnic group that has been highly affected by linguistic *khaskaran*. At the same time, religious *khaskaran* also seems to have occurred extensively, because most ordinary Kumal have listed their religion as Hindu. However, Kumal organizations and activists have advocated that they are different from Nepali speakers and Hindus.

Judging by the traditional occupational identity of Kumal (that of making clay pots), there is no doubt that they are ancient people. Various records confirm this. But their origin and ancestral homeland are unclear, so there is ambiguity in their ethnicity, religion, and language. Since their physical features and culture are similar to other groups of Inner-Tarai—such as Bote, Danuwar, Darai, Majhi, and Tharu—Kumal must also be of Mongolian origin. Some consider the Kumal language belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese family (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 6), while others consider it to be of the Indo-Aryan family (Pandeya 2060 vs: 6). One group considers Kumal to be Hindus (Pandeya 2060 vs: 7), while another group considers them to be nature worshipers and followers of shamanism (Sarbahari et al. 2081 vs: 25, 103).

The main occupation of Kumal, who are known for their ancient occupation of making clay pots, is agriculture. Now their occupation has expanded and diversified. They now can be seen in any profession: from jobs to business and from wage labor to foreign employment.

The indigeneity of Kumal is reflected in their customary traditions. They have their own traditional institution, the Mukhiya system. Under the guidance of Mukhiya, the Kumal society operates by following their policies, rules, and customs.

Kushunda

According to the 2021 census, Kushunda, with a population of only 253, are a tiny minority and endangered ethnic group, listed in the NFDIN Act. This group, which has only recently settled, was nomadic, wandering in the forest like some of the present-day Raute. Kushunda, who wish to be known as “king of forest,” consider themselves to be the descendants of Kush. According to Valmiki Purana, Kush

was the second son of King Rama and Queen Sita during the Treta Yuga. It is difficult to find the traditional homeland of this group in Nepal, as they were nomadic and hunter-gatherers until recently. According to one author, their ancestor land is some villages of Gorkha, Tanahun, Kaski, Arghakhanchi, Gulmi, Pyuthan, Dang, Salyan, Dailekh, and Surkhet districts (Pandeya 2060 vs: 10). But the results of the latest census show otherwise. This group is found in only four districts—the highest number in Kathmandu and then in Dang, Pyuthan, and Bhaktapur respectively.

The Kushunda language is considered by some to be of the Tibeto-Burmese family (Rana 2002), some consider it belonging to the Indo-Pacific family (Whitehouse et al. 2004), while others consider it a separate language that does not belong to any of these language families. According to the 2021 census, the number of Kushunda speakers is only 23. However, according to a recent field study, only one person can speak this language (Gurung and Gurung 2082 vs).

Having been nomadic and wandering in the forests until recently, Kushunda must have been nature worshipers; that is, this group worships forest deities and believes in shamans. But their Hinduization is evident in their surnames (e.g., Singh, Sahi, Khan, and Sen). In contrast, Kushunda do not consider themselves Hindus, as found in a recent field study (Gurung and Gurung 2082 vs).

Kushunda, who have just emerged from the forests, certainly do not have their own land. In this sense, they are now *sukumbasis* (squatters). Earlier, their livelihood depended on hunting and gathering tubers and fruits in the forest. Now wage labor—in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors—is their main occupation. Also, their main source of livelihood is the monthly allowance of Rs. 4,000 provided by the government to persons of the endangered groups.

Kushwadiya

Kushwadiya, named after their occupation of making broom, are a minority ethnic group in Nepal, which is listed in the NFDIN Act as an Adivasi Janajati. There is no written history about the origin of this group, but there are three legends about it. Firstly, Kushwadiya are the descendants of Hanuman from the Treta Yuga. Perhaps that is why they worship Hanuman more than any other god or goddess. Secondly, they are descendants of Mana and Muniya, so Mata Maharani is their patron deity. And thirdly, their ancestor is a fakir named Nanuchotu. All three legends about their origin are consistent with their lifestyle.

Until recently, Kushwadiya lived a nomadic life. Their exact historical territory in Nepal is unknown. Since most Kushwadiya live in the mid-western and far-western Tarai, their arrival in Nepal may be linked to the unification of the country in 1768, then expansion of the Gorkha state until 1814, and the return of new territories (Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Kanchanpur) from British India in 1856. Their current settlement in Nepal is in western Tarai. The 3,343 Kushwadiya mentioned in the 2021 census are located in Banke (21%), Kapilvastu (20%), Bardiya (19%), and Rupandehi (18%) districts.

Pashi is Kushwadiya's mother tongue, which belongs to the Dravidian family. But this language is not mentioned in the census. The influence of Bhojpuri and Awadhi languages is evident in the Pashi language. The religion of Kushwadiya is Hindu. Worshiping Mata Maharani and Dharmin Thakurain is an intrinsic feature of this group, about which there is no description in any Hindu text. Kushwadiya are also different from other Hindus because their society is not stratified according to the caste system. People of this group do not go to temples, nor do they use Brahmins as priests.

Therefore, Kushwadiya are a Hindu group without the basic characteristics of Hinduism.

The entry of Kushwadiya into Nepal is linked to economic factors. The similarity between Kisan of the east and Kushwadiya of the west is that both groups entered Nepal driven by poverty. But the two have different occupations—Kisans are in farming and Kushwadiyas in other occupations. The main occupation of Kushwadiya is making *silauto* (stone slab and roller for grinding) and brooms of *kush* grass and selling them in the market. Hunting, gathering wild tubers and herbs, and fishing are their traditional occupations since their nomadic days, and they continue to do them because they do not have their own land. They have now started living in huts and also work as agricultural laborers and do animal husbandry. Overall, this group is very poor in terms of human development and poverty indices (Gurung et al. 2014).

Larke (Chumba/Nubri)

Listed as Larke in the NFDIN Act, mentioned as Chumba/Nubri in the census, and known locally as Nubri, they are a minority Himalayan Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. They originated in Tibet and arrived in Nepal a long time ago. Their homeland is the remote villages of Sama, Lho, Prok, and Bihi in the northern Himalayan region of Gorkha district. It lies west of Shiyar River. According to the 2021 census, the population of this group is 4,414, out of which 4,284 (97.1%) speak their own ethnic language. The almost equal numbers of their population and their native language speakers indicate that their migration is very low compared to other groups; that is, they have remained in their own homeland.

Larke, of Mongolian origin, have their own language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family, but they do not have their own script.

Like other Himalayan groups, Larke's ancient religion is nature worship and Bon, but they later converted to Buddhism. Their culture and rituals incorporate all four religions—a mix of Prakriti Dharma, Bon, Buddhism, and shamanism.

Larke's traditional occupation is agriculture, animal husbandry, and cross-border trade. The main agricultural crops grown in their habitat are sorghum, maize, wheat, millet, and potatoes. Animal husbandry includes buffaloes, yaks, horses, sheep, and goats. In cross-border trade, they import salt and wool from Tibet and export food and herbs from Nepal. The traditional occupations of this group, who are not interested in migration, have continued even today.

The monastery and Lama play a large role in their customary institution. The monastery is a religious place, an educational institution, as well as a place for herbal treatment. Lamas perform religious rituals; officiate at lifecycle ceremonies; provide astrologer services; treat the sick using herbs; and play a leading role in other social and cultural activities.

Lepcha

Lepcha are a minority Adivasi Janajati. There is no written evidence of the origin of this group. But at one time Lepcha had their own kingdom, called Mayal Lyang, and it was located in the lap of the Kanchenjunga mountain, including Ilam of Nepal and Darjeeling and Kalimpong of West Bengal, Sikkim of India, and parts of Bhutan. The homeland of this group in Nepal is Ilam. Even today, 84 percent of Lepcha live in that district. The population of this group, who prefer to be known as Rong, is 3,578, according to the 2021 census, out of which 62 percent recorded their language as Lepcha. The Lepcha language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family and has its own script and alphabet.

Lepcha are basically nature worshipers and also follow Buddhism. Their religious scripture is Astachyo, and their religious leaders are Bung, Thing, Yaja, and Yama. Although Buddhist religious leaders (Lamas) perform religious activities, the presence of native religious leaders Bung and Thing is also mandatory. Their culture shows a combination of nature worship and Buddhism. “The religious traditions and beliefs of Lapcha are based on nature, such as mountains, hills, rivers, streams, lakes, forests, trees, leaves, stones, etc.” (Rai, Lapcha and Lapcha 2069 vs: 8). They also believe in Udhauli and Ubhauli, which are connected to nature and occupation. Lepcha are among the groups that celebrate in Lhosar, which is connected to nature, time, and animals.

In the past, the livelihood of Lepcha depended on hunting and gathering tubers and fruits found in the forests. The occupation of Lepcha, who entered the agricultural stage from being nomadic hunters, is linked to their settlement. They live in the mountains and river valleys. Agriculture is their main occupation, and animal husbandry is a subsidiary occupation. They also produce and sell household items made from wood found in the forest. They are also engaged in wage labor.

The customary institution of Lepcha is called Didityom. It has the following officials according to the division of work: Dane, Machin, Nongmu, and Karthak. This institution formulates customs, administers justice, and mobilizes free labor for work related to the community’s welfare. External interference in this customary self-government occurred in two phases: in the first phase, from the state-appointed Kajis and Subbas, and in the latter phase, from elected officials at the local level. Although the scope and role of Didityom have been gradually reduced, it has survived, especially in the community’s religious and cultural fields.

Lhomi (Shingsawa)

Lhomi are a very small minority Himalayan group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN list. In Tibetan language, *lho* means south (Tibet) and *mi* means human. Therefore, Lhomi originated in Tibet, from where they entered Nepal centuries ago. In Nepal, their home is the remote Himalayan villages of Chepuwa and Hatiya in the northern part of Sankhuwasabha district of eastern Nepal. Lhomi, also known as Shingsawa or Karbhote, have a population of only 355, as per the 2021 census. In the 2011 census, their population was 1,614. One possible reason for such a large drop within a decade is that Lhomi have been writing their surnames as Bhote in government documents. According to the 2021 census, the number of Lhomi speakers is 413. Lhomi are different from many other Himalayan groups in that they are migrating from their homeland day by day. According to the 2021 census, only 42 percent of their total population are in Sankhuwasabha. More than that number, 49.4 percent, have been counted as residents of Kathmandu.

The Lhomi people, of Mongolian origin and Tibetan descent, speak the Lhomi language (Lhoket) of the Tibeto-Burmese family. They use the Sambhota script. Their religion is both Bon and Buddhism. Their priest is Lama, who performs death rituals according to Buddhism. In addition, other pujas are performed by Bon religious leader called Bijuwa or Loben. Their culture and rituals include nature worship, Bon, and Buddhism mixed.

The major traditional occupations of Lhomi are agriculture, animal husbandry, and cross-border trade. The locals continue to do this, but the migrants—who make up more than half of their population—have also taken up other occupations to earn money in addition to sustaining their livelihood.

Lhomi have their own customary institution (Goa). The responsibility for ensuring that

they comply with the customary law lies with the local village head, who is called Goba and Gembu in the Lhomi language. Lhomi have a very different tradition from other Himalayan groups who practice polyandry: If a husband becomes polygynous, he must leave his original home (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 31). Like some other group, they celebrate Udhauli and Ubhauli festivals.

Lhopa

Lhopa, listed in the NFDIN Act, are a minority Himalayan Adivasi Janajati. This group settled in the territory of Nepal from Tibet a long time ago. Their homeland is Lhomanthang, located in the upper reaches of Mustang district. There are three sub-groups within this tribe: Kutuk, Shelpa, and Rigin.

According to the 2021 census, the population of Lhopa is 1,390, but the number of speakers of Lhopa language is almost double (2,348). Two things may explain this. One is that some Lhopa have used surnames of other caste or ethnic groups for official purposes. For example, until some time ago, the Mustangi king, who received the royal allowance, used to write his surname as Bista. This surname mainly applies to some Hill Brahmin and Kshetri. Therefore, some Lhopa may have been counted in a different group due to the adoption of such surnames. Another is that some minority ethnic groups neighboring Lhopa may have adopted the Lhopa language. More than 90 percent of the total Lhopa population live in Mustang district. They differ from their neighboring Thakali in that Thakali have a strong tendency to migrate, while the Lhopa are a sedentary people.

Lhopa are of Mongolian descent. They originated in Tibet. Their mother tongue belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. They are Buddhists, although Bon and shamanism are found in every Lhopa culture.

The traditional occupation of Lhopa is agriculture (barley, wheat, and potato), livestock farming (sheep, yaks, and horses), and cross-border trade.

The Lhopa territory has a historical chieftaincy system, with the Mustangi king as its head. With the help of Bhardars (courtiers), there was a system of self-government that reflected ethnic autonomy in various activities—such as collecting land tax and other taxes; protection, development, and utilization of natural resources; adjudicating civil cases, administering justice, and imposing punishments; and establishing social, cultural, and religious customs. This customary institution is still functioning in some of these areas.

The Lhopa people also have other customary traditions—such as polyandry and the practice of having children become monks or nuns—but these practices have now declined considerably.

Limbu

Among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act, Limbu (locally known as Yakthung) are an indigenous people living in the eastern hills. This group has been living in Nepal since prehistoric times (Sharma 2039 vs: 271; Tumbahang 2068 vs: 18). The homeland of this group, which belongs to the Mongolian origin and Kirati descent, is Yakthung Laje (Pallo Kirat, or Limbuwan). According to Mundhum, the people living in Limbuwan—bordered by Saya Muden (Tibet) in the north, Temen Balang (India) in the south, Sumroti Umroti (Brahmaputra) in the east, and Thosu Barumma Parumma Onu Yosu Paramawa Kakamawa (from Arun to Koshi) in the west—is the Limbu (Limbu 2014: 29; Tigela 2071: 277). The six hilly districts east of Tamor River (Taplejung, Panchthar, Sankhuwasabha, Tehrathum, Ilam and Dhankuta) are the center of Limbuwan.

It is also claimed that Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari districts of eastern Tarai are also part of historical Limbuwan. According to the 2021 census, the population of Limbu is 414,704, out of which about 56 percent live in the six eastern hills mentioned above, while about 40 percent live in Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari.

Limbu have their own mother tongue, grammar, literature, and script. The Limbu language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family, and its script is Srijanga. There are five local dialects of this language: Yangwarke, Panthere, Tamarkhole, Phedappe, and Chhatare. Limbu is probably at the forefront of a few ethnic groups that have preserved and promoted their language. Even after a hundred years of history of *khaskaran* of ethnic groups through the Nepali language, it does not seem to have affected the Limbu much. According to the 2021 census, the mother tongue of 84.5 percent of this ethnic group is Limbu language. Another aspect of *khaskaran* is Hinduization, which has been going on for thousands of years. Even in adverse conditions, Limbu have preserved their religion. According to the 1991 census, the majority of people of many Hill ethnic groups regarded themselves as Hindus, but according to the same census, more than half of the Limbu registered themselves as followers of Kirat religion. According to the latest census conducted in 2021, 80.2 percent of Limbu are followers of Kirat religion.

The ancient religion of Limbu is nature worship and their traditional religion is Kirat. Mundhum is their religious scripture, which is preserved in oral tradition. They have their own priests—Fedangma, Shamba, Yewa, and Yema. During the Rana period, Limbu were divided into two sects—Riti, who followed traditional religion, and Samariti, who followed Hindu beliefs. Limbu have a congruence of religion, nature, culture, and occupation. They celebrate Ubhauuli and Udhaululi festivals. Dhan dance and Chhyabrunge drums are the major aspects of

Limbu culture. After death, the body is buried under the ground.

The identity of Limbu is linked to *kipat* (traditional community land). The then 10 Limbuwans were merged into Nepal with a written agreement to continue *kipat*, but it was later violated during the 1964 land reform. Therefore, the main occupation of this group was agriculture, both in the past and at the present as well. Animal husbandry is linked to agriculture. Other traditional occupations are making household items from bamboo (such as *doko* and *dalo* baskets and *mandro* mat) and wild wood and selling them in the market. Since the late 19th century, joining the British army has been their tradition. They later joined the Indian and Nepali armies. The main source of income for many Limbu families is the salary and pension received from military service. Although the end of the *kipat* system has marginalized Limbus linguistically, culturally, religiously, and socio-economically (Tumbahang 2068 vs), the legacy of *kipat* seems to be reflected in the economic life of Limbus. Limbus are prosperous compared to many other ethnic groups. Perhaps this is why Limbus did not need to leave their homeland to make a living. About 95 percent of Limbus live in what they claim as Limbuwan (including Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari).

Self-rule is a memorable history for Limbu; therefore, it is in their cells like a gene. Earlier, there were 10 Limbuwans (*thum* chiefdoms); each *thum* (hilly principality) had a Limbu ruler. Even after these *thums* merged during unification, there was self-government with autonomy under the leadership of Subba—initially a hereditary position and later a position purchased at auction. Amal, Rai, Karta, Karbari, Budhaululi, and Pagri were officials nominated for administration of local governance. The customary local government led by Subba was responsible for settling people at the local level, collecting taxes and

paying them to the center, punishing crimes, administering justice, settling disputes, and establishing customs and traditions in the society and mobilizing the society accordingly. However, this responsibility was later transferred to government offices, courts, and elected officials, especially after the abolition of slavery. However, its legacy is still reflected in local economics and politics.

Magar

Magar are the most populous among the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. They are a large and diverse group in themselves. Even if we consider the specific geographical location and corresponding linguistic differences, it is clear that there are three sub-groups of this ethnic group, excluding the Magar who migrated east after the unification of Nepal: One, the Bahra Magarati east of Kaligandaki River; two, the Athara Magarati west of Kaligandaki, i.e., Kham Magar; and three, the Kaike Magar residing in the Himalayan district of Dolpa. Therefore, it is natural that there are different opinions about the origin and ancestry of this large Magar group.

According to one historical account, Magar originated in Tibet, beyond the Himalayas. This may be close to truth given that during *ankhla* (ancestral worship), ancestors are called from the Himalayas (Shris Magar 2067 vs: 4). Janaklal Sharma has said that ancestors of Magar were the Huns, and it is also speculated that their ancestors may have been the Thakuri (2039 vs: 243). Some scholars believe that this group came to the western hills from Sikkim in the east of Nepal via Simraungadh (Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 23). Another opinion, on the contrary, is that a group of Magar entered from western Nepal via Punjab, Nainital, and Garhwal. Refuting all these opinions, Nepal Magar Association has claimed that the origin

of their group is within the borders of present-day Nepal. An author cites an expert who said that Magar originated from Nepal itself, pointing to a cave in Maikot in Rukum district (Shris Magar 2067 vs: 4).

Although opinions, speculations, and perspectives on the origin of Magar vary, there is a consensus on the existence of traditional homeland of this group in Nepal. This is the mountainous terrain of the Rapti and Gandaki catchment area (Shris Magar 2067 vs: 4). The districts falling within this are Palpa, Tanahun, Gulmi, Arghakhanchi, Myagdi, Pyuthan, Baglung, and Parbat of Bahra Magarat, and Rolpa and Rukum of Athara Magarat. Although it is confirmed, it is difficult to draw the political territory of Magar, because they are a very scattered group. The province-wise distribution of the 2,013,498 Magar mentioned in the 2021 census is as follows: 37 percent in Lumbini, 23 percent in Gandaki, 16 percent in Bagmati, 10 percent in Koshi, 9 percent in Karnali, 3 percent in Madhesh, and another 3 percent in Sudur-Paschim.

The Magar language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. According to the 2021 census, less than half of the total Magar population (44.7%) speak their mother tongue (Magar Dhut, Magar Kham, or Magar Kaike). This itself is an example of how this group is under the grip of *khaskaran*. Religious *khaskaran* is even more intense. Since ancient times, there has been a tradition of Magar being the priest in some royal shrines. According to the 2021 census, 78.8 percent of Magar are Hindus. Magar celebrate all Hindu festivals, including Dashain, Tihar, and Teej. But Magar activists have been trying to deconstruct it. At a Magar conference held in Jhapa in 2055 vs, there was a discussion on launching a campaign to declare this group as Buddhist. On the eve of 2021 census, Nepal Magar Association had issued an appeal to register the religion of Magar as Buddhism or Prakriti Dharma (animism). Magar

tend to show themselves to be different from Khas Arya, who are staunch Hindus. They wear white *tika* (colored mark applied on forehead) mixed with *achheta* (rice grain) and curd. Most importantly, they are also continuing their traditional religion and culture. The ancient religion of Magar is Prakriti Dharma, and shamanism is their ritualistic practice. They have their own priest, who is called Lama in Bahra Magarat and Rama in Athara Magarat. Their lifecycle rituals and worships are basically based on ancestor worship and nature worship. They worship three powers—Pitri Shakti, Prakriti Shakti, and Raj Shakti—in Ubhauri and Udhaulai during the planting and harvesting of annual and winter crops respectively. Bhume puja is a tradition of Magar that is not found in the Khas Arya. A proposal to create Magarati religion by combining all these has come from a writer (Shris Magar 2067 vs: 37).

The main occupation of Magar is agriculture and animal husbandry, but this is only related to subsistence. Mining was once a lucrative occupation, but this is now confined to history. Magar's priority is to join the foreign army, because it provides good income. The alternative is a stable job in the Nepali army and police, as well as other government and non-government jobs, from which they receive regular salaries and pensions. Today, Magar are involved in various occupations such as animal husbandry, agriculture, handicraft, security, administration, education, and foreign employment.

Magar's customary institutions have historical roots. Before the unification of Nepal, there were Magar principalities (*thum rajya*) in Bahra Magarat and Athara Magarat. These principalities had three levels of governance: local level, regional level, and central level. Each level exercised administrative, economic, and political authority. Issues that could not be resolved by the lower level would gradually move up, and the upper level would make the

final decision. Its remnants are still visible in the customary institutions of this group such as Bheja and Rodi. Every year, Mukhiya (chief) is elected as the leader of the community. The chief settles minor disputes; while the Bheja, in consultation with the community's priest (Lama), performs rituals and enforces them. At the same time, he mobilizes labor for small construction works that are carried out for the collective benefit of the community.

Majhi

Like Kumal and Bote, Majhi is a minority Adivasi Janajati of Nepal, named after their occupation. There is no written history about the ancestry of this group; there are only legends. According to them, Majhi are the descendants of Matsyagandha, or the descendants of Kush, the son of Ram and Sita during the Treta Yuga. According to another story, Majhi are a group that migrated from India to the mid-hills via the Mithila route (Rai and Majhi 2014: 3–5). There is no consensus on the location of the homeland of this group in Nepal. According to Gopal Vamshavali, it is Rajgaun in Ramechhap district. Some have written that it is around Tamakoshi in Ramechhap and Marin Khola in Sindhuli. Many have considered it to be the banks of Saptakoshi and its tributaries. The main reason why it is difficult to pinpoint the exact location is that Majhi settlements are scattered. According to the 2021 census, their population is 111,352. About one-third of them live in the mid-hill districts, 28 percent in the central Tarai districts, 19 percent in the eastern Tarai, and the rest are scattered.

According to the 2021 census, the number of people speaking the Majhi language is 32,917, which is only 29.6 percent of their total population. In other words, Majhi are very much affected by linguistic *khaskaran*. Religious

khaskaran is even more severe. According to the 1991 census, 98 percent of Majhi are Hindus.

From the physical structure of Majhi and their cultural proximity with other groups of the Inner-Tarai (Bote, Danuwar, Darai, Kumal, and Tharu), it can be concluded that Majhi are also of Mongolian origin. However, their mother tongue belongs to the Indo-Aryan family (Rai and Majhi 2014: 1), and there is no script. The traditional religion of Majhi is nature worship; they worship land, forests, and rivers. Shamanism dominates the cultural life of this group, although the degree of Hinduization is high. In 2053 vs, Nepal Majhi Utthan Samaj declared the religion of their group as Tantric Dharma.

Majhi settlements are located on riverbanks. This indicates their traditional occupations of ferrying, fishing, and searching for gold in the river sand. But this is not the only way to make a living. They have been involved in agriculture for a long time.

Majhi have their own customs and traditions. There is a five-member Majhesewa institution under the leadership of Majhe. It regulates social order by carrying out religious and cultural traditions, establishing customs, settling disputes, administering justice, and punishing offenders.

Meche

Meche, listed in the NFDIN Act, are a minority Tarai Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. Their homeland is the banks of Mechi River. According to the 2021 census, the Meche population is 5,193, and 95 percent of them live in Jhapa district. There are different opinions about the origin of this group. Some consider it to be the descendants of an ancient Kirati king (Chemjong 2003/1967). Some say that this group appeared in Nepal only in the middle of the 19th century (Khanal 2015: 175). There

is no dispute that Meche of Nepal, who have linguistic and cultural affinities with the Bodo people of West Bengal and Assam of India, which border Nepal in the east, are a nomadic group that roamed the forests until recently.

Meche are a people of Mongolian origin and possibly Kirati descent, who have their own language, which is called Bodo. However, the census has given it the ethnonym Meche. This language does not have a script. The number of speakers of this language in Nepal is 4,203; that is, this language is the mother tongue of 82.4 percent of Meche. The Meche language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. The ancient religion of Meche is Bathau, but it is not included as a religion in the census. The Bathau signals five auspicious signs associated with the spiritual life of this group: five thorny edges of *siundi* (crown of thorns), five holes of the flute, five prayers of Bathau, five ethics, five *kura* of Meche. They are nature worshipers by tradition. They worship rivers, forests, plants, and stones. They have their own priest, who is called Roja, and his assistant is called Phanthol. But Meche have been affected by Hinduization. According to a recent field study, the Hindu gotra system has penetrated this group (Gurung and Gurung 2082 vs).

The main occupation of Meche is agriculture and animal husbandry, especially pig farming. However, most families that were until recently nomads in the forest do not own land in their own names. Therefore, they are agricultural laborers and cultivate small plots. Along with this, they also do small business and wage labor to earn income.

Meche have their own customary institution, and its leader is called Makhal. He is a social leader who organizes and conducts religious and cultural activities in accordance with the customs and traditions of this group. He also plays the role of a judge, settles small disputes in village, administers justice, and even punishes offenders.

Mugali

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Mugali are a Himalayan Adivasi Janajati. They are believed to have originated in the Ngari region of Tibet and entered Nepal in the 11th century. Their homeland is Mugu village and 13 villages connected to it, which are located within the Mugu Karan region. Mugali, who are named after their place of origin, prefer to be known as Mugam or Karmarong.

According to the 2021 census, their population is merely 2,124. More than three-quarters of Mugali are recorded as living in Mugu district. This means that most of them live in their homeland. There are only a few migrants—some to the neighboring district of Jumla and others to the country's capital, Kathmandu. Interestingly, the number of speakers (2,834) of their native language, Mugali, is higher than their population. One possible reason for this is that some Mugalis use the surname Tamang or Lama when preparing official documents. This might have had an impact on the census, and especially on ethnicity.

Mugalis are a people of Mongolian origin. This group has their own language (Kham Kura), which is different from the Kham Magar language spoken in Athara Magarat, and has a script (Sambhota). This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. The traditional religion of this group is Bon, but they later converted to Buddhism. Along with these, shamanism is used in their lifecycle rituals. There are many monasteries in the Mugali region, which is also a religious place, educational institution, and health center for the people of this group.

The main occupation of Mugali is agriculture, animal husbandry, and cross-border trade. There is also growing interest and involvement in business and trade in urban areas.

Mugali tradition is inextricably linked to the monastery. Therefore, the Lamas of monastery

have many roles and responsibilities. In this regard, the observation of Karmadhoj Tamang Lama is relevant: “In the Mugali community, Lamas and Chunbas are considered not only religious teachers but also social and judicial figures. Among the Lamas, it is customary to consider the eldest Lama as the village head. The Lama plays an important role in resolving various types of disputes in the village and also in formulating and implementing development programs” (2080 vs: 92).

Newar

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Newar are an advanced Adivasi Janajati. Among all the ethnic groups of Nepal, perhaps most studies, research, and publications are done on Newars. But there is still no consensus on their origin. One group of scholars believe that this group originated from Tibet, based on the legend associated with Manjusri who came from the north, drained the water of the Kathmandu Valley that was in the form of a lake, and made human settlement possible. On the contrary, another group has linked the descent of Newar people to Nair group of South India and king Nanyadev of Karnat dynasty. The third group relates Newar to the place where the sage Ne meditated. But there is consensus about the identity of Newar as the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley.

Kathmandu Valley has been the ancestral homeland of Newars since prehistoric times. It is a confluence of Tibet in the north and India in the south, and people of different ethnicities used to travel through the Kathmandu valley for trade, religion, knowledge, politics, and other purposes. In this process, people of all castes and ethnicities and followers of different religions became intermixed with the native population here. Therefore, Newars are a special ethnic group, a “melting pot” of

all these groups—Mongolians, Aryans, and Kiratis (Malla et al. 2080 vs: 2) and Hindus and Buddhists (Bista 2002: 53; Sharma 2039 vs: 297; Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 115; Tuladhar et al. 2067 vs: 13). There are racial and religious differences within this ethnic group, but everyone is united by the mother tongue, honorifically called Nepalbhasa.

The Newar homeland is the Kathmandu valley (Swaniga, or Nepaga in Nepalbhasa). The latter term covers a vast area and includes not only Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur districts but regions that have geographical continuity of settlement of this group, such as Banepa, Dhulikhel, and Panauti towns of Kavrepalanchok district in the east; Chitlang, Bhimphedi, and Hetauda of Makwanpur district in the south; Narayanghat of Chitwan district in the southwest; and Trishuli Bazaar of Nuwakot district in the northwest. These places are surrounded by Tamang settlements, and in some places the territorial contiguity of Newars is broken. The administrative geography used for the census is different from that of Nepaga. However, according to the 2021 census, more than half of the 1,341,363 Newar still live within the Kathmandu Valley. Almost half are outside their ancestral homeland. Historically, Newar have left their homeland for three major reasons: first, after being defeated by the Gorkhali army in 1768; second, when smallpox broke out shortly after, when Prithvi Narayan Shah's grandson, King Rana Bahadur Shah, drove Newar out of the valley; and third, for seeking business opportunities. There is a proverb: Where there is Newar, there is a town.

Although all ethnic groups in Nepal are indigenous, Newars are different from others in some ways. Earlier, in the Gopal, Mahishpala, and Kirat periods, Newar society was egalitarian, without caste system. But since Jayasthiti Malla divided Newars into 64 castes on an occupational basis in the early Medieval period, the society has become stratified. This

system was reshaped by the old Muluki Ain 1854 in accordance with the varnashrama. Newars are also one of the groups most affected by religious *khaskaran*. Although they were nature worshipers earlier, now 89.1 percent Newars are Hindus, according to the 2021 census. A revival of identity is evident in this group as well. The number of speakers of the mother tongue (Nepalbhasa) is 863,380, according to the latest census; that is, 64.4 percent Newars have linked their identity to their mother tongue. This language has its own script (e.g., Ranjana), grammar, dictionary, and literature. Recently, a cultural encyclopedia written in Nepalbhasa in the Devanagari script has also been published.

Newar is a mixed society: some are Mongolian by origin, others are Aryans. In religion too, it is a mixed group: some are Hindus and others are Buddhists. Hindu Newar also worship Buddha; similarly, Buddhist Newar go to Hindu temples to worship. There is not only religious tolerance but also religious unity.

Most Newar have more than one profession. They are involved in both agriculture and trade. Newars are involved in every field, including government and non-government jobs, civil service, education, national and international organizations, industry, and business. But still, police and army service are not a priority for the Newar people.

There are many Newar customary institutions, such as *bhajan*, *dapha*, and *guthi*. The role of *Guthi* in particular is important in performing community-based religious and cultural activities. It is the backbone of Newar culture. They celebrate at least one *jatra* (festival) every month, which includes worship, *bhajan* (religious singing) dance, and feast.

Pahari

Pahari are a minority Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. There is no consensus on the origin of this group. Some say that their ancestral homeland is Dailekh. Others associate it with Newars. At some point in time, they were displaced from Newar and started living in Tamang settlements in search of a new place to live. Perhaps this is why it is said that Pahari have a mixture of Newar and Tamang blood. Some villages of Lalitpur, Kavrepalanchok, Sindhupalchok, and Makwanpur that are geographically contiguous are the homeland of Pahari. Out of the total 15,015 Pahari mentioned in the 2021 census, three-quarters live in these four districts. The neighboring settlements of Pahari are of Newar, Tamang, Brahmin, and Kshetri. Each of these neighbors seems to have had an impact on the language and culture of Pahari.

Pahari, of Mongolian origin, have their own distinctive mother tongue (Pihi), which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family, but the Pihi language does not have a script. According to the 2021 census, only about one-third of the Pahari people consider Pihi as their mother tongue. One reason for this is that the Pihi language does not have a script, grammar, dictionary, or literature.

The religion of Pahari is a mix of nature worship, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Such influence is reflected in their culture and rituals. There is a Gubhaju priest like that of Newar and a Brahmin priest like that of Kshetri. For marriage, some Pahari have adopted the tradition of cross-cousin marriage like that of Tamang, while among other Pahari such marriage is prohibited like among Newar (Maharjan et al. 2073 vs: 29). There is a bit more resemblance with Newar in terms of language and tradition. Many words are used in both languages, and Pahari also have the *Guthi* institution like Newar do.

The main occupation of Pahari is agriculture. Pahari are skilled in making household items from bamboo and making handcrafted furniture. Labor related to agriculture, industry, and construction is another source of income for this group.

The customary institutions of Pahari do not seem to be much old if we exclude *guthi*, festivals, and *bhajan*. A tradition of local governance that dates back to the unification of Nepal is that the state appoints an official (e.g., a Pahari Dware) from their own group. The Pahari Dware performs many functions simultaneously: collecting taxes; conducting social, religious and cultural activities; settling local disputes and punishing the guilty, etc. But nowadays, this responsibility has shifted to the police, administration, and elected local government.

Phree

Phree are a very small minority Janajati of Nepal, listed in the NFDIN Act. According to the 2021 census, their population is only 921, and their ethnic language is not mentioned in the census. There has been no study or research on this group. The history of this group could have been mixed with that of Pahari, because a published handbook states that these two groups are the same (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 20).

According to one myth, Phree's ancestor was a man who worked in the kitchen of a king of Bhaktapur in the medieval period. But after he was fired from that job, the children born from his marriage to a Tamang woman were called Phree. This myth is similar to that of Pahari in a different context, where the Pahari's ancestor was a Newar outcaste whose children were born after his marriage to a Tamang (Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 141). Like Pahari, Phree are also scattered in specific places in Lalitpur,

Kavre, Sindhupalchok, and Makwanpur, such as Badikhel, Sikharpa, Lele, and Godavari villages in Lalitpur and Betini and Kulekhani in Makwanpur (Pandey 2060 vs: 64). The 2021 census has shown a different place of residence of this group than that written in the above-mentioned books. According to the census, 83 percent of Phree live in Tehrathum and the remaining 9 percent in Morang and 4 percent in Ramechhap district. This census data does not match with the available literature about the settlement area stated above of this ethnic group.

The language and culture of Phree are similar to that of Newar and Pahari (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 20). Therefore, this group must also be of Mongolian origin like Newar and Pahari. The traditional occupation of Phree is to warn the people of possible theft by patrolling and blowing conch shells at night. They earn some income from this activity. Otherwise, their main occupation is agriculture.

Rai

Rai are one of the 60 Adivasi Janajatis listed in the NFDIN Act. There are different opinions about the origin of this group; however, it is indisputable that all Rais are native to the central part of eastern hills (Majh Kirat), which is also called Khambuwan. Districts in the catchment area from Arun River to Dudhkoshi River (Solukhumbu, Okhaldhunga, Khotang, Bhojpur, and Udayapur districts) are claimed as the homeland of Rai. Along with geographical continuity of the upper and lower Kirati areas—such as Ilam, Sankhuwasabha, Dhankuta, the hilly areas of Sunsari, and the north-eastern part of Sindhuli—Rai settlements have expanded, somewhere as the first largest group and in others as a minority population. According to Kirat Rai Yayokkha, these later

areas are also homeland of Rai. Out of the total population counted as just Rai (excluding those in group “A” in the paragraph below), one-fourth live in the three contiguous Tarai districts of Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari. According to the 2021 census, the population of Rai is 640,674, and if we include the other language-based 12 ethnic groups mentioned in Group “A” in the next paragraph, this number increases to 756,089, which is 2.6 percent of the country’s total population.

Rai is a multilingual ethnic group. The 26 Rai linguistic groups registered as surnames by Kirat Rai Yayokkha in the Indigenous Nationalities Commission (INC) can be divided into the following two subgroups: (A) Aathpahariya, Bahing, Bantawa, Chamling, Khaling, Kulung, Lohorung, Mewahang, Nachhiring, Sampang and Yamfu; and (B) Belhare, Chiling, Chintang, Dumi, Dungmali, Jerung, Koyu, Lungkhim, Mugali, Phangduwali, Puma, Sam, Tilung and Wambule. Out of these 26, all those falling under Group “A” have been included as distinct groups in the 2021 census. Those within Group “B” are included within the larger Rai group, although their languages are distinct. If one takes the proverb *Das Rai, Das Kura, Ek Chulo* as an example, it can be said with certainty that the Rai is a single cultural group but with different linguistic identities. All are of Mongolian origin, Kirat descent, Kirati religion, language (except for the Indo-Aryan-speaking Devas Rai) of the Tibeto-Burmese or Sino-Tibetan family, and Mundum as their ritual oral knowledge tradition, which is now being documented.

Language is becoming secondary in the identity of this group. In the 2021 census, only 22.6 percent of those who considered themselves ethnically Rai have registered their language as Rai. Kirat Rai Yayokkha has called this statistic wrong. In terms of script, Rai have been using the Kirat Srijanga script.

The traditional religion of Rai is Kirat. They are ancestor worshipers and nature worshipers. Their religious and cultural traditions are guided by Mundum. But the influence of Hinduization is visible. According to the 1991 census, 65 percent of Rai were Hindus. Like other Hindus, many Rai celebrate Dashain and Tihar, but contrary to this, a campaign to boycott Dashain has also been going on for some years. Recently, awareness of Rai regarding their original identity linked to religion has increased. According to the 2021 census, 68.4 percent of Rai are followers of Kirat religion. Although some people of this group are registered as Hindus in government documents, the Rai group is very indigenous. They use their own priest (Bijuwa) for ancestor worship and clan worship. Like other nature worshipers, they worship wind, water, soil, land, and forest. The gods and goddesses they believe in are formless; therefore, their traditional religious places do not have temples and idols like those of Hindus. The main festivals are Ubhauri and Udhauri. After death, they bury the body under the ground.

At one time, Rai were considered as *kipatiya* (*kipat* owners). They had communal land and forests. This indicates that their traditional occupation was agriculture and animal husbandry. Weaving blankets such as *khadi* and *radipakhi*, making and selling household goods from bamboo and wood, and producing and selling *chiraito* (Indian gential) are also traditional occupations of Rai. Another major source of income is the salary and pension received from enlisting in the army (in Nepal, India, and Britain). Especially after the abolition of the *kipat* system, Rai's occupation has diversified. While the main source of livelihood for some is employment in the government and non-government sectors, agriculture is the main source of livelihood for many. Currently, the number of people going for foreign employment is also increasing.

Migration is also an issue associated with the expansion and diversification of their occupation. About 25 percent of Rai have migrated to the three districts of eastern Tarai (Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari), and about 12 percent have reached the Kathmandu Valley and some abroad.

Rai have their own customary law. Although the term Rai has always been used to refer to their ethnic group, it also used to refer to an administrative post at the local level during the Rana period. Other similar terms were Majhiya, Jimdar, and Dewan, whose main responsibility was to collect taxes and remit them to Kathmandu, although their other task was to settle local disputes. But this historical legacy is now carried on, to some extent, by elected officials at the local level. Even now, Gaurung and Jimwal play a leading role in their collective cultural activities.

Rajbanshi (Koch)

It is undeniable that Rajbanshi, who have been living in their own historical land in the eastern Tarai for a long time, are an Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. According to the 2021 census, the population of Rajbanshi is 132,564. Rajbanshi Samaj Vikas Samiti has claimed that this number should be around 175,000. Out of the Rajbanshi included in the census, almost two-thirds (62.2%) live in Jhapa district, while one-third (32.6%) live in Morang district and the rest in Sunsari district. This group seems to have a strong attachment to their linguistic identity. The number of people who consider the Rajbanshi language as their mother tongue is 130,163; that is, the mother tongue of 98.2 percent of Rajbanshi.

There are different myths about the origin of Rajbanshi. One myth, following Hindu narrative, links it to the campaign launched by Parashurama in the Treta Yuga to destroy the Kshatriyas. Rajbanshi are depicted as a

community that de-Aryanized themselves to avoid that destruction. According to another myth, the descendants of Kichaka, the army chief of King Virat of the Kshatriya caste in the Dwapara Yuga, are the present-day Rajbanshi. There is another myth in this regard. According to Ambika Prasad Chaudhary, R.M. Nath, and Shivendra Narayan Koch, the ancestors of Rajbanshi are Tibetans who came via the banks of the Brahmaputra River to the present-day north-eastern part of India and Nepal (Rajbanshi et al. 2081 vs: 12).

There is no dispute that Rajbanshi have lived in Nepal since ancient times. Before modern Nepal was founded, that is, before the unification of Nepal, they lived under the Vijayapur kingdom, and before that they lived in the greater Morang province of the Koch Bihar kingdom ruled by Koch or Rajbanshi kings (which extended eastwards from the Teesta River to the present-day settlements of Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari districts). They had settled in this area even before the Aryans arrived. This was the territory of Pragjyotishpur in the mythological period, Kamrup in ancient times, and Koch Bihar in the medieval period. After the unification, the Morang region of the former Koch and Vijayapur kingdoms fell within the political borders of Nepal. Due to this historical legacy, some people of their group became Nepali and others Indian. Rajbanshi are in the millions in West Bengal and Bihar of India, which are connected to Nepal.

Physically, Rajbanshi appear to be of Mongolian origin, but this group contains a mixture of Mongolians and Aryans (Maharjan 2015a: 51). Some say that their mother tongue belongs to the Indo-Aryan family, while others say that it is a mixture of Tibeto-Burmese and Indo-Aryan (Maharjan 2015a: 55). According to the 1991 census, 99 percent of the Rajbanshi were Hindus. But Rajbanshi activists are engaged in deconstructing this interpretation. Their argument is that genetically Rajbanshi

cannot be Hindus because their social structure, rituals, culture, and customs are different from those of staunch Hindus. This group does not have gotra (Rajbanshi et al. 2081 vs). In fact, Rajbanshi are nature worshipers. Their deities are Thakur, Brahmani, and Hanuman.

The main occupation of Rajbanshi is agriculture. Since it is now difficult to sustain a life solely on agriculture, they also do wage labor to earn income. Fishing and hunting are their traditional occupation.

Rajbanshi have their own customary institution, called Poinch. Every household head is a member of it. Poinch is involved in settling disputes in the village and performing cultural and ritual activities within their own community.

Raji

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Raji are a minority Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. There is no proven written history about the ancestry of this group. Some scholars say that the ancestors of this group, who are located on the border of Nepal and India, came from Rara village in Mugu district of Nepal, while others believe that they came from Pithoragarh in Uttarakhand, India. Raji of Nepal were nomadic like some of the present-day Raute until recently. At that time, the roaming areas of this group were the forests between Chisapani in Karnali in the east, Mahendranagar in the west, and Mohana River in the south (Angbuhang and Raji 2081 vs: 1). It has only been a few years when this group became permanently settled. Out of the 5,125 Raji mentioned in the 2021 census, about half live in Kailali, while about 29 percent live in Surkhet and 19 percent in Bardiya.

There are three types of Raji: Naukalya, Bahrabandali, and Atthar Panthe. All have the same mother tongue: Raji. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family.

According to the 2021 census, the number of Raji speakers is 4,247, which is 82.9 percent of their total population.

It is natural for Raji, who became recently free from their nomadic life in the forest, to be nature worshipers. It can be assumed that this group, whose body and facial features appear non-Aryan, later became Hinduized. There is a tradition of Raji being the priest in the temple of Gangamala Devatibajayi, a famous religious and tourist destination in Surkhet. According to the 1991 census, 99 percent of Raji are Hindus. However, their gods are formless, and they believe in shamanism. Their priest is called Gurav, who is of their own kind.

The traditional occupation of Raji is hunting, collecting roots and herbs from the forest, fishing, and extracting honey. After entering the agricultural stage from a nomadic state, farming and animal husbandry are now their new occupations. But it is worth mentioning that the settling of Raji was done for providing housing, not for providing agricultural land. Therefore, on the one hand, this group has continued their traditional occupation, and on the other hand, they have also taken advantage of new employment opportunities. Their new occupations are agricultural labor and construction labor.

Raji have continued, to some extent, the ethnic autonomy and self-government that has existed since their nomadic days. There is a system of tribal chief (Mukhiya), who manages their society and settles disputes.

Raute

Raute are probably the only ethnic group among the Adivasi Janajati of Nepal which have some members still in the hunting-gathering stage. According to one legend, the ancestor of Raute is Lord Vishnu. In the Kali Yuga, they are the descendants of a Thakuri dynasty (Pandeya

2060 vs: 98). Perhaps that is why Raute are happy when someone calls them “king of the forest.” The surnames they use—such as Chand, Pal, Singh, and Rawat—are similar to those of Thakuri.

Being nomadic, it is natural for Raute to have no permanent residence. However, the forests of Phukot region between the Seti and Madi rivers are considered their hunting land. They often roam around Dailekh, Jajarkot, Surkhet, Salyan, Achham, Jumla, Darchula, and Baitadi districts. But according to the results of the 2021 census, 419 people live in Dadeldhura district and the remaining 147 in Salyan district. In the booklet prepared by the Language Commission, this number is 589, including 425 permanent residents and 164 nomads (2075 vs: 1). It is necessary to mention here that in 2039/2040 vs, some Raute were given 1-1/2 bigha of land per family and were settled permanently in Dadeldhura. These settlers write their surname as Raut in government papers (Gurung and Gurung 2082 vs).

There has been no study on the ethnicity of Raute. But their language (Khamchi) belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. The number of speakers of this language is 741, according to the 2021 census; that is, 175 more than the population of Raute. It is likely that some other minority ethnic groups (e.g., Raji) also speak Khamchi. Raute living in the wild must be nature worshipers. They also worship *Masto* (ancestor and clan deity). However, a study conducted in 2012 found that 60.5 percent of the Raute population included were Hindus and 39.5 percent were nature worshipers (Bandhu et al. 2012).

The main source of livelihood of Raute is hunting and gathering tubers and fruits found in the forest. They have traditional knowledge in woodworking; therefore, they have started making some household items (such as chests) from forest wood and selling them in the market. Raute, who do not want to engage in

any occupation, whether agricultural or non-agricultural, now have one source of income—the monthly 4,000 rupees that the government gives as allowance to members of endangered groups.

Raute have their own customary leader (Mukhiya), who is responsible for their social, cultural, and religious life.

Satar (Santhal)

Santhal are a minority Tarai Adivasi Janajati listed in the NFDIN Act. The 2021 census shows that their settlement is concentrated in some villages of Jhapa and Morang districts. Out of the 57,310 Santhal, 61 percent live in Jhapa and 38 percent in Morang.

There are Santhal also in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. There is no clarity about the origin of this group in Nepal. There are some myths on this. Santhal consider Hididi Pididi as their place of origin, but this place does not exist anywhere in the world. According to an elderly Santhal, the ancestor of this group is Ram from the Treta Yuga (Gurung and Tamang 2014: 9). It is estimated that this group, like some other group such as Kisan and Jhangad concentrated in Jhapa, settled in Nepal only about 200 to 300 years ago. At that time, there was a big famine in Bihar, India, and the policy of importing agricultural workers from India began in Nepal. Although the history of their arrival in Nepal is not long, there was no other human community in the Charkose Jhadi (a dense forest in Tarai) when they settled there. Therefore, some villages in Jhapa and Morang, which are now home to the Santhal, were first inhabited by this group. Therefore, Santhal are an indigenous group of Nepal.

Santhal are of Australoid origin. Their language (Santhali) is named after their ethnonym. It belongs to the Austric family and has its own script (Alchiki). According

to the 2021 census, there are 53,677 Santhal speakers in Nepal, which is 93.7 percent of their total population. The religion of Santhal has been written as Hindu, but this group is an Adivasi Janajati without varnashram and caste hierarchy. Santhal activists have declared their religion as Sharana. Now they are being widely christianized. The traditional religion of Santhal must have been Prakriti Dhama (animism).

If we look back at their recent history, even a few decades ago, their settlements were located in dense forests. Hunting, fishing, and collecting wild tubers and fruits were traditional occupations of this group. With entry into the agricultural stage, they began farming and animal husbandry. Now, wage labor has become their main source of income.

Santhal have their own customary institution, which is called Atumajhi, and every household head is its member. In addition, there is a six-member executive committee headed by Majhdham (chief). It makes rules for social, cultural, and ritual activities and also solves disputes that occur in the village.

Sherpa

Sherpa is a minority Himalayan group among the 60 Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal listed in the NFDIN Act. “Their ancestral home is the northern region of Solukhumbu district, the valleys of the Dudhkoshi and Sunkoshi rivers, and the surrounding area” (Sherpa 2067 vs: 2). Sherpas live in the upper reaches of the Dudhkoshi and Sunkoshi rivers—which extend from Solukhumbu to Sankhuwasabha and Taplejung in the east and to Okhaldhunga, Khotang, Bhojpur, Ramechhap, and Sindhupalchok in the west—that is, from Solu to Helambu.

According to the 2021 census, the population of this group is 130,637. Nepal

Sherpa Sangh claims that this number should be around 500,000. Among the Sherpa people mentioned in the census, the number of speakers of the Sherpa language is 117,896 (90.3%). This means that the Sherpa people have been saved from linguistic *khaskaran*. This group has been saved from religious *khaskaran* as well. Even when the majority of 22 out of the 26 Janajatis mentioned in the 1991 census described themselves as Hindus, 90 percent of Sherpa remained apart from it. According to the latest census conducted in 2021, 98.2 percent of Sherpa are Buddhists. Another indication that the Sherpa's indigenous identity is still preserved is that about three-quarters of Sherpas are still living in their own places. Among the quarter of those who have migrated, most are concentrated in Kathmandu.

Sherpas are of Mongolian origin and speak a language of the Tibeto-Burmese family. They have their own script (Sambhota). They are Buddhists. Every Sherpa settlement has a monastery, and the main responsibility for its running lies with the religious leader, Lama. The Lama's jurisdiction is wide: he is a *pujari* (monastery priest), *purohit* (a domestic priest), a teacher of religious scriptures, an astrologer, and also a health worker who practices *amchi* (traditional Tibetan and Himalayan medicine).

The traditional occupation of Sherpa is agriculture, animal husbandry, and trans-Himalayan trade. Wheat, barley, naked barley, and potatoes are the main food crops. Yaks and sheep are reared by almost all indigenous Sherpa. This group is famous for herbal trade. These traditional occupations are being continued by native Sherpa. Now a new dimension has been added to the occupational identity of this group. Sherpa are known as mountain climbers, a lucrative job. The number of Sherpa involved in trade, tourism, construction business, and other sectors that require a lot of investment is increasing day by day.

Sherpa have their own traditional rules and customs. They have a customary institution (Nawa) for preserving crops and forests. Lhosar is an important festival of this group. There are three main Lhosars—Tamu Lhosar, Sonam Lhosar, and Gyalpo Lhosar—the latter celebrated by Sherpas in the month of Falgun according to the Tibetan calendar to mark the new year.

Siyar (Chumba)

Siyar is a Himalayan Adivasi Janajati that is listed in the NFDIN Act. However, this group is not recorded in the census. According to a study conducted by their ethnic society, the population of Siyar is 3,700. Ward no. 6 of Chumanubri Rural Municipality of Gorkha district is the belt of Chum (Syar) speakers.

The homeland of Siyar, who are of Mongolian origin, is located on the banks of Siyar River in the north-eastern part of Gorkha district. The people of this group live in the Himalayas region of Nepal and Tibet. The ethnonym Siyar is named after the place, while the local name is Chumba. The Chumba valley is known as the sacred place where the Buddhist monk Chipchun Milarepa meditated.

Siyar are Buddhists. The principle of non-violence is literally followed in the settlements where they live. Bon and shamanism are seen in their culture. The monastery is their religious place as well as educational institution. The Lama is the monastery head, the domestic priest who conducts lifecycle rituals, and also the teacher who teaches Buddhism.

In terms of occupation, agriculture is the second most important occupation for some Himalayan group after animal husbandry. However, since Siyar settlement is a monsoon-affected area, agriculture is their main occupation and animal husbandry is a subsidiary occupation. In Siyar settlements,

grains such as wheat, barley, sorghum, millet, and naked barley are grown, and vegetables such as beans, lentils, cauliflower, and potatoes are also grown. Cross-border trade with Tibet is the traditional occupation of Siyar.

Sunuwar

The original ethnonym of Sunuwar is Koinch, and their homeland is called Koinchwan (Lugun et al. 2068 vs). Some have considered Sunuwar as a group that migrated from Simraungadh (Sharma 2039 vs: 261; Pandey 2060 vs: 118). Their homeland is located in the hill region between Likhu and Khimti rivers of Wallo Kirat, which now falls in some areas of Okhaldhunga, Ramechhap, and Dolakha districts (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 34; Lugun et al. 2068 vs: 13). According to Sunuwar Society, Sunuwar were the first inhabitants of the area around Likhu, Tamakoshi, and Sunkoshi rivers, and their ancestral homeland is the regions of Dolakha, Ramechhap, Sindhuli, Okhaldhunga, and Solukhumbu districts. Koinchwan was previously known as Bahra Kipat and Sohra Thum. The ancestral lands of other groups—such as Jirel, Thami, Surel, and Hayu—also fall within the Wallo Kirat.

According to the 2021 census, the population of Sunuwar, which is a minority group, is 78,910, of whom 41.5 percent have registered their mother tongue as Sunuwar. The Sunuwar language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family.

Sunuwar are of Mongolian origin, Kirati descent, and Kirat religion. Their religious scripture is Mundum. But the influence of Hinduization is evident in this group. In the 1991 census, 94 percent of Sunuwar declared their religion as Hindu. Now there has been some change in this. In the 2021 census, about one-third of Sunuwar declared their religion as Kirati. They have preserved their ancient religious and cultural identity. For example,

like some other groups, Sunuwar celebrate Ubhauri and Udhauri festivals with great pomp. Like other nature worshipers, they worship air, water, soil, land, and forest. Ancestor worship and clan worship are performed by Naso (priest) of their own kind, and Hill Brahmins are prohibited from doing so.

The main occupation of Sunuwar for their livelihood since ancient times is agriculture. Animal husbandry naturally comes along with it. Weaving and selling of *bhanga* and *radi* blankets made of *allo* (Himalayan nettle) is also a traditional occupation of this group. The livelihood of Sunuwar, who were once *kipatiya* (*kipat* owners), was diverted from agriculture when the *kipat* system was abolished. Like other Kirati, Sunuwar also consider this land confiscation as a big tragic event. After that, they started looking for other employment opportunities. Now it seems that they are oriented toward business. Some have started working as laborers to earn a living: some are agricultural laborers; and some are industrial laborers.

Due to expansion and diversification of their occupation, Sunuwar have migrated from their homeland. Today, only a quarter of the total population of this group remains in their original homeland; others have scattered.

Sunuwar have their own customary institution, called Koinch. It used to be operated under collective leadership. Koinch conducted social, cultural, and religious activities within their community or in their settlements. Its remnants still survive to some extent. This customary institution began to decline after elected local governments were formed.

Surel

The population of Surel is only 318, according to the 2021 census. This is a very small minority group and is considered an endangered group.

Only half of their population have identified themselves with their mother tongue. That is, there are signs that the Surel language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family, is disappearing. There is a myth about the origin of this group: Surel are descendants of Base and Birbal. Surel believe in this myth, although it does not correspond to the religion they follow. Their homeland is Suri village in Dolakha district. About half of their population have migrated in search of opportunities for livelihood—especially in Tanahun, Nawalparasi, and Dang districts.

Surel are nature worshipers, and their traditional religion is Kirat. But their religious life is a mixture of different religions. Like Hindus, they celebrate Dashain and Tihar. Like other Kirats, they have their own priest (Meyambo), and if they encounter any trouble, they resort to shamans.

Surel were also once *kipatiya* (*kipat* owners) but are now landless (Rai et al. 2079 vs: 12–14). Their livelihood is based on subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, and production of household goods. But they are engaged in wage labor.

Surel have its own customary institution called Nakso, and it is basically connected to the management of Bhume puja (nature worshipping festival).

Tajpuriya

Tajpuriya, listed in the NFDIN Act, are a minority Tarai Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. According to a legend, this ethnic group originated from the Trigata kingdom of Mahabharata period in the Dwapara Yuga. They claim to be descendants of king Susarma of that kingdom (Maharjan 2015b: 67). This ethnic group has a history similar to some other minority groups concentrated in Jhapa and Morang districts of eastern Nepal. All came to Nepal from India 200 to 300

years ago—Kisan from Bihar, Jhangad from Chhotanagpur, Gangai from West Bengal, and Santhal from Jharkhand. They are considered Adivasi because they were the first settlers of areas they now live in.

According to the 2021 census, the population of Tajpuriya is 20,989. Two-thirds of them live in Jhapa district and one-third in Morang district. Tajpuriya, formerly known as Koch, is a branch of the Koch tribe, who were considered to be a mix of Mongolian and Dravidian peoples. The mother tongue of this group belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. According to the 2021 census, there are 20,349 Tajpuriya speakers, which is 96.5 percent of the total population of this group.

Influenced by Hinduization, people of this group celebrate festivals such as Dashain and Tihar, but there is no caste hierarchy in their social structure. There are no idols in their temples (Gram), only mounds of earth. The traditional religion of Tajpuriya is Prakriti Dharma. Thakur is their deity. Currently, their culture is a mix of Hindu and Koch. They use Hill Brahmins in religious activities. In addition, ritual activities are performed by the priest (Gosai) of their kind. The main occupation is agriculture, and the auxiliary occupation is animal husbandry. They also work as wage laborers to make a living.

Tamang

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Tamang are a majority Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. There are some myths, some folklore, and some anecdotal history about the origin of this group. The myth is that Tamang were created by Lord Shiva. Like Kirati, Tamang also consider Mahadev to be non-Aryan and worship him. But Tamang organizations reject this myth. According to one legend, some horsemen who came across the mountains during the expansion of the

kingdom of the powerful Tibetan emperor Srongchang Gampo settled here and they became Tamang (Sharma 2039 vs: 314; Gautam and Thapa-Magar 1994: 263). According to another unverified source, the homeland of Tamang is the Gyalsa kingdom, whose borders are the present-day Syangtseung and Purang districts of Tibet and the Mugu and Mustang districts of Nepal (Tamang 2069 vs: 7).

But what is undisputed is that Tamang are an Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. According to Mohan Gole Tamang, Tamang began settling here after Manjusri drained the water of the Kathmandu Valley and made it habitable. According to a genetic study, this group had already entered Kathmandu 16,400 years ago. The territory of Tamsaling is large; it extends to Sunkoshi in the east, Budhigandaki in the west, northern part of Chitwan district in the south, and Tibet in the north (Tamang 2080 vs: 36). Three areas that fall within the greater Tamsaling are Temal, Lachyang, and Gorsyang. But these areas are not geographically contiguous. Therefore, the historical or traditional homeland of Tamang is the hilly terrain around the Kathmandu Valley. Ajitman Tamang's statement on this is as follows, "The districts where the Tamang jati is in the majority, such as Dhading, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Makwanpur, Chitwan, Kavrepalanchok, Sindhupalchok, Dolakha, Ramechhap, Sindhuli, etc., are the main territories of the present-day Tamsaling" (2069 vs: 45). These districts fall within the current Bagmati Province. The 2021 census also shows that the Tamang's claim is factual. Out of the total 1,639,866 Tamang in the country, three-quarters live in this province. The number of Tamang language speakers is 1,423,075; that is, 86.8 percent of their total population associate their identity with their mother tongue. Apart from language, Tamang seem to be more cautious about *khaskaran* than other ethnic groups regarding religion. Even when the majority of 22 out of the 26 Janajati

groups mentioned in the 1991 census identified themselves as Hindu, 86 percent of Tamang listed their religion as Buddhism. According to the latest census conducted in 2021, 84.9 percent of Tamang are Buddhists.

The Tamang people are of Mongolian origin. The Tamang language has its own script (Tamayig), dictionary, grammar, and rich literature. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. There are mainly two variants of the Tamang language: the variant spoken west of Trishuli River is called the Western Tamang language, and the variant spoken east of this river is called the Eastern Tamang language. Their religion is a mix of Bon and Buddhism. There is Gonpa for practicing Buddhism, which is supervised by a Lama. The Gonpa is not only a religious place but also an educational institution for learning and teaching Buddhism. The Lama is not only a teacher but also a priest who regulates the religious and cultural traditions of Tamang. Tamang also have another priest (Bombo) who performs rituals and incantations according to the Bon religion to protect Tamang from ghosts and other kinds of harmful forces.

The occupation of Tamang is linked to the terrain in which they live. Most of the Tamang live in high hill regions (*lek*). Food grown in that region are barley, wheat, naked barley, and potatoes, and they are what the Tamang people live on. Agriculture is the main occupation, while animal husbandry is a subsidiary occupation. Using natural resources found in the high hills, especially bamboo, they weave *doko* (basket) and *namlo* (head strap for carrying loads) and sell them in the market to earn extra income. They also earn money by making blankets like *radi*, *pakhi*, and *bakkhu* from wool and selling them in the market. Poor Tamang work as wage laborers. Nowadays, people of this ethnic group are also found involved in trade, business, salaried jobs, and other professions.

Tamang can be considered as an exemplary group in terms of customary institutions and traditions. Based on division of work, there are nine types of hierarchical officials in those institutions: Lama, Bombo, Gamba, Tamba, Katauke, Laiba, Dyangbasya, Chhyaba, and Byon Hrabadorje (Tamang 2069 vs: 76; Sharma 2039: 321). There is also Choho system, which plays an important role in organizing society and enforcing customary laws. In addition, there is Mulmi (headman) system, in which Mulmi takes the lead in resolving family and village disputes, collecting land revenues, and mobilizing free labor for public works.

Tangbe

Tangbe are a Himalayan Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. They are one of the seven Himalayan ethnic groups (five of which are in Mustang district) that are not listed in the census, although they are listed in the NFDIN Act. The reason for this, which has been speculated in the context of Chhairrotan, also applies here. An additional reason for this group being mixed with other groups that are relatively numerous is its geographical and cultural proximity to Thakali, while another reason is that most ethnic groups in Manang and Mustang write their surname as Gurung in government documents. According to a reliable study, the Tangbe population is only 628, including 313 females and 315 males (Chhantyal and Tangbe 2079 vs: 2). Therefore, this is a very small minority group.

There is no dispute that the origin of Tangbe is in Tibet. However, in recent times, this group has migrated en masse from Bhurje village of Manang to Tangbe, a village within Bahragaun located in ward no. 3 of Bahragaun Muktikshetra Rural Municipality in Mustang district.

Tangbe, named after the village, are a Mongolian people. They have their own language (Serke), which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. This language does not have a script.

Tangbe are Buddhists and also followers of Bon religion, because there are a lot of Bon characteristics in their social, religious, and cultural activities. The monastery is both their place of worship and their educational institution. The religious leader is a Lama of their own kind. He is also a priest who participates in lifecycle rituals and at the same time a teacher who teaches Buddhism.

The traditional occupation of Tangbe is agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as cross-border trade. But now there is diversification and expansion in their occupation. Most of the Tangbe are engaged in business. On the one hand, as the border with Tibet is becoming tighter due to various reasons and, on the other hand, as urbanization increases within Nepal, migration of Tangbe for occupational purposes has intensified. This group is now seen more in Jomsom, Pokhara, and Kathmandu than in Tangbe. Since the central committee of the Tangbe Samaj Sewa Sangh is located in Pokhara, it shows the extent and destination of their migration.

Despite high migration, Tangbe are rich in customary rules and traditions. There are institutions such as Jhomo (elderly assembly) and Phodomaki (which formulates social customs). Under the leadership of village headman (Ghenpa), officials like Chyangpa, Chhokpo, and Thungla collectively establish social customs and administer the judicial system. They have a community building for religious activities. They do not sell ancestral land to other communities. There is a polyandry system that is voluntary, but now monogamy is increasing. There is no division of property among siblings; only the eldest person enjoys the share (primogeniture). This group celebrates

Lhosar on the day of the Chhau festival in the Nepali month of Poush.

Thakali

Thakali is listed as three separate ethnic groups in the NFDIN Act: Thakali, Tin Gaunle Thakali, and Marphali Thakali. The identity of these sub-ethnic groups, who live in the same district (Mustang), are basically place-based. The settlements of Tin Gaunle Thakali are Thaksyang, Thakchimang, and Thakathini; of Marphali is Marpha village; and of Thakali is Thasang. There is little difference in population size and economic status between them. Tin Gaunle and Marphali belong to the disadvantaged category, while Thakali belong to the advanced category. In all other respects, these sub-groups are similar. All have the same place of origin, traditional religion, language, and occupation. All have strong customary rules. Here, a brief description of Thakali is given, considering all these sub-groups as one group. Along with this, a brief description of each sub-group is also presented separately.

Thakali are a minority Himalayan Adivasi Janajati. Some consider their origin to be in Rajasthan, India; some consider it to be Sinja of Jumla district; while others consider it to be Tibet (Bista 2002 vs: 32). Until the 14th century, the present Mustang district was the political border of Tibet. At some time, Thakali and other Mustang residents used to pay taxes to both Nepal and Tibet. If written history and geographical continuity are taken as the yardstick, the statement that Thakalis came to Mustang from Mongolia via Tibet long ago comes closer to the truth. When Marphali and Tin Gaunle are also included in the Thakali group, their homeland in Nepal is the place called Thak Satsayan of Thakkhola. But if these three sub-groups are considered separately, Thakali's homeland is only Thasang, ruled by

13 chiefs, which is located in the southern part of Mustang district.

According to the 2021 census, the population of Thakali is 11,741. The number of Thakali speakers is very small compared to their population—only 4,220, which is only 35.9 percent of the total Thakali population. The main reason for this decline is high migration. For example, only 16.9 percent of Thakali are now in Mustang district. More than that, 18.9 percent, are in Kaski district, and even more than that, 22.9 percent, are in the country's capital, Kathmandu.

Migration has contributed to linguistic *khaskaran* of Thakali. According to the 1991 census, 57 percent of the Thakali listed their religion as Hindu. But there is now a revival among Adivasi Janajatis to preserve their original identity, and Thakali are no exception. In 2049 vs, Thakali Sewa Samiti declared Buddhism as the religion of Thakali. There are also other differences from Khas Arya. Thakali are of Mongolian origin, and their mother tongue belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. Their ancient religion is Bon; they later converted to Buddhism. In addition, shamanism is also found in their lifecycle rituals. Every village with a Thakali settlement has a monastery, and there is a Lama. The monastery has three functions: a place of worship; an educational institution providing Buddhist education; and a place providing traditional Tibetan and Himalayan medicine services (*amchi*).

Agriculture, animal husbandry, and cross-border trade are traditional occupations of Thakali; the native Thakali are continuing it. Maize, millet, buckwheat, barley, potatoes, beans, and apples are main agricultural produces. Animal husbandry includes *chauri* (hybrid of yak and cow), horses, donkeys, sheep, and goats. The main occupation of Thakali is now trade. All four clans—Gauchan, Tulachan, Sherchan, and Bhattachan—are engaged in this profession. At one time, Thakali had monopoly

in the salt trade between Nepal and Tibet. Now, their trade and business have diversified and expanded. Involvement of Thakali in hotels, construction, and tourism-related industries is increasing.

Thakali are at the forefront of customary institutions and self-rule. Even as the country's political system has shifted from monarchy to republic, the Tehra Mukhiya system is still in practice in Khasang. This has been presented by Chhan Bhattachan as follows: "The main function of this system is to regulate the social customs made by the thirteen chiefs of Thasang as well as implementing economic and judicial rules and solving issues, protecting the forests, promoting the Dhikur system, etc." (2078 vs: 111). There is also a similar organization of Tin Gaunle ethnic group, which is called Hulo Jhomba. Marphali also have a Ghampa system for a similar purpose.

Tin Gaunle Thakali

Tin Gaunle Thakali are known locally as Hyulkosomapemhi. Their origin is the three villages of Mustang district: Thaksyang, Thakchimang, and Thakathini. According to one story, their ancestor is the three-eyed Dhyal Thokorchen who migrated from Samsung in Tibet and came to Thakathini.

The NFDIN Act recognizes Tin Gaunle Thakali as a separate Adivasi Janajati, but this group is not mentioned in the census. According to one study, their population is 1,163 (Gurung et al. 2068 vs: 7). The ancient religion of Hyulkosomapemhi is Bon, but they are now followers of Buddhism. The culture and customs of this group are a mix of both these religious traditions.

The main occupation of Tin Gaunle Thakali is agriculture and animal husbandry. This is being continued by local Tin Gaunle Thakali. They are a highly migratory group. Currently, they live in various cities, including

Kathmandu. The central office of Tin Gaunle Thakali Sewa Samaj is in Pokhara. This means that the new residence of most of Tin Gaunle Thakali is the Pokhara city. The main source of income of those who have migrated is trade and hotel business.

The customary laws of Tin Gaunle Thakali are exemplary. They have a traditional institution called Hulo Jhomba in the village, in which every household is a member. Its head (Mukhiya) is elected every year, and under his leadership the Hulo Jhomba meets twice a year. A study conducted on the jurisdiction of this institution has shown that: "The Hulo Jhomba makes rules and enforces them. It fines those who commit crimes, break the law, cut trees from protected forests, leave someone's livestock in someone else's fields, and do not participate in social work in the village. It also protects the property of the village. It decides which crops to plant in which season. The jurisdiction of the council includes construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, and similar development works. It also makes decisions on religious and social work and on justice issues and implements them" (Gurung et al. 2068 vs: 104).

Marphali

Like Tin Gaunle Thakali, Marphali are also a group not listed in the census. However, the NFDIN Act has recognized this community as a separate indigenous people. According to Rai and Hirachan, the Marphali population is about 2,500 (2067 vs: 3). The birthplace of Marphali is Marpha village in Mustang district.

The ancient religion of Marphali is shamanism, and they are now Buddhists. Their religious and cultural life is guided by the monastery and its priest (Lama). The tradition of the middle son becoming lama and the middle daughter becoming nun is still in prevalent.

The traditional occupation of Marphali is agriculture and animal husbandry. Currently, agriculture has been commercialized, and a lot of income is generated from apple farming in particular. Currently, most of the Marphali are engaged in hotel business.

Marphali have their own traditional autonomous system of governance. Four chiefs, ten Katuwals, and one secretary are elected every year, representing the four *chho* (i.e., clans)—Jwarchan, Pannachan, Hirachan, and Lalchan. The 15-member council has a wide jurisdiction, such as convening village assembly, giving notices to villagers, giving instructions on farming operations, making laws and regulations on the use and consumption of natural resources, administering justice, collecting fines, and assisting in development activities.

Thami

Thami are a minority Hill Adivasi Janajati of Nepal. There are different versions about the origin of this ethnic group. Some believe that their ancestors migrated from Simraungadh to the hilly region of Dolakha, while others believe that they are a Kirati group that migrated west from the eastern hills. Some say that the ancestors of Thami were the people in the town of Thimi of the Kathmandu Valley. None of these stories have a proven history.

Thami live in the high hilly areas of Sindhupalchok and eastward to Dolakha, Ramechhap, and Sindhuli. The origin of Thami is considered to be Suspa Rangrangthali of ward no. 1 of Bhimeshwor Municipality in Dolakha. From that place, the primitive human couple Yapati Chuku and Sonari Aji started settling down, and it is believed that their descendants are the present-day Thami people. Based on the previous settlements of Thami, it is claimed that their historical land is as follows: “From

the foot of the Gaurishankar Himal in the east to Tamakoshi in Sindhupalchok district in the west, from Jiri to Deudhunga in the autonomous region of Tibet in China in the north” (Nepal Thami Samaj 2067 vs: 1). According to the 2021 census, the population of Thami is 32,743, which their organizations claim should be around 50,000. About 80 percent of Thami mentioned in the census reside in the four districts mentioned above.

Thami, of Mongolian origin and Kirat descent, have their own language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. Out of the total 32,743 Thami mentioned in the 2021 census, 82 percent recorded that their mother tongue was the Thami language. Since Thami are of Kirat descent, their religion is bound to be Kirati, but the Kirat culture has thinned out as they moved west. The reason for this is Hinduization. Thami, like other Hindus, celebrate Dashain and Tihar. However, their traditional religion is Bon, and they also follow shamanism. All the traditions, customs, and lifecycle rituals are performed by their own priest (Jhankri). There are signs that Thami are increasingly attached to their identity linked to religion. In the latest census conducted in 2021, 40.7 percent of Thami registered their religion as Kirat. Like some other Adivasi Janajatis, they celebrate Udhauli and Ubhauli. Bhume puja is another indigenous tradition of Thami, which brings them closer to nature worshipers. Like other nature-worshipping groups, Thami worship water, land, forests, air, soil, and streams.

The main occupation of Thami is agriculture. Thami were once *kipatiya* (*kipat* owners), but now many of them are almost landless or small land holders. As a result, they are drawn to other occupations. Thami were living in the forest not long ago, and perhaps due to this heritage, they have special skills in clearing forests and cutting trees. In addition, wage

labor in agriculture and industry is another main source of income.

Thami have their customary institution, and its leader is called Majhuwa. Under the supervision and guidance of Majhuwa, the Thami's community-based social, religious, and cultural rituals are performed.

Tharu

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Tharu are a majority Adivasi Janajati living in the Inner-Tarai and Tarai of Nepal since ancient times. There are dozens of books and articles written about this ethnic group, but there are different legends about their origin. One tradition points to a place called Thar in the Sindh province of present-day Pakistan and the Thar desert in India. But apart from being look-alikes and sound-alikes to the ethnonym, there is no other basis to establish that Tharu originated from these places. Another narrative weaves a story linking it to a king named Maharana Pratap of Chittor, India. According to this, the present-day Tharu are descendants of the children born from the intercourse between the queen and her servant who took refuge under the Chure mountains of Nepal after the death of Maharana Pratap due to the Muslim invasion. There is also another theory about who Tharu are. Tharu are the original inhabitants of Chure mountains and Tarai. Because people of different castes and ethnicities from nearby areas from all directions migrated and integrated themselves into the Tharu, the present-day Tharu, like the Newars, are a “melting pot” ethnic group (Rajaure 2056 vs: 188). The three different legends mentioned above about the origin of Tharu have been refuted by Tharu organizations as fictions.

Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha claims that Tharu are an ancient Janajati, and that they have been living in Nepal since long before the Mongolians and Aryans arrived. According to

some scholars, Tharu are an ethnic group that originated in Kapilvastu of Nepal (Bista 2002: 38; Sharma 2039 vs: 357). The argument made to support this point is that the ancestors of the present Tharus are the Shakya dynasty, the dynasty in which Gautam Buddha was born. To prove that Tharus have been indigenous to Nepal since the beginning of time, they put forward the rule of king Dangisharan and his 18 generations of successors with Dang as their capital (Dahit 2062 vs: 8).

The myths and legends mentioned above are incompatible with each other. But what is undeniable is that Tharus are indigenous to the Inner-Tarai and Tarai regions of Nepal. It is also a fact that there are geographically distinct linguistic groups within Tharu, such as Dangora, Rana, Katharia, Morangiya, and Chitauniya (Guneratne 2002; Sharma 2039 vs; Dahit 2062 vs). This diversity is mainly due to geographical differences. According to the 2021 census, the Tharu population is 1,807,124, but Tharu Kalyankari Sabha claims that this number should be 3.5 million to 4 million. Out of the Tharu mentioned in the census, about one-third live in the eastern Tarai from Parsa to Morang, while more than two-thirds live in the western Tarai from Chitwan to Kanchanpur. The number of Tharu speakers is 1,714,091, which is 95 percent of their total population.

The mother tongue of Tharus is the Tharu language, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family. There is controversy about their religion. They are basically Buddhists (Ukyav and Adhikari 2057 vs: 160), but more affected by Hinduization. According to the 2021 census, 96.5 percent of Tharus are Hindus. Tharus have certainly been Hinduized, but now Tharu activists are deconstructing it. Their argument is that Tharu society is not hierarchically structured according to the caste system; all Tharus are equal by birth. Another argument is that in traditional Hinduism, only Brahmins are priests, but the Tharu priest

(Guruwa) is from their own kind. There seems to be a campaign to assert that Tharus are hereditarily Buddhists.

The occupation of Tharu was agriculture and associated animal husbandry. But after the eradication of malaria from Tarai, influx of other castes and ethnic groups from the hills into Tharu settlements led to the displacement of many Tharus from their lands. Millions of Tharus were converted into bonded laborers as Kamaiyas and Kamlaris. This practice has recently ended, and in the days since, the former Kamaiyas and Kamlaris have been engaged in various non-agricultural sectors today.

Tharus have a strong customary institution. An assembly of all the heads of households in the village is called a Khel or Jutan. Its structure is reminiscent of the direct democracy of the Greek era. Its executive is Badghar, who is also called Bhalmansa in some places and Matawan or Mahatau in others. The jurisdiction of Tharu Badghar is wider than those of other ethnic groups. It not only mediates and resolves disputes between households and villages but also mobilizes free labor from them for the public good. The leader plays a leading role in worship, festivals, and other cultural activities.

Ranatharu

The Nepal government has identified a subgroup within the Tharu ethnic group: Ranatharu. Ranatharu has been given a separate identity and included in the list of Adivasi Janajati. Ranatharu has not been mentioned in the previous censuses. Now according to the 2021 census, their population is 83,308, and out of that 77,766 (93.4%) speaks their own mother tongue, Ranatharu language. Ranatharu are different from other Tharus in some ways. One, they consider themselves descendants of Maharana Pratap, the king of Chittor in India. Two, Ranatharu's settlement is limited to Kailali and Kanchanpur districts; that is, their homeland

is a few villages in Kailali district (such as Geta, Urma, Chaumala, Malakheti, Beladevpur, and Dhangadhi municipality) and most of the plains of Kanchanpur. Three, the Language Commission has recognized Ranatharu as a separate language. Four, Ranatharu's religion is Prakriti Dharma (Chaudhari 2079 vs: 1), while most other Tharu activists pride themselves on being Buddhists. Their society is viewed as matrilineal. Finally, the head of their customary institutions is called Bhalmansa, while in other Tharu settlements the one who plays the same role is called Badghar or Mahatau.

Thudam

Thudam are a Himalayan Adivasi Janajati listed in the NFDIN Act. This group, which uses the surname Bhote in government documents, is not mentioned in the census. A very small minority group, their population, according to one study, is only 250 (Pandeya 2060 vs: 45). Their language is a mix of languages of neighboring ethnic groups such as Sherpa, Topkegola, and Walung.

Thudam, who are of Mongolian origin and Tibetan descent and named after a specific place, is native to the Thudam village of Sankhuwasabha district. The Mongolian and Tibetan origins of Thudam suggests that this group is Buddhist, and their culture and tradition is a mixture of nature worship, Bon, and shamanism.

The occupation of Thudam is agriculture. They cultivate as tenants of the Lhomi and Walung ethnic groups. Animal husbandry is associated with agriculture. They have been involved in cross-border trade for a long time. They trade agricultural products in Tibet.

Topkegola

Topkegola are a Himalayan ethnic group listed in the NFDIN Act. This group, named after a place, is locally known as Dhokpya. In Nepal, their homeland is the headwaters of Mewa River west of Olangchungola in the Taplejung district. They are a very small minority group with a population of only 642, according to the 2021 census. About 98 percent of them live in Taplejung district; that is, they all live in their own homeland.

Topkegola are of Mongolian origin. Their language is Dhokpya, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. However, this language has no script, nor is it mentioned in the census. Their language, dress, and lifestyle are similar to Tibetans, like those of the neighboring Lhomi (Shingsawa), Walung, and Thudam. All of them have a religion that is a mix of Bon, Buddhism, and nature worship.

The main occupation of Topkegola is trade. Their trade center is between Chainpur of Sankhuwasabha and Sar of Tibet. Agriculture and animal husbandry are only auxiliary occupations. Barley, wheat, naked barley, and buckwheat are the main grains grown. Domesticated animals include goats, sheep, goats, and mules.

Walung

Walung are a very small indigenous people listed in the NFDIN Act. The origin of this people is Tanak village near Shigatse in Tibet (Ganden 2078: 29). In Nepal, their home is Olangchungola, located at the head of Tamor River in Taplejung district. The inhabitants of five places—Olangchungola, Yangma, Dhunsa, Lungthung, and Lelep—are called Walung. Olangchungola is a major trade center between Nepal and Tibet.

According to the 2021 census, the population of this group is only 481. In reality, it must be more, because many Walung people write their surname as Bhote or Lama or Sherpa on official documents. It is possible that some Walung may have been included in other groups in the census. Another reason is that many people of this group have migrated. Among mentioned in the census, less than half are now in their original places. Almost half of the Walung have migrated to Kathmandu. The number of speakers of their native Walung language is 545, which is more than the population of this group. Probably some of the neighboring groups (such as Thudam) may have adopted the Walung language.

Walung are a people of Mongolian origin and Tibetan descent. Their language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family. Their ancient religion is Bon, which is intricately mixed with Prakriti Dharma (animism) and shamanism. Over time, they became Buddhists, like other Himalayan people. There is a mix of Buddhism, Bon, and shamanism in their lifecycle rituals. In every Walung settlement, there are small and large monasteries, the head of which is a Lama, who simultaneously plays four roles: *pujari* (monastery priest), *purohit* (domestic priest), teacher, and *amchi*.

The main traditional occupations of Walung are animal husbandry (including goat farming) and cross-border trade. Agriculture comes only after these.

Yakkha

Listed in the NFDIN Act, Yakkha are an Adivasi Janajati of eastern hills of Nepal. Mongolian in origin, Kirati by descent, and identified as Rai until 1991, this group is home to the southern part of Sankhuwasabha district in the eastern hills and the northern part of Dhankuta district. According to Ramji Kongren, the origin of

Yakkha is Yakkhalen, which is considered to be three of the seven *thums* of the ten Limbuwan of Kirats, namely Dashmajhiya, Panchmajhiya, and Panchkhapan (2068 vs: 8). Rai, Sherpa, Bhote, and Limbu live around Yakkhalen.

Yakkha are a minority group with a population of 17,460, according to the 2021 census. In the 2011 census, this number was 24,336. There has been no such event that would have caused a population decline of about 7,000 (28 percent) in a decade; therefore, there is an error in the latest census. Out of the Yakkhas mentioned in 2021, 81.6 percent identify themselves with their mother tongue. The Yakkha language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family.

The religious scripture of Yakkha is Mundum, and they are followers of Kirati religion and are close to Prakriti Dharma. The influence of Hinduization is also visible among Yakkha. They celebrate Dashain and Tihar, but they also tend to show that they are different from the staunch Hindus. Parbates (Hill castes) put red *achheta tika*, while Yakkha put white *achheta tika* like other Hill groups. The Hinduism of Yakkha was imported and mechanical. Yakkha worship nature. Recently, awareness of Yakkhas about their original identity linked to religion has increased. According to the 2021 census, 78.5 percent of Yakkhas are followers of Kirat religion. Traditional religion, occupation, and culture are intertwined. Ubhauri, celebrated during planting of crops, and Udhauri, celebrated during harvesting

of crops, are the main religious and cultural festivals of Yakkhas, similar to those of some other Hill ethnic groups.

The main occupation of Yakkha is agriculture. Rice, mustard, wheat, and cardamom are cultivated in irrigated fields, while they sow maize, millet, fenugreek, sorghum, etc., in unirrigated land. The occupation associated with agriculture is animal husbandry. The main livestock found in Yakkhalen are cows, buffaloes, pigs, goats, ducks, and chicken. Production and sale of household items made of bamboo (such as *doko*, *damlo*, *namlo*, *bhakari*) is the traditional occupation of Yakkhas, like that of other Hill ethnic groups. Employment in the army (in Nepal, India, and Britain) is the main source of income for Yakkhas, like that of some other Hill groups.

Expansion of occupation leads to migration. According to the 2021 census, almost half of Yakkha live outside their ancestral land. About a quarter live in the neighboring districts of Ilam, Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari.

Yakkha's history of local self-government in relation to the state is not very old. Those who were given positions and responsibilities by the Shah and Rana rulers at their discretion after the unification of Nepal became Mukhiya (local chiefs) of various titles. That is, they became Majhiya or Jimdar or Dewan, whose main responsibility was to collect taxes and send them to Kathmandu. However, their other work was to settle local disputes. This historical legacy has now been adopted to some extent by elected officials at the local level.

Chapter 3

Glossary Related to Adivasi Janajati

This chapter provides definitions of 59 terms that are directly related to the identity and rights of Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal. Objective knowledge and accurate information on these terms is expected to make public discourse on indigenous issues positive, creative, and result-oriented.

Access

This term refers to the representation and participation in governance of communities that have long been excluded from state power due to structural discrimination. Therefore, access means the state of being able to or having the right to easily use or participate in all services, opportunities, information, language, resources, and decision-making processes of government and private bodies without discrimination. It is the basis of social justice, equality, and inclusive governance.

Adivasi (Indigenous people)

This term refers to an ethnic group or community that has been living in their ancestral land for a long time. Indigenous people have their own distinct identity, mother tongue, culture, religious belief, and traditional knowledge. In addition, they have their own traditional governance system. These communities have collective ownership of land.

Adivasi Janajati (Indigenous nationalities)

This term, formed by combining the two words “Adivasi” and “Janajati”, implies that Adivasi (indigenous people) and Janajati (ethnic group) are not the same. Janajati is an ethnic group formed on the basis of equality within which no individual, family, or lineage is divided into higher or lower levels based on birth. Adivasi refers to a particular tribe or ethnic group in relation to their historical land; therefore, the synonymous word *bhumiputra* is also used. In the context of Nepal, Adivasis are Janajatis and Janajatis are Adivasis, and this equivalence has received social and legal recognition.

Adivasi rights (Rights of indigenous people)

This refers to the legal, political, social, and economic rights to protect and promote the identity, land, culture, language, tradition, and way of life of Adivasi. These rights include the right to identify and establish themselves as indigenous people, and the government should recognize these rights. This also includes the right to represent and participate in decision-making processes.

Affirmative action

Affirmative action is the provision of special opportunities to socially, economically, and educationally disadvantaged communities

(such as Adivasi Janajati and Madheshi) and backward and marginalized groups (e.g., women and Dalits). Such arrangements are legally made in the fields of education, health, employment, social security, etc.

In the United States, Canada, India, Malaysia, and South Africa, measures such as financial assistance, subsidies, quotas, and special rights have been adopted for the benefit of targeted marginalized groups and backward classes.

Article 18(3) of the Constitution of Nepal recognizes 22 groups, including Adivasi Janajati, as entitled to affirmative action. This is expected to benefit and empower the lower classes and marginalized communities.

Ancestral land

Ancestral land is a place that a certain ethnic or cultural community have long inhabited and used and that they consider as their own. Ancestral land has been used by the same community for generations that ties up with their culture, festivals, language, and customs. Such land is not only an economic asset but also has historical, cultural, social, and emotional attachments. In the context of Nepal, Adivasi Janajatis, in particular, consider ancestral land as the basis of their identity, livelihood, and autonomy.

(See Homeland [*Thatthalo*])

Bheja

Bheja is a traditional social and cultural institution that has been practiced by the Magar community—especially Magar living in the Bahra Magarat area (east of Kaligandaki River)—for a long time. It serves to maintain unity and social cohesion within the community and plays an important role in their political and economic lives and natural resource management. It determines the roles and responsibilities of its members in this regard. This institution traditionally performs the function of administering justice and

also provides financial assistance in times of emergency. Bheja is led by a chief (Mukhiya).

Community rights

It refers to the right of a group to preserve and promote their identity, culture, language, tradition, resources, and way of life. Community rights ensure to freely exercise their rights to cultural identity, land, and natural resources, and economic and political rights, including self-determination. It keeps the strength, self-reliance, and identity of the community alive.

Cultural rights

Cultural rights are a type of community rights that allows an ethnic group to freely practice, preserve, and promote its culture, language, religion, tradition, customs, lifestyle, values, and knowledge systems. It is also a right linked to the existence, self-respect, and identity of the community.

Customary law

It is a socially accepted law based often on oral traditions that have been practiced historically. Traditional institutions of indigenous people practice customary law in social, cultural, religious, and economic matters. It also administers justice based on the values, beliefs, and traditions of the community. The main functions of customary law are to maintain mutual harmony in the community, resolve differences, and solve problems faced by community members, along with community development and management of natural resources. Social disorders and harmful customs (e.g., child marriage, dowry, Kamaiya system) that are contrary to the universal principles of democracy and human rights are not considered acceptable in customary law.

Dhikur

Dhikur is a traditional collective saving and credit system prevalent in the Thakali

community. Under this system, members deposit some amount of money in a fund and lend it to members in need. Dhikur is not a formal institution like a bank or a cooperative, but a traditional financial institution. This institution is based on collectivity, social harmony, trust, interdependence, cooperation, and mutual understanding. This is also prevalent among other ethnic groups such as Tharu, Magar, and Gurung.

Ethnic autonomy

It is a state or process of decision-making on issues of cultural, economic, and political importance to freely pursue an ethnic group's social goals without external interference. This concept is related to the issues of identity, justice, and inclusion.

(See Autonomous Regions and Customary Law)

Excluded community

This includes specific gender, caste, or ethnic groups that have been excluded due to structural discrimination in society, economy, and state power. In the context of Nepal, women, Dalit, Adivasi Janajati, Madheshi, and Muslim are excluded communities. If a nation is to be built according to the concept of state-nation, these communities are entitled to have special rights.

(See State-nation)

Federal system

In a federal system, there are at least two levels of government. In some countries, in addition to the central and provincial levels, there are also local governments and special structures. Each level of government has three organs: executive (government), legislature (parliament), and judiciary (courts). The central government is based on the concept of shared rule, while the provincial government is based on the concept of self-rule. The jurisdiction of each level of government is mentioned in the constitution.

The State Restructuring Committee and State Restructuring Commission formed during the first constituent assembly (CA-I) had drawn up a proposal of 14 provinces and 10 provinces respectively based on identity. But the second constituent assembly (CA-II) rejected this and created a federal structure of seven provinces formed in accordance with the spirit of administrative federalism.

First right (Priority, Privilege)

First rights refer to the privileges of indigenous communities, in particular the rights of communities to receive priority in consumption, utilization, and management of natural resources (e.g., water, land, and forest) in their ancestral lands. Also, indigenous people have priority in governance and administration structures set up in their land. For example, such right has been granted to the natives of north-eastern states in India. The State Restructuring Committee of CA-I somehow felt a need for such rights in Nepal too. Its proposed provinces and autonomous regions had a provision of first rights of the concerned Janajatis to the chief executive post (e.g., Chief Minister) for a certain period. But the new constitution of Nepal framed by the CA-II completely rejected this concept.

(See Identity-based rights)

Free, prior, and informed consent

This is a right, enshrined in ILO 169, of a community to give free, prior, and informed consent to external intervention on their lives, land, resources, and culture. This applies particularly to indigenous peoples. It provides an opportunity for indigenous peoples to be protected from potential harmful impacts of development projects on their natural resources (water, land, forest) and on their tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Guthi

Guthi is a customary institution established to conduct and manage religious, cultural, and social activities. The Guthi system is especially prevalent among the Newar community. Newar Guthi are of three main types: Sana Guthi, Si Guthi, and Dyo Guthi. Sana Guthi and Si Guthi are related to death rituals, while Dyo Guthi is related to the worship of ancestral deity. There are also various other types of Guthi in Newari society to manage temples, monasteries, festivals, and various social rituals. It runs according to traditional values and is led by a Thakali (head). Its members are called Guthiyar. The responsibility of Guthi is handed down by tradition as a collective asset, and there is, therefore, no individual ownership to Guthi property. It has played an important role in preserving some Newari culture, rituals, arts, and traditions, as well as in transferring knowledge to the new generation.

Homeland (Thatthalo)

Homeland (*Thatthalo*, in Nepali) refers to a territory with deep historical and cultural ties to a particular ethnic group. It is associated with indigenous right to use natural resources contained in it.

(See Indigenous land)

Identity (*Pahichan*)

Identity is the set of characteristics of a community by which it is recognized and is set apart from others. It is formed on the basis of caste/ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and region.

In politics, especially in the construction of federal structures, the term identity has a special meaning. The CA-I considered identity to be a combination of five elements for crafting of federal units: caste/ethnic community, language, culture, history (temporal continuity of settlements in a particular region), and

geography (geographical contiguity of settlements).

Identity-based federalism

In identity-based federalism, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural identity is considered the primary basis for creating a province (determining its name and borders), as well as other issues (such as capability) as the supporting basis. While administrative/territorial federalism gives priority to existing administrative geography in the formation of provinces, identity-based federalism gives priority to the geography of ethnicity-based human settlements. There is a difference between identity-based federalism and ethnic federalism. In identity-based federal system, no ethnic group is given priority or privilege in politics, administration, and utilization of natural resources. In addition, the representation of provinces in the legislature, executive, and judiciary of the central government is not on the basis of ethnicity, but on the basis of geography/region.

The State Restructuring Committee of the CA-I and State Restructuring Commission proposed identity-based federalism as defined above. On the contrary, the federal structure created by the CA-II is administrative federalism in its nature and attributes.

Identity-based rights

It refers to the special collective rights that come with being associated with a particular caste, ethnicity, or gender that does not apply to other communities. Therefore, it is a community right different from the individual rights of citizens. For example, the Fundamental Rights section of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 has a provision for special collective rights under the headings of Rights of Women and Rights of Dalits. The Adivasi Janajati of Nepal are also a community that should have their own identity-based rights, including the right to practice customary law and the right

to self-determination. But the Constitution has not recognized this.

ILO 169

This is a convention related to indigenous peoples adopted by the International Labor Organization in 1989. Its contents are broad. Specifically, they include: Who are indigenous people? What are their jurisdictions? What are the responsibilities of the state toward them? This is an important document for information on these topics.

According to this Convention, for a community to be considered indigenous, it must meet the following three criteria: (1) Having had its own historical homeland somewhere in the country before the formation of the present state and the determination of its borders; (2) Having its own language, culture, tradition, and history that are different from other communities—especially from the dominant group; and (3) Being deprived of state power.

The jurisdiction of this Convention on indigenous peoples is extensive—for example, socio-cultural rights, primary rights to their natural resources (water, land, and forest), and ensuring representation and participation in the political sphere. In addition, the Convention grants indigenous peoples the right to self-determination in accordance with customary laws. It also makes free, prior and informed consent mandatory from the concerned groups before any development or construction takes place on indigenous lands.

This Convention recognizes and respects the above-mentioned identity-based rights of indigenous peoples, and it is the mandatory responsibility of the state to protect and promote those rights. Nepal ratified this Convention in 2007.

Inclusive democracy

This principle ensures inclusion of different socio-cultural groups in the structures and

mechanisms of all levels of the state. It promotes representation and participation of people of all races, languages, cultures, religions, genders, and regions. It ensures meaningful participation of communities facing structural discrimination and exclusion.

Indigenous knowledge and technology

Indigenous knowledge and technology is the knowledge and skills developed through collective customs and practices established by indigenous peoples through their interactions with nature over the generations. They are passed down from generation to generation through folklores, traditions, festivals, rituals, and ceremonies. As indigenous knowledge and technology have been developed based on locally available resources, it helps to maintain a balance with nature and promotes sustainability.

Indigenous land

Land that has been used, utilized, protected, and managed by indigenous peoples since ancient times is called indigenous land. Ownership of land is shared and based on collectivity. For indigenous peoples, such land is not only a source of livelihood but also is tied to cultural identity, ancestral home, spiritual place.

(See Kipat)

Jadan

This refers to the upper parts of the districts of Karnali zone, which is also called “Upper Karnali” in colloquial language. This is the home of Bhote group living in the Upper Karnali. Bhote, which live in these very cold places, have the culture of drinking *jad* (alcohol), so this place is also called Jadan.

Jadan was also one of the 14 provinces proposed by the State Restructuring Committee of the CA-I. It included the then 39 Village Development Committees (VDCs) of three

Himalayan districts (Humla, Dolpa and Mugu). But the proposal for the Jadan province was aborted because the CA-II did not own it.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province)

Khambuwan

Khambuwan is the historical territory of the Rai (Khambu) people, who have traditionally lived in the eastern hilly and mountainous districts of Nepal. This term signifies historical, cultural, and geographical identity of Rai or Khambu. At one time, Khambuwan was an independent kingdom that included the present-day districts of Bhojpur, Khotang, Solukhumbu, Udayapur, Okhaldhunga, and Sankhuwasabha.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province).

Kipat

Kipat refers to the traditional land (including natural resources such as water, land, and forest) owned collectively by indigenous peoples for a long time. *Kipat* land cannot be bought or sold.

In Nepal, such a system was in place, particularly in the Kirat region (Pallo Kirat, Majh Kirat, and Wallo Kirat); that is, indigenous people of those regions (such as Rai, Limbu, Yakkha, Sunuwar, and Lepcha) had their own *kipat* land. Apart from this, Tamang, Sherpa, Majhi, Kumal, and Danuwar were also *kipatiya* (*kipat* owners).

In principle, the state cannot violate the *kipat* system. This was also mentioned in a written agreement signed in 1831 vs when the Kirat region was integrated into unified Nepal. However, the Land Reform Act 1964 abolished this system. Kirat considered this land confiscation as a tragic incident.

Kirat

Kirat are indigenous peoples of eastern hilly regions of Nepal—especially Limbu, Rai, Yakkha, Sunuwar, and some other minority

groups. Kirat is also known as a civilization based on the philosophy of the Mundum/Mundhum scripture. Kirats originally worshiped nature and ancestors, while most of them now follow the Kirat religion. The term Kirat also reflects the history of the above-mentioned groups having their own autonomous principalities in the past (Pallo Kirat of Limbu, Majh Kirat of Rai, and Wallo Kirat of Sunuwar).

Kirat Province

This term refers to an ethno-political territory that combines ethnicity and geography. Before the unification of Nepal, there were three major Kirati independent principalities, the Limbu-ruled Pallo Kirat (Limbuwan), the Rai-ruled Majh Kirat (Khambuwan), and the Sunuwar-ruled Wallo Kirat.

At time of constitution making by the CA-I, Kirat province was one of the 14 and 10 federal units proposed by the State Restructuring Committee and the State Restructuring Commission, respectively.

The territory of the proposed Kirat Province was drawn based on the historical land and territorial contiguity of Rai settlements. It encompassed most parts of the present Solukhumbu, Sankhuwasabha, Khotang, Okhaldhunga, Bhojpur, Dhankuta, and Udayapur districts.

But the federal Nepal with seven provinces eventually framed by the CA-II is different from what it was proposed during the CA-I. Therefore, there is discontent among the Adivasi Janajatis of Nepal, including Rai, with the existing federal structure of seven provinces.

At the outset, the State Restructuring Committee and the State Restructuring Commission of CA-I unanimously adopted the principle of forming provinces by considering identity as the primary basis and capability as the secondary one. Accordingly, identity was defined as (1) caste/ethnicity, (2) language,

and (3) culture—with these three as main attributes; and (4) historical continuity and (5) territorial contiguity of settlements of targeted ethnic groups—with the two as associated attributes.

Lhosar

This is the New Year observed by some ethnic groups of Nepal, such as Tamang, Gurung, Sherpa, Bhote, Hyolmo, and Lhopa. According to the Tibetan lunar calendar, Lhosar is celebrated by different ethnic groups in different months. For example, according to the Nepali calendar, Tamu Lhosar is celebrated by Gurung on the day of Paush Shukla Pratipada; Sonam Lhosar is celebrated by Tamang on the day of Magh Shukla Pratipada; and Gyalpo Lhosar, celebrated by Sherpa, Bhote, Lhopa, and Hyolmo, usually falls in Falgun and sometimes in Chaitra. It is also a festival that exhibits the unity of the community based on shared cultural and religious identity. It is customary to celebrate this new year collectively as it is deeply connected to nature, agriculture, seasons, and religious rituals.

Limbuwan

This term refers to the ancestral homeland of the Limbu ethnic group. It is also associated with their socio-cultural identity, economic system (e.g., *kipat*), and political structure. There is written evidence that there were 10 small Limbuwan principalities in the far-eastern hills, i.e., in Pallo Kirat, before the unification of Nepal.

There was a strong possibility of re-establishing Limbuwan Province during the transformation of Nepal from a unitary to a federal state, when the State Restructuring Committee and the State Restructuring Commission formed during the CA-I period drew the outline of Limbuwan Province in federal Nepal. The borders of Limbuwan extended to the six hilly districts across Arun River from

Dhankuta to Taplejung that corresponds to the territorial contiguity of Limbu settlements.

However, the proposed Limbuwan Province was not recognized by the new constitution endorsed by the CA-II.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province)

Linguistic rights

This refers to the rights of a person, community, or caste/ethnic group to speak, write, read, disseminate, and receive education in their mother tongue, and to receive services and information from state machinery in their mother tongue. The right to language and culture is mentioned in the Fundamental Rights section of the Constitution of Nepal.

(See, Multilingual Policy)

Magarat

Magarat is the ancestral home of Magar people. Before the territorial unification of Nepal, there were many independent Magar principalities. The possibility of Magarat returning in a different context, form, and shape had emerged a decade ago when Nepal was being transformed from a unitary to a federal state. That is, the State Restructuring Committee and the State Restructuring Commission formed during the CA-I had proposed a Magarat province for federal Nepal. This proposed province extended to 481 VDCs/municipalities spread across 14 districts (Parbat, Tanahun, Kaski, Syangja, Nawalparasi, Arghakhanchi, Baglung, Gulmi, Myagdi, Palpa, Pyuthan, Salyan, Rolpa and Rukum) that had geographical continuity of Magar settlements. However, the proposal to establish Magarat province was not accepted by the CA-II.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province)

Marginalized community

Marginalized communities are communities that are politically, socially, economically, and educationally backward or have fallen behind due to policies adopted by the state and thus excluded from the power structure of the state.

According to the definition by the Committee on Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities of the CA-I, “Marginalized communities mean those communities who are subjected to backwardness politically, economically, health sector, politically, ethnically, religiously, linguistically, or sexually, and this term also includes the communities which are highly marginalized and on the verge of extinction.”

Mongolian origin

This is the root or origin of a particular human group from which many ethnic groups were derived and spread to different countries. Unlike the Aryans and Dravidians, the people of Mongolian origin inhabit Nepal, China, Japan, Korea, northeastern India, Bhutan, Myanmar, and many countries in Southeast Asia. With a few exceptions, almost all of the ethnic groups in Nepal are of Mongolian origin.

Multiculturalism

This is a concept of equality and coexistence among peoples of different linguistic, cultural, and religious identities. It accepts both equality and diversity. Its practice also gives all groups the right to live with dignity according to their language, religion, and tradition, and gives the feeling that “this nation is ours.” It promotes coexistence, tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect among peoples of different castes and ethnicities.

Multi-ethnic state/nation

A multi-ethnic state/nation refers to a country where social groups with distinct identities reside and their distinct existence is recognized.

In the context of Nepal, this term refers to Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country; therefore, Nepal is a multi-ethnic nation/state.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 considers Nepal a multi-national country but does not call it a multi-ethnic state. Nevertheless, the two previous constitutions—Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1991 and the Interim Constitution 2007—specifically stated that Nepal is a multi-ethnic state.

Multilingual policy

Multilingual policy is essential for a linguistically diverse country like Nepal. For this purpose, the Constitution of Nepal 2015 has provisioned Article 6, 7, 32 and 50(c) for the right to receive basic education in mother tongue and to use mother tongue for governmental affairs at local and provincial levels. However, contrary to the multilingual policy, Nepali has been made the only official language of the government at the federal level.

Multinationalism

This concept accepts that various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural nations/ethnicities have equal political existence. It recognizes history, culture, and identity of different nations/ethnicities as well as upholds the right to political autonomy and self-determination. For example, the Tharu people, with their own language, culture, geography, and customs, are a nation. Many nations come together to form a multi-nation.

(See State-Nation)

Mundum/Mundhum

Mundum/Mundhum is the philosophy encompassing all lifecycle rituals, traditional knowledge, history, and moral values and norms of the Kirati people such as Rai and Limbu. While there has been a tradition of reciting Mundum since ancient times, Mundum

is beginning to be documented in writing in recent times. Therefore, now Mundum is in both oral and written forms. Written Mundhum has been published in many parts, including Saksak (creation), Samajik (human civilization and development), Sapji (spiritual knowledge), and Sappmundhum (teachings and guidance).

Nation-state

This concept emerged from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Before this, the world, especially Europe, had either feudalism or imperialism. The concept of a modern state with fixed territory and sovereignty emerged from this treaty. At that time, when a country was established, its character was mono-ethnic, mono-linguistic, mono-cultural, and mono-religious. Today, examples of such states include Japan, Korea, China, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, where different ethnic or linguistic groups either do not exist or their number is very small.

In a state without ethnic and linguistic diversity, that is, a state for which a unitary system suits best, there is no system of identity and identity-based community rights, and there is no need for them. There are only individual rights of citizens.

Newa Province

Literally, Newa Province is an ethno-geographical-political unit (province) created to address the identity of the Newar people. Once referred to as Nepal, the Kathmandu Valley-centered Nepal Mandal, or Newa chiefdom, was a state whose borders once extended as far east as Dudhkoshi River.

Taking this history into account, the State Restructuring Committee of the first CA-I and the State Restructuring Commission formed thereafter proposed the creation of Newa Province while drawing the boundaries of the provinces of federal Nepal. The proposed province included all three districts of the

Kathmandu Valley (Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur) and also some contiguous villages of Kavrepalanchok, Nuwakot, and Makwanpur districts that were densely populated by Newar. But the proposal to establish a Newar province was rejected by the CA-II.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province)

Proportional inclusion

This multidimensional concept refers to the representation of a defined group such as belonging to a specific caste, ethnicity, gender, region, etc., in public institutions/positions, including governance, in proportion to the size of their population. It is a system in which seats are distributed in proportion to the size of population of the group, especially when political parties are represented in the legislature according to the popular votes they receive.

Nepal has adopted a mixed electoral system, and according to the Constitution of Nepal 2015, 40 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives and in the Provincial Assembly of each province are reserved for the communities specified by the Constitution (such as Khas Arya, Adivasi Janajati, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslim, and backward regions), and the seats are distributed in proportion to their respective population. In the case of women, it is limited to 33 percent.

However, due to lack of proportional representation in the executive branch, the scope of inclusive democracy has become limited and stifled.

Representation and participation

These two terms have broad meanings. According to traditional liberal democracy, representation and participation is the unfettered individual right of citizens to participate in governance according to their abilities and capacities. From the perspective

of inclusive democracy, representation and participation is the right of specific communities (for example, women, Dalits, Janajatis, and Madhesis who are marginalized in the case of Nepal). Special arrangements are made to ensure the representation and participation of these communities in the state machinery—for example, electoral system with proportional representation, reservations, and affirmative action based on gender, caste, and ethnicity. To translate representation into meaningful participation, that is, to ensure participation in the decision-making process, disadvantaged communities also need to be included in executive positions and roles.

Reservation

Reservation is a system of providing opportunities to enter the public and private sectors for a certain number or percentage of people of marginalized communities that have been excluded from state power. Such a system is legally provisioned in the fields of education, health, employment, social security, etc. It is expected that excluded communities and lower classes will benefit from this and will get empowered. Reservation can also be for political representation.

In Nepal, reservations have been made in state apparatus for Adivasi Janajatis, Dalits, Madhesis, Tharus, Muslims, women, and people from backward regions.

Restructuring of state

Restructuring of state refers to a comprehensive change in the structure and character of the state. Republicanism, secularism, multilingualism, inclusion, proportional representation, and federalism are basic components of restructuring of the Nepali state. Its justification is mentioned in Article 138(a) of the Interim Constitution of Nepal as follows: “To bring an end to discrimination based on class, caste, language, gender, culture, religion

and region by eliminating the centralized and unitary form of the State, the State shall be made inclusive and restructured into a progressive, Democratic Federal System.” On the form of state restructuring, the Charter prescribes further, “Nepal shall be a federal democratic republican state, accepting the wishes of the Madhesi people, indigenous peoples, and the people of backward and other regions, for autonomous provinces.”

But the way the new constitution formulated by the CA-II has restructured the Nepali state, especially the way it has created the framework of federalism, is contrary to the guidelines provided by the Interim Constitution.

Right to self-determination

This concept originated from the international legal system that ensures the right of any sovereign country to make independent decisions in international affairs without foreign interference. Besides, this is the right of federal units to secede, as propounded by V.I. Lenin. This concept is somehow embodied in the constitutions of Ethiopia and Canada. Generally, it is a specific type of community right to govern their own affairs, according to which they have ownership and control over their identity, tradition, lifestyle, culture, language, land, and natural resources, and the state cannot interfere in them.

ILO 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 define the right to self-determination as a community right of indigenous peoples.

The State Restructuring Committee formed during the CA-I and the State Restructuring Commission formed thereafter defined this as a community right of Adivasi Janajatis but without the right to secede from the country.

Rodhi

It refers to a traditional institution of the Gurung community and also refers to a communal

house where young men and women gather. In a Rodhi house, young men and women interact with each other, get entertainment, and exchange feelings with each other. Generally, in Gurung villages, each village has a Rodhi. It is led by the Rodhi Aama. Rodhi also mobilizes collective labor for farming. In some cases, the Rodhi house also becomes a place for starting love relationships that generally lead to get marriages.

Secularism

According to this concept, a state cannot have a religion and the state treats all religions equally. It considers religion as a purely personal matter. Citizens are free to follow any religion of their choice. There is freedom to follow, not follow, or change one's religion. Since the state and religion are separate, the policies, laws, and regulations of the state should not be biased towards any religion.

According to the Constitution of Nepal 2015, Nepal is a secular state, but it is bound by the "protection and promotion of religion, culture handed down from the time immemorial."

Social justice

Theoretically, social justice is the concept of including marginalized groups (e.g., women and Dalits) and excluded communities (e.g., Janajati and Madhesi) in the governance of the state through special processes. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 defines social justice as the right of socially, educationally, and economically backward groups to proportional inclusion in state institutions. The constitution has granted this special rights to 17 communities, including Adivasi Janajatis. However, it may be reasonable to transfer the specific rights of some of these groups (e.g., people with disabilities, sexual minorities, farmers, workers) into the right to social security.

Special structure: Autonomous regions, protected areas, and special regions

In addition to the basic structures of state, such as federal, province, and local governments, some federal countries have special structures considering the unique features of the respective country. In Nepal, its concept, necessity, and justification began with the CA-I.

Autonomous region: As proposed by the State Restructuring Committee, if a minority Adivasi Janajati live densely in their historical territory, an autonomous region can be established in that region. The Committee had proposed 22 autonomous regions. It provided an exclusive jurisdiction on 20 subjects, including those related to services and facilities that are directly related to the daily lives of the people as well as those related to the use of natural resources, customary law, and culture. The autonomous region could make laws on the listed subjects to be implemented within its territory.

Protected area: Protected areas are established to ensure the rights and interests of very small minority, endangered, or marginalized Adivasi Janajatis within a province, while protecting and promoting their identity and ancestral lands.

Special area: A special area is a political unit formed to include a specific geographical area for the development of minority communities or socially and economically backward communities, or areas within the respective province not included in autonomous regions and protected areas.

Article 56(5) of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 has made provision for the establishment of special, protected, and autonomous regions for socio-cultural protection and or economic development in accordance with federal law. In terms of implementation, this provision is still limited to paper only. In the context of autonomous regions, this constitutional provision is a much weaker arrangement than

an ethno-political unit proposed by the State Restructuring Committee.

State-nation

This new concept has been formulated specifically for management of social diversity. Its features are: (1) There are many ethnicities/nations in a state; (2) There is inequality between these different communities because a particular community is privileged in every aspect—social structure, economic opportunities, and political power—and the rest are excluded; and (3) Inclusive democracy is indispensable for nation-building, and for this, representation and meaningful participation of backward, disadvantaged, and excluded communities in governance is essential. For this, there should be recognition of gender, ethnic, regional, and cultural identities and provision of identity-based rights. This gradually reduces community-based inequality. Nepal and India are examples of state-nation in terms of formation of their society as a diverse country.

Tamsaling

This is related to the identity and historical territory of the Tamang community. Its roots are found in the Tamsaling chiefdoms like Temal that existed before the unification of Nepal. Much later, when Nepal was in the process of transforming from a unitary to a federal state, Tamsaling was proposed as a province. The territory of Tamsaling province, as proposed by the State Restructuring Committee of the CA-I and the State Restructuring Commission, was as follows: Tamang-dominated districts (such as Sindhupalchok, Kavrepalanchok, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, and Makwanpur) with dense Tamang settlements that are geographically connected to each other. But this proposed province was rejected by the CA-II.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province)

Tamuwan

This refers to an ethno-political territory of the Gurung community. A village with a dense Gurung population is also a small (mini) Tamuwan. There were a number of Tamu principalities, governed by Gurungs themselves, before the unification of Nepal. The concept and proposal of a larger Tamuwan came out during the drafting of the new constitution. The territory of Tamuwan province proposed by the State Restructuring Committee of the CA-I and the State Restructuring Commission was as follows: the entire territory of Manang and Mustang districts, as well as densely populated Gurung villages/towns in Lamjung, Kaski, Syangja, Gorkha, Tanahun districts that are territorially contiguous. But this proposed province was rejected by the CA-II.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province)

Tharuhat/Tharuwan

Tharuhat (or Tharuwan) literally means the traditional land of Tharu. Tharu activists claim the whole Inner-Tarai and Tarai of Nepal as their ancestral homeland. In the early medieval period, Dangisharan and his 18 succeeding generations ruled the western Tarai with Dang as their capital.

The demand for a Tharuhat province was strongly raised during the drafting of the new constitution. The State Restructuring Committee of the CA-I and the State Restructuring Commission formed later had proposed a province with a combined name (Lumbini-Awadh-Tharuwan) targeting the Tharus in particular. The borders of the proposed province extended from Nawalparasi district in the east to Kanchanpur district to the west. But this proposed province was rejected by the CA-II.

(For the basis of crafting provinces of federal Nepal, see Kirat Province)

Tibeto-Burmese language family

Tibeto-Burmese (or Bhot-Burmese) is a larger language family primarily spoken in the Himalayan region, northeastern India, Burma, Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, Yunnan Province of China, and surrounding areas. This language group, among others, includes Dhimal, Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Nepalbhasa, Rai, Sherpa, Tamang, Thami languages of Nepal.

Traditional skills/occupations

This term refers to the skills, knowledge, and occupations that an ethnic group or community has developed through continuous practice over generations. Such skills/occupations are transmitted through daily interaction,

practices, and socio-religious traditions within a community. It is deeply connected to the identity, culture, tradition, and beliefs of that particular community. For example, the traditional skill/profession of indigenous fishermen is fishing in rivers.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007

This international document recognizes, protects, and promotes the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples around the world. Its main objective is to ensure the identity, land, language, culture, governance, and right to self-determination of indigenous peoples. Nepal has ratified this declaration.

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