**Southern Illinois University Carbondale**
**OpenSIUC**

2016

# Politics of Identity in Nepal - Implications for Theories of Regionalism

Kedar P. Badu
*Southern Illinois University Carbondale*, kedarbadu@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs_rp

# POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN NEPAL – IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF REGIONALISM

By

Kedar Badu

Intermediate in Science (Eng.), Tribhuban University, 1979

Master of Science (Eng.), Byelorussian Polytechnic Institute, 1986

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL


POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN NEPAL – IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF
REGIONALISM



By

Kedar Badu



A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

In the field of Political Science



Approved by:



Professor Stephen Bloom, Chair

Professor Stephen Shulman



Graduate School

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

October 24, 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

KEDAR P BADU, for the Master of Arts degree in POLITICAL SCIENCE, presented on OCTOBER 24th, 2016, at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

TITLE: POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN NEPAL – IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF REGIONALISM

MAJOR PROFESSOR:  Dr. Stephen Bloom

Due to incredible socioeconomic stratification of society in the context of extreme demographic and regional diversity, regionalism has been a crucial political issue for Nepal during the recent democratic transition. The traditional power elite belonging to hill "high caste" groups are trying to maintain the centralized power structure to protect their own interests. On the other hand, various ethnic and regional identity groups, who have fought for autonomy and self-rule, want their identity and rights to be recognized. Despite the promulgation of the federal constitution by the Constitutional Assembly in 2015, many ethnic and regional identity groups have expressed their opposition for the restructuring of the state based on territorial principle which ignores their identity.

Despite the historical struggle of ethnic and regional groups, this research shows a significant section of the voters belonging to these groups are divided on the federal question. There is lack of internal cohesion, communication and solidarity within and across many of the identity groups, despite the prediction of such cohesion by the existing theories of regionalism. Scholars of regionalism assume that economic and social differences automatically produce ethnic mobilization and regionalism. The case of Nepal shows that such assumption is not always true as we do not find the extent of support for ethnic federalism prescribed by various theories of regionalism.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LISTS OF TABLES

# LIST OF FIGURES

# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Bahun | "High-caste" group from the hill region traditionally engaged in performing Hindu rituals and promotion of learning, following strict rules for food, drinking and marriage |
| Chherti | "high-caste" group from the hills, traditionally engaged in military and governing |
| Dalit | The so called "low-caste" group in Hindu society, who live scattered across the country. This group is also divided by an internal caste system; and are traditionally engaged in different trades such as iron work (Kami), leather work (Sarki), tailoring (Damai), and goldsmiths (Sunar). |
| Gorkha | One of the principalities in central hills of Nepal, which initiated a military campaign to unite the country in 1776 |
| ILO-169 | ILO Convention on the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Rights, 1989. |
| Limbu | Ethnic group, living in the far eastern hills |
| Madhesi | Caste groups living in Eastern Terai, who claim that all people living there are Madhesi |
| Magar | Ethnic group, living in western hills |
| NC | Nepali Congress, center right party |
| NEFIN | Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, umbrella organization representing ethnic groups of Nepal, established in 2002 |
| Newar | Ethnic group living mostly in the Kathmandu valley, also known as Newa |
| PEON | "Permanent Establishment of Nepal", or the elite groups of military top brass, merchants, mendicants, mandarins and mediators (contractors) also known as M5 who traditionally control state power in Nepal |
| Rai | Ethnic group living in the eastern hills |
| RPP | Rastriya Prajantra Party, the far-right monarchist party, advocating for centralized Hindu state and restoration of monarchy |
| Sugauli | Place in northern India, where the British-Nepal Treaty was signed in 1816. This treaty is known as Sugauli (or Sugoli) Treaty. |
| Tamang | Ethnic group, living in the central hills of Nepal around the Kathmandu valley |
| Terai | Low lands in southern part of Nepal bordering India, sometimes also called as Madhesh. It stretches from east to west of the country. |
| Tharu | Tribal Groups living in the Terai, who claim that they are not Madhesi and have separate identity |
| UCPN(M) | United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) also known as Maoists, which have now split into various outfits |
| UML | United Marxists Leninists, Centre Left party in Nepal |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nepal has been selected for the current research because it is a country with incredible socioeconomic stratification along with extreme diversity in demography and culture. Due to such diversity, the question of ethnic and regional identity has become a prominent political issue over the past decade as the country undertook the task of federal restructuring. The case of Nepal is still more interesting because there is a proportional electoral system (along with 'first past the post' system), which was introduced to encourage participation of even smaller regional or ethnic identity groups. In spite of this, the ethnic and regional groups are divided in their preferences regarding the federal question, due to which the dominant groups have benefitted in maintaining their traditional power. How can we explain the federal question in Nepal? How does the Nepal case stand in relation to the existing theories of regionalism? This research is directed to find the answers to these important questions.
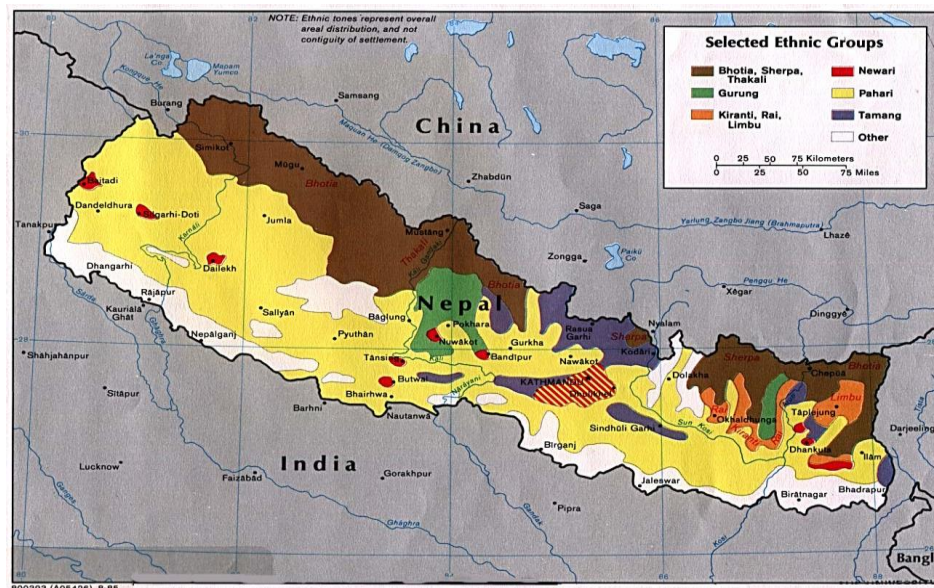
*Figure - 1*: Demographic Map of Nepal[1]

---

[1] University of Texas, Austin. 2016. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/nepal_ethnic_80.jpg

In order to understand the context of regionalism in Nepal, we need to look into the key moments in its modern history as well as its socio-economic structure. In this chapter, I will give a brief outline of the modern history of Nepal, which is important to understand the nature of regionalism in the country. The socioeconomic structure will be discussed in a later chapter (Chapter 3).

<div align="center">a). Brief History of Modern Nepal</div>

Nepal is a country located on the southern slopes of the Himalayas. It is a landlocked country bordering China's Tibet region in the north, and India in the south, east and west. The landscape varies from plain land in the south called the *Terai-Madhesh*; moderate hilly region in the middle; and the high Himalayan mountainous region in the north. The country has a total population of 26.5 million and is inhabited by people of Tibeto-Burmese, Aryan and local Tribal origins, with 126 ethnic groups and indigenous nationalities, speaking 123 languages[2].

The country came into existence in the second half of 18th century when *Prithvi Narayan Shah*, one of the kings of the *Gorkha* principality in the central hills, initiated a military campaign against other principalities and established a unitary state[3]. As the king belonged to the "high-caste" group from the hill region, he established a state where the religion, culture and language of the ruling caste achieved dominant position.

The control of the state by the "high-caste" group led to their political, economic and cultural domination over the country which marginalized the other ethnic and regional groups. Some ethnic groups like the *Limbu* in the Far East, who protested against the Gorkha rule, were later pacified by giving them limited autonomy. Keeping in mind the expanding British

---

[2] Government of Nepal, Central Bureau of Statistics. "Population Monograph of Nepal" Vol-II, 2014.
[3] In 1769, King Prithvi conquered Kathmandu valley (which was known as "Nepa" in the local Newari language) and established Gorkha Kingdom there. The name of the country was later changed to "Nepal", possibly to appease the local ethnic Newari population, who were unhappy with the military occupation by the King of Gorkha.

colonization of the plains in neighboring India, the newly established state was more interested in consolidation of its power through security of its borders and collection of taxes. The state recruited officers for government jobs from the dominant group. At the local level, however, it allowed the ethnic and regional groups to practice their religious and cultural traditions[4] and tried to harmonize the situation for the maintenance of the new regime[5]. After the Anglo-Gurkha War of 1814-16, Nepal lost one-third of its territory in the south, east and west. The *Treaty of Sugolee* (1816)[6] allowed the British to recruit the men from the hill ethnic groups into the British Army.

In 1846, one of the military generals belonging to the Rana clan, captured power through a military coup and established hereditary rule of Rana Prime Ministers that lasted for about a century (1846-1950). The Ranas gave the king a ceremonial role, and did not allow education or development in the country. They kept the country in complete isolation from the outside world by prohibiting foreigners from visiting the country. As the Ranas made a lot of enemies among the ruling clans, they established close ties with the British rulers in India for the survival of their regime. They allowed the Indian businessmen to come to Nepal to trade which gradually ended the trade monopoly of the local ethnic Newars of Kathmandu. The Ranas continued the same policy as the Shah Kings vis-à-vis the ethnic and regional groups.

The popular uprising of 1950, however, ended the Rana rule and established democracy for the first time leading the country towards modernization. But, Nepal's first tryst with democracy was short-lived. Threatened by the mobilization of the diverse groups in the democratic process, the ruling classes (landlords and courtiers belonging to the Shah and Rana

---

[4] Prithvi Narayan, the founder of Nepal had understood the importance of making peace with the diverse caste and non-caste ethnic groups for the stability of his regime and had said that "Nepal is a garden of 4 castes and 36 ethnicities".

[5] The ethnic Newars of Kathmandu Valley had exclusive trade rights with Tibet, and the king of Gorkha allowed them to continue the trade and did not allow the merchants from India taking it over.

[6] The Treaty of Sugauli, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Sugauli

clans) conspired against democracy. Taking advantage of the post-democratic chaos of 1950s, the king took power through a military coup in 1960 and established a "party-less" *Panchayat*[7] system.

During the period of 1960-1990, the country took the path towards modernization but under the autocratic rule of the monarchy. The monarchy started the hill "high" caste oriented nationalist campaign of homogenization ("*Nepalization*"), by claiming that Nepal is a country with "one ethnicity, one language, one dress and one nation".

However, the popular uprising of 1990 ended the autocratic *Panchayat* system and established constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy. The new regime provided political space for the ethnic groups to participate in the political process. But the ruling elites were able to maintain the status of "Hindu state" in the new constitution and rejected demands for a secular state, regional autonomy and identity based representation.

Again, in 2005, at the height of Maoist civil war (1996-2006), the king took over power with the help of the military, curtailed political rights and jailed political leaders. The second popular movement against the monarchy took place in 2006, and was successful in restoring democracy. This time, the elected constitutional assembly abolished the monarchy in 2008, declared Nepal as a secular, federal democratic republic, and established the principles of proportional representation for all ethnic and regional groups in the state structures.

In spite of these achievements, the political actors representing traditional political forces and the emerging regional and ethnic identity groups strongly differed on the principles and goals of restructuring of the state. The traditional political elites advocated for non-ethnic

---

[7] The Panchayats were the informal village assemblies of local elites, who traditionally used to settle local disputes in the villages. The new regime formalized these Panchayats by introducing elections, but these Panchayats were just an embellishments and a cover for the autocratic rule of the Monarchy.

territorial division, whereas the elites of the emerging identity groups demanded ethnic and identity based restructuring. Although the 2nd Constitutional Assembly in 2015 adopted a constitution based on non-ethnic restructuring[8], the elites of the identity groups were not satisfied with the provisions in the constitution, and their campaign for the revision of the constitution is on-going.

## b). The research topic and its relevance

Although Nepal has been a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country, the traditional ruling elites have suppressed the ethnic and regional groups and ruled the country throughout most of its modern history by establishing a centralized unitary state. Every time Nepal's democratic political forces attempted to institutionalize the rights of the diverse ethnic and regional groups through a democratic and secular constitution, the traditional hill "high caste" Hindu elite (also labeled as the permanent establishment of Nepal – PEON[9]), who have entrenched themselves in the state structures, have suppressed the demands of the regional identity groups in order to safeguard their political and economic interests. Therefore, the inclusion and rights of diverse ethnic, regional and minority groups have been a crucial political issue over the past six decades.

The traditional ruling elite do not want to lose their power, but the hitherto oppressed ethnic, linguistic, regional groups want recognition of their identity through equitable representation and devolution of power. To achieve this goal, the identity groups have been demanding the restructuring the traditional unitary state and the establishment of federal units based on ethnicity and regional identity. The question of regionalism in Nepal is so critical that the first constituent assembly (2008-12) was unsuccessful in drafting a new federal constitution.

---

[8] The Constitution of Nepal, 2015. http://www.nepalembassy-germany.com/pdfs/Constitution_full_english.pdf
[9] One renowned political analyst, CK Lal, has defined the PEON of Nepal as 5-M: military top brass, mandarins, merchants, mendicants and mediators (contractors). See CK Lal, "The Conservative Consolidation", The Republica, August 13, 2016. http://admin.myrepublica.com/opinion/story/25232/the-conservative-consolidation.html

The second constituent assembly (2013) finally adopted the constitution in 2015 by deciding to have seven federal states based on non-ethnic principle, although this decision was not accepted by the identity groups who have continued their struggle by demanding revision of the federal structure.

The continued political instability even after the adoption of the new constitution indicates that the issue of identity and regionalism in Nepal has not been adequately addressed by political actors. Therefore, the study of the issues of ethnic, linguistic, caste, religious and regional identities in Nepal and their necessary resolution for national integration has acquired not only academic but also practical political significance.

The key tasks of this research are to 1) assess the extent to which ordinary voters and political party preferences regarding the federal question varied during the recent election; 2) estimate the level of unity of preferences between ethnic voters and political parties representing them; and 3) make recommendations for the solution of the federal question in Nepal.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF REGIONALISM

Regionalism is a political theory that examines the interests and political aspirations of group(s) of people living in a particular region of a country who may feel that they have been marginalized by the central state based on ethnicity, language or culture and want to have access to power and resources through decentralization, autonomy, or secession from the state. The theory of regionalism is relatively new. Scholars have been studying this question especially after the end of WWII that led to the creation of new states following decolonization. As many national and regional groups around the world started claiming their political rights, the United Nations adopted the principle of "national self-determination" (UN Charter) and the "rights of indigenous and tribal peoples" (ILO Convention 169).

In order to study the regional question in Nepal, I have used various theories of regionalism, including Dependency Theory, Internal Colonialism, Primordialism, theory of Social Communication, and Institutional Theory.

Dependency Theory was developed in the 1950s which tried to explain the structural relation of dependency between the developed "core" and the backward "periphery" which was thought to lead to the rise of nationalist, regionalist and secessionist movements in developing countries (Rokkan, Urwin, 1982). Based on the Dependency theory, Internal Colonialism suggested that economic exploitation and cultural domination by the Centre helps strengthen identities in cultural regions as a response to it (Hechter, 1975). Hechter also claimed that the process of industrialization increases economic inequality between the center and regions and the resulting unequal industrial development creates dependency of the periphery on the center. He also claimed that the dominant Centre will use its administrative policies and structures to

institutionalize the existing stratification in the periphery in order to reinforce its dominant position (Hecter, 1975, page 9). If Hechter's theory is true, then it means that the allegedly internal colonial approach of the center creates strong internal unity in the different social strata in the periphery, and generates loyalty and commitment of the masses to their own ethnic/regional political leadership to fight the domination of the center.

Samuel Huntington (1968) argued that democratic transition in the emerging multi-ethnic societies of states that gained independence after WW II could be destabilizing as these states might not be able to balance political development with modernization pressures due to a lack of institutions. He claimed that transition from autocratic rule to democracy will liberate hitherto oppressed groups and enable them to participate in the political process. However, as these new groups do not find institutional space for participation and for sharing of power, these groups become alienated form the political process leading to conflict in the society. In this research, analysis has been made how far the alienation of the new groups by the state affected the preferences of the masses of the regional identity groups towards making a unified response against the dominant elites who control the state.

Clifford Geertz (1973) proposed the concept of Primordialism to explain the continued relevance of nationalism and regionalism in new states. He believed that group identity emerges naturally as a result of very long period of cohabitation of group members who are linked through common history, language, culture, kinship, religion, region etc. and these bonds coalesce to form primordial identities. If Geertz's theory is true, we shall see a strong correlation between the demands of the ethnic and regional parties with the individual preferences of the voters during elections.

Karl Deutsch (1953) argued that Social Communication affects the extent of regionalism. Deutsch believed that social communication plays a prominent role in the formation of nationalities during the transition of societies to modernity. He claimed that the process of modernization increases social mobilization and communication within the marginalized groups. Deutsch argued that members of the marginalized group communicate more effectively and intensely with individuals within the group than those from the outside, which could reinforce regional and national identities. He also suggests that states can in some instances build ties across ethnic groups through the flow of standardized information ("standard stream") in order to assimilate those groups into the dominant culture. The ethnic groups will also have the "peculiar stream" of information from the past experiences of their community. The interaction between standard stream and peculiar stream will generate a "feedback stream" as a response of the group to the assimilation efforts of the state through the standard stream. Deutsch concludes that assimilation or dissimilation of the ethnic group will depend on whether the "standard stream" or "feedback stream" gets the upper hand (Karl Deutsch, page 91-92).

In Nepal, since 1990s, various forms of communication have been developed. If Deutsch's theory is true, then we shall see how far the increased opportunities for communication contributed to generate common preferences among the marginalized groups and their political parties on the federal question[10]. We can also measure the extent of national or regional mobilization as an indicator of the processes of assimilation or dissimilation taking place among the diverse ethnic and regional groups in Nepal.

---

[10] Experts believe that development of the media in Nepal is one of the major achievement of the democratic process of recent years. Along with the vast number of newspapers and TV channels, community radios are proliferating in the country. There are above 200 local FM radios spread across 74 out of 75 districts. For more, see Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal. 2016.
http://www.acorab.org.np/index.php?pagename=aboutus

CHAPTER 3

REGIONAL STRUCTURE OF NEPAL

a). Nepal's Demographic Structure
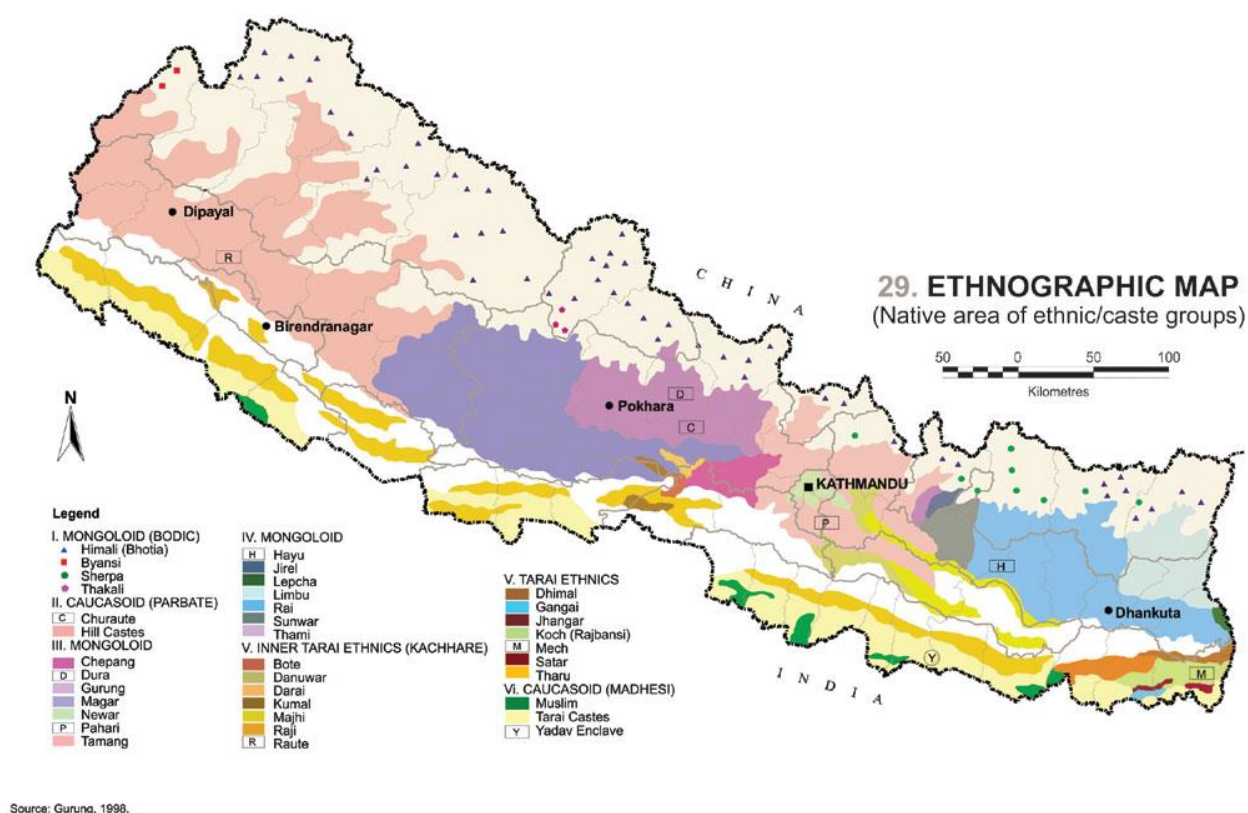


*Figure - 2*: Ethnographic Map of Nepal[11]

Nepal's demography is extremely diverse. The population can be divided broadly into two groups: caste groups and non-caste (ethnic) groups. Caste groups belong to the Hindu system of social hierarchy, where Brahmins and Chhetri occupy dominant positions; and Dalits are the "low caste" who are also known as the "untouchables". On the other hand, there are about 100 non-caste ethnic groups with native areas in certain regions of the country. (See Map-2 above).

---

[11] Mark Turin, "Harka's Maps". Nepali Times, 26 Jan 2007. http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=13160#

Having said that, there is no region in the country where a single ethnic or regional identity group that has a majority of the population. A breakdown of the population of the country, as provided by the 2011 National Census[12], is given in Table-1.

Table-1: *Population of Major Ethnic and Caste Groups*

| Group | # | Population | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. "High-Caste" Hill people (*Bahun, Chhetri*) | 4 | 8,278,401 | **31.2** |
| 2. Indigenous Nationalities (non-caste) | 67 | | **35.3** |
| • *Mountain* | *50* | *7,228,463* | *27.3* |
| • *Terai-Madhes (Tharus)\** | *13* | *2,039,407* | *7.7* |
| • *Others ethnicities* | *4* | *91,852* | *0.3* |
| 3. Dalits ("low caste") | 20 | | **12.6** |
| • *Hill* | *5* | *2,151,526* | *8.1* |
| • *Madhesi Dalit\** | *15* | *1192,517* | *4.5* |
| 4. Madhesi (Regional Identity groups) | | | **15.3** |
| • *Caste Madhesi* | *34* | *4072323* | *15.3* |
| 5. Muslims\* (Religious identity group) | 3 | 1,164,255 | **4.4** |
| 6. Unidentified | | 275,670 | **1.0** |
| Total | | 26,494,504 | **100** |

As the table shows, the dominant hill "high-caste" group, consists of Bahun and Chhetris, who account for 31.2% of the population. The indigenous nationalities account for 35.3%, Dalits – 12.6%, Madhesi 15.3% and Muslims – 4.4%. The Madhesi group claim that the Tharus and Muslims, who live also in the southern Terai belt, are also Madhesi. But both the Tharus and Muslims have rejected that claim and believe that their identity is separate from that of the Madhesi. Ten major caste and non-caste groups in Nepal are given in the table below.

---

[12] Government of Nepal, Central Bureau of Statistics. "Population Monograph of Nepal, 2014".

Table-2: *Ten major Caste Groups in Nepal*[13]

| Caste or Ethnicity | Total Population | % | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chhetri | 4,398,053 | 16.6% | Scattered, mostly in Mid & Far West |
| Bahun | 3,226,903 | 12.2% | Scattered |
| Magar | 1,887,733 | 7.1% | Western and Mid-western Hills |
| Tharu | 1,737,470 | 6.6% | Terai region |
| Tamang | 1,539,830 | 5.8% | Central Hills |
| Newar | 1,321,933 | 5.0% | Kathmandu valley |
| Kami | 1,258,554 | 4.8% | Scattered |
| Muslim | 1,164,255 | 4.4% | Mostly in Terai, scattered |
| Yadav | 1,054,458 | 4.0% | Eastern Terai |
| Rai | 620,004 | 2.3% | Eastern hills |

According to the National Census of 2011, 123 different languages are spoken in the country as mother tongue. Nepali, the official language, is spoken by 44.6% of the population. Maithili, the second largest language, is mostly spoken in the Eastern Terai. Ten most spoken languages in Nepal along with population and locations are given in the table below.

Table-3: *Major languages spoken in Nepal*[14]

| Language | Total population | Percentage | Locations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nepali | 11,826,953 | 44.6 | Across the country |
| Maithili | 3,092,530 | 11.7 | Eastern Terai |
| Bhojpuri | 1,584,958 | 6.0 | Mid Terai |
| Tharu | 1,529,875 | 5.8 | Throughout Terai |
| Tamang | 1,353,311 | 5.1 | Central hills |
| Newar | 846,557 | 3.2 | Kathmandu valley |
| Bajjika | 793,418 | 3.0 | Eastern Terai |
| Magar | 788,530 | 3.0 | Western hills |
| Doteli | 787,827 | 3.0 | Far western hills |
| Urdu | 691,546 | 2.6 | Terai |

---

[13] UNDP, 2014. The Federalism Debate in Nepal. Page 64
http://www.np.undp.org/content/dam/nepal/docs/projects/UNDP_NP_SPCBN_the-federalism-debate-in-nepal.pdf
[14] UNDP, ibid.

b). Nepal's Economic Structure:

The hill "high-caste" dominated unitary state created extreme economic disparity among the caste and non-caste groups over the past two and half centuries, which is reflected in a report prepared by the UN in Nepal (Human Development Report, UNDP, 2014). The report says that Human Development Index (HDI) of Brahmins and Chhetris rank at the top (0.538), whereas Ethnicities, Dalits, and Muslims have HDI values of 0.482, 0.434 and 0.422 respectively[15]. The report also found that "(a)mong identified castes and ethnic groups, Hill Brahmans have the highest HDI score at 0.557, and the Madhesi Dalits have the lowest. The Muslims and Dalits have HDI values 27 and 24 percent lower respectively than that of the Brahmans/Chhetris"[16]. (See Exibit-1 for details of the figures).
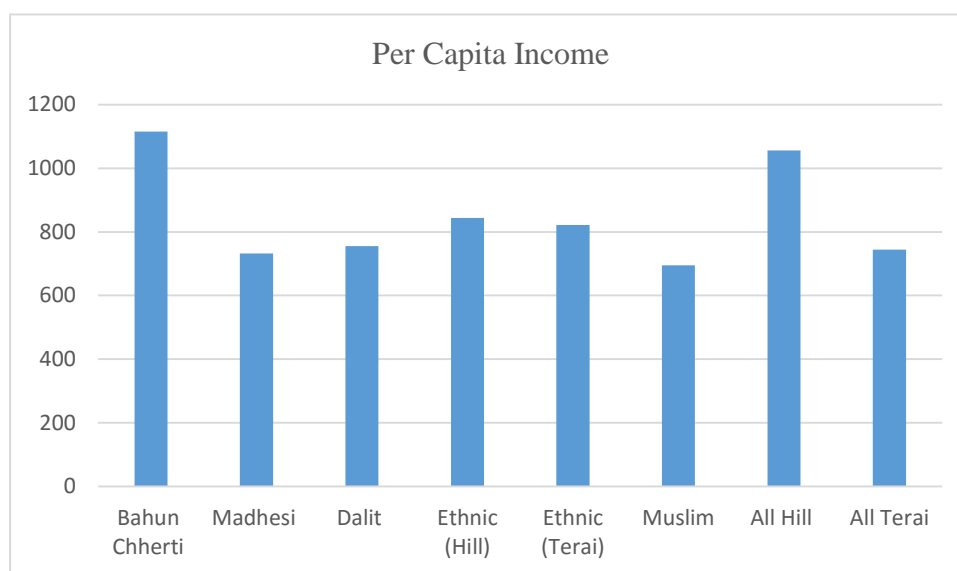


*Figure -3*: Per-capita Income across Demographic Groups and Regions[17]

---

Nepal Living Standards Survey of 2010/2011 also found that there is a clear relation between levels of income with caste and ethnicity. The survey showed that "Brahmans/Chhetris have the highest income per capita, followed by the Janajati (ethnicities) and the Dalit. The per capita income of Hill Brahman is 1.7 times higher than that of the Dalit in general, and two times higher than that of the Madhesi Dalit"[18]. (See Figure -3 & 4 and Table in Exhibit - 1&2).
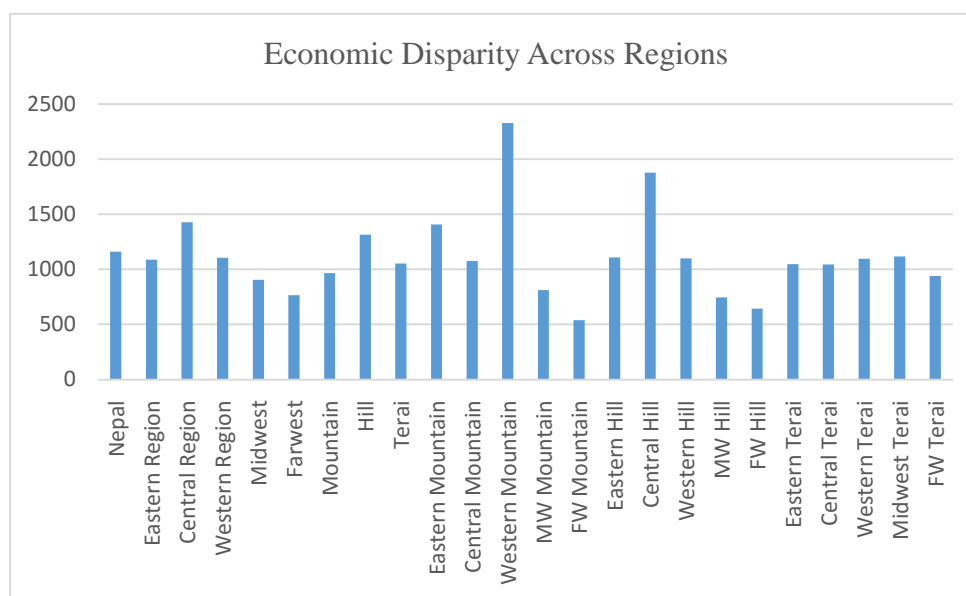


*Figure -4*: Economic Disparity Across Regions[19]

If we compare the life expectancy among the different groups, we see that Bahun and Chhetri have the highest and Dalits have the lowest. Literacy rate is highest among Bahun Chherti and lowest among Muslims. (See Figure-5 & Exhibit – 1).

---

[18] UNDP, 2014, page 18
[19] Figure drawn by using data from UNDP, 2014, page 96-99

Life Expentancy and Adult Literacy
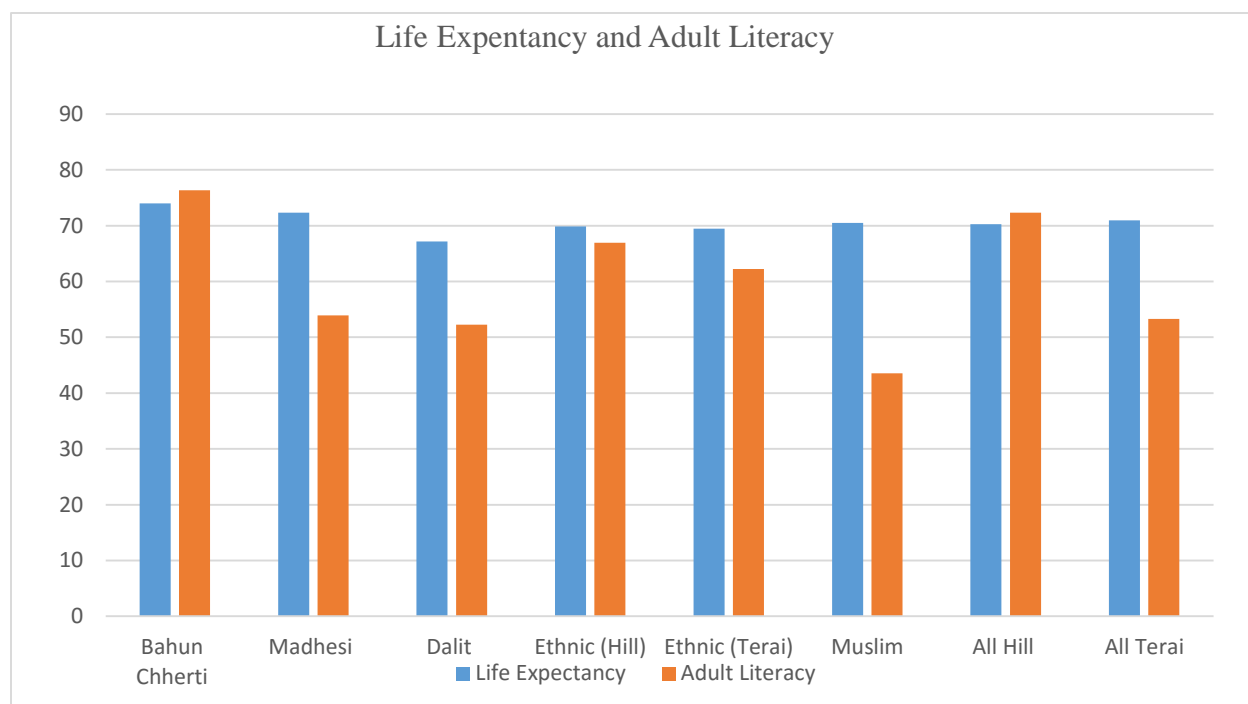
*Figure – 5*: Life Expectancy and Adult Literacy among Groups and Regions[20]

Although Nepal is traditionally an agricultural country, the industrialization process started in the 1960s and now industry contributes about 15% of the GDP[21]. Industries are more and more being concentrated in the 'periphery' (mostly in the Eastern Terai) which is reflected by the industrial employment data. (See Figure – 6 below and Exhibit – 3).

The territorial structure of industrialization also shows that most of Nepal's industries (food processing, jute mills, sugar mills, tobacco, tea processing etc.) are located in the eastern Terai. The Terai in general heavily contributes to the country's national income (GDP)[22], whereas the mid and far western hills and the mountain regions are dependent on allocation from the center.

---

[20] Figure drawn based on data from UNDP, 2014. Page 96-99
[21] Statista.com http://www.statista.com/statistics/425750/nepal-gdp-distribution-across-economic-sectors/
[22] Gaige, 1975
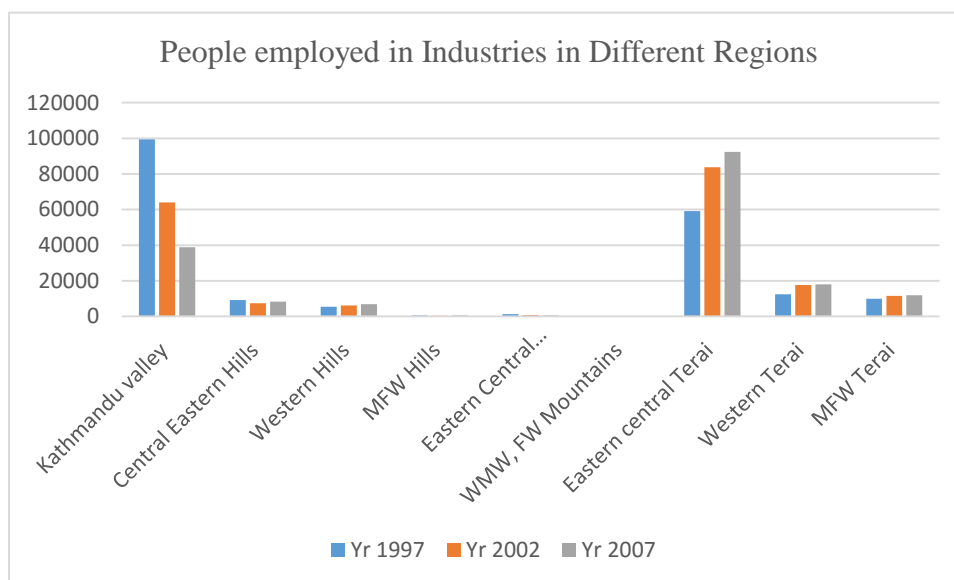
*Figure -6*: Industrial Employment in Different Regions[23]

The structural analysis shows that there is significant economic and human development disparity among the regions of Nepal, where the central hills have a higher level of development but the other regions, especially the Terai are left behind. Similarly, we can see that there is disparity among the ethnic and regional groups, where the traditional elite (Bahun and Chhetri) have a higher status in terms of income, whereas other ethnicities and regional groups are significantly behind.

The Dependency / Internal Colonialism theories claim that the state concentrates industries at the Centre and exploits the periphery by making the latter as a base for raw materials. In Nepal's case, however, the state has supported the establishment of major industries in the periphery (eastern Terai-Madhes), thereby making the Centre dependent on the periphery for industrial production.

---

[23] UNDP, 2014, page 116. Also see Exhibit-3 for details of the figures.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

a). Research Methodology:

Guided by the theoretical propositions mentioned above, I use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data regarding the preferences of national and regional political parties on the federal question has been obtained from their election manifestoes and also from media sources. On the other hand, quantitative data such as 1) votes received by major political parties in the 2013 national elections, 2) demography and 3) economic data of the 75 districts has been used. Regression analyses have been carried out by taking the percentage of votes received by political parties at the district level as dependent variable; and voter turnout, economic and demographic data of those districts as independent variables.

Although the election in 2013 was for a new constitution, and, as the main agenda of the constitutional assembly was to decide on the federal restructuring, an assumption has been made that the votes cast reflected the preferences of the voters on the issue of restructuring of the state; and that the party votes represent the level of support of voters to the state restructuring agenda proposed by the political parties. The votes received by the political parties[24] on the proportional system has been used as it better reflects voter preference in support of the manifesto of the parties[25]. Due to the extreme diversity of population groups, demographic data of four major caste or non-caste groups from each of the 75 districts, provided by the 2011 National Census, has been used. Data on per capita income has been taken from UNDP 2014 Human Development

---

[24] The 2013 National Election data were received from the Nepal Election commission website.
http://election.gov.np/CA2070/CAResults/reportBody.php?selectedMenu1=2&rand=1472227323
[25] The assumption here is that the FPTP system will be biased for this research as voters in Nepal cast their votes based on various other factors like kinship (nepotism), existing contacts, access to the candidate etc. Hence FPTP votes have not been considered for this research.

Report, whereas data on government revenue and total budget allocation to the districts has been

taken from the Consolidated Financial Statement[26] of the Government of Nepal for the Fiscal

Year 2011/12.

## b). Data analysis

In order to assess voter preferences regarding the restructuring agenda of regional and

national political parties, I conducted regression analysis to evaluate 13 different Models: 4

models for national political parties (NC, UML, Maoist and RPP); 8 models for regional parties

representing identity groups; and 1 model for 'other' minor parties. The party votes at the district

level are taken as the dependent variable reflecting voters' preferences towards the agenda of the

political party on federal question. The independent variables are the percentages of the

population of four major demographic groups of each district, voter turnout, per capita income,

per capita government revenue and budget allocation in each of the 75 districts. While carrying

out the regressions, I excluded the dominant groups like Bahun and Chherti, as these groups are

generally considered having preferences in favor of the traditional unitary state[27].

Findings of the regressions, together with coefficients, standard errors and coefficient of

determination ($R^2$ adjusted), have been given in the page below. The results of the tests of the

models are discussed in the next section.

---

[26] Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal. 2011-12. Consolidated Financial Statements.
http://www.fcgo.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/Fiscal-year-2011-12-2068-69.pdf
[27] A separate regression for the joint vote of NC and UML (NCUML) also shows that there is strong relation
between Bahun and Chhetri population and the votes of these political parties. See Table-4 in next page.

Table 4- *Regression Analysis: Coefficients and Standard Errors*

| Variables | NC | UML | Maoist | RPP | Madhes | Tharuha | SLimbu | SSPN | Dalit | Khamp | Janamu | Newa | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | .37** (.17) | .28 (.19) | .10 (.19) | .58 (.11) | -.03 (.08) | .01 (.06) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.01) | 00 (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.02 (.02) | -.01 (.006) | (.14 .12) |
| Turnout | .04 (.23) | .03 (.26) | .15 (.25) | -.12 (.15) | .04 (.11) | -.02 (.08) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.02) | 00 (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | .02 (.02) | .01 (.008) | .02 (.17) |
| Percapita Income | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.00 (0.00) | -0.001** (0.00) | 0.001*** (0.00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) |
| Percapita Revenue | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0*** (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) |
| Percapita Exp | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0** (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) |
| Limbu | -.16 (.10) | .06 (.12) | .03 (.11) | 0.0 (.07) | -.02 (.05) | -.02 (.03) | .01*** (.003) | .05*** (.01) | 00 (00) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | .03 (.07) |
| Sherpa | .36 (.40) | -.22 (.45) | .61 (.43) | -.57** (.26) | -.03 (.20) | -.07 (.14) | -.01 (.01) | -.28*** (.03) | 00 (.02) | -.001 (.003) | 00 (.05) | 00 (.01) | .27 (.28) |
| Rai | -.15 (.13) | .13 (.15) | 0.00 (.14) | -.08 (.09) | -.01 (.06) | -.04 (.05) | 0.0 (0.0) | .21*** (.01) | 00 (.01) | 00 (.001) | 00 (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.09) |
| Madhesi Tribal | -.68 (.63) | .51 (.72) | .48 (.68) | .25 (.42) | .61* (.31) | -.18 (.23) | -.003 (.01) | .12* (.06) | -.03 (.04) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.02 (.07) | 00 (.02) | .01 (.45) |
| Tharu | -.85* (.09) | -.21* (.11) | .13 (.10) | 0.00 (.06) | .01 (.04) | .19*** (.03) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | .04 (.07) |
| Muslim | -.57** (.24) | -.17 (.27) | -.25 (.26) | .15 (.16) | .40*** (.12) | .27*** (.08) | 0.0 (0.0) | .01 (.02) | .04** (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | .02 (.03) | 0.0 (0.0) | .09 (.17) |
| Magar | -.08 (.07) | -.27 (.08) | .22** (.08) | -.07 (.05) | .00 (.03) | -.02 (.02) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | .02** (.009) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.02 (.05) |
| Tamang | -.16** (.07) | .02 (.08) | .25*** (.08) | .02 (.05) | -.02 (.03) | -.02 (.02) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.008*** (.002) | -.07 (.05) |
| Newar | -.23* (.13) | -.27* (.15) | 0.00 (.14) | .20** (.09) | -.02 (.06) | 0.00 (.04) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.01) | .05*** (.004) | .29*** (.09) |
| Madhesi | -.41** (.16) | -.50*** (.18) | -.08 (.17) | -.06 (.11) | .73*** (.08) | 0.00 (.06) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.01) | .02** (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.02 (.02) | 0.0 (0.0) | .32 (.11) |
| Madhesi Dalit | .21 (1.22) | 1.13 (1.37) | .71 (1.31) | .25 (.81) | -2.1*** (.60) | .51 (.44) | -.001 (.03) | .01 (.12) | -.08 (.08) | 0.0 (0.0) | .06 (.15) | .009 (.04) | -.63*** (.87) |
| Gurung | .03 (.18) | -.53 (.20) | .42** (.19) | -.20* (.12) | -.05 (.09) | -.05 (.06) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.01) | 00 (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (.02) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.07 (.13) |
| Hill Dalit | -.11 (.08) | .03 (.09) | -.01 (.09) | .03 (.05) | -.02 (.04) | 00 (.03) | 0.0 (0.0) | 0.0 (0.0) | 00 (00) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.02** (.01) | 0.0 (0.0) | .09 (.05) |
| Thakali | -.52 (.44) | -.59 (.49) | -1.13** (.47) | .18 (.29) | .02 (.21) | 00 (.15) | 00 (.01) | -.06 (.04) | 00 (.03) | 0.0 (0.0) | -.03 (.05) | -.02 (.01) | 1.65*** (.31) |
| R^2 Adj. | 0.30 | 0.275 | 0.269 | 0.510 | 0.813 | 0.530 | .186 | .851 | 0.291 | -0.198 | -0.157 | 0.812 | 0.445 |

Standard errors are in brackets. Codes of Significance: *** => p = 0.01; ** => p = 0.05;   * => p = 0.10.

c). Findings and Discussion

In this section, analysis has been made on the results obtained from the regression analysis by using various theories of regionalism: Institutional Theory, Internal Colonialism, Social Communication and Primordialism.

Institutional theory claims that in modernizing societies, because of increased education and economic development, many oppressed groups strive to participate in the political process, but the system does not allow them to participate, and alienates them, thereby creating conflict in the society. Samuel Huntington (1968) has called this phenomenon as the 'institutional gap'. This means that, as the traditional elites alienate the marginalized groups from the political mainstream; this alienation reinforces the identities of these groups and generates a common political preference in order to fight the discriminatory policies of the traditional dominant actors who control power of the state.

One of the major caste group that has been discriminated in the Nepali society are the Dalits, who are treated as "untouchables" and do not have access to public places (e.g. places of worship), public services (e.g. education and healthcare) and are not adequately represented in the decision-making structures. The Dalits have their own political party (The Dalit Janajati Party is the major one). There are countless Dalit civil society organizations working throughout the country for raising awareness and educational status of Dalits and for empowering them to claim their rights.

If Huntington's Institutional theory is valid, we should see a strong unity of preference of Dalit voters with the political party representing their political interests. However, this is not the case. The regression analysis shows no significant association between this party's federal restructuring agenda (non-territorial Electoral College for Dalits) and the Dalit population both in

the hills and the Terai. This means that Dalits in Nepal (12.5% of the population) are divided in their preferences and do not support political party that was established to represent their interests. Instead of the Dalits, there appears to be some association between the Dalit Janajati Party preferences with the Muslims (coef=0.04, r^2=0.291) and a section of the Madhesi group (coef=0.02, r^2=0.291).

The lack of Dalit support to their political party may be due to several reasons. First of all, the Dalit population is scattered across the country and their leaders are ideologically divided among the main political parties. Another reason is that Dalits are divided among themselves with their own internal caste system, and the lower caste Dalits do not support the "*Dalit Brahmins*" who have a dominant position in Dalit organizations. Dalits are also divided regionally, as the Dalits in the Terai see the hill Dalits belonging to the dominant hill people. As the Dalits speak the same language and practice the same religion as that of the dominant group, they have not been able to clearly articulate their identity and initiate a strong campaign. Therefore, we conclude that, political alienation of the hitherto marginalized group by the elite does not automatically create unity in the marginalized group, as claimed by Samuel Huntington's Institutional Theory.

Theory of Internal Colonialism of Michael Hechter (1975) claims that the state at the Centre creates economic and cultural dependency in the 'periphery' and reinforces separate identities in the regions as a response to the internal colonial policies and practices. Let us test this theory in the cases of Madhesi and Newari communities in Nepal.

Some groups in Terai-Madhesh claim that the state has practiced internal colonialism and has marginalized their community culturally and economically for a long time. The issue of Madhesh first came up in the 1950s when some local groups started demanding autonomy for the

region. Later, Nepal Sadbhawana Party (NSP), established in 1985, started advocating for the political rights of the Madhesi. However, the party split in 2003, and now consists of half a dozen outfits. In 2007, two other parties, namely, Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJF) and Terai Madhesh Lokatantrik Party (TMLP) were established. However, MJF also split into several groups the following year. These different parties would-be representing the Madhesi community have demanded a single Madhesh province (or a maximum of two provinces) in the southern Terai region.

Historically, the people of the Terai-Madhesh could not be integrated into the national "mainstream" due to various reasons. First of all, malaria was prevalent in the Terai, where people from the hills could not live. Secondly, there was a belt of dense forest at the foothills that separated the communities in the hill and Terai[28]. The people in the Terai did not speak Nepali, and therefore they faced difficulty in getting government jobs (Gaige, 1975). However, after the eradication of malaria in the 1950s, the government initiated resettlement schemes of hill people in the Terai.

In the 1960s, the autocratic monarchy initiated the process of *Nepalization* by imposing Nepali language in the Terai to strengthen mono-ethnic nationalism. Citizenship became a key issue in the Terai as the royal government could not establish a fair and workable procedure to identify who was a Nepali citizen and who was Indian and failed to distribute citizenship certificates to the citizens in a systematic way. During the brief period of democracy in the 1950s, the political parties worked as a "melting-pot" for the diverse groups of both the hill and the Terai. However, after the ban against political parties in 1960, the process of national integration became stalled.

---

[28] This forest was perceived by the then rulers as a natural defense from any threat coming from the south (India), especially from the British.

If Michael Hechter's theory of Internal Colonialism was valid, we should have seen strong unity of preferences among the various groups living in the Terai, which is not the case. There is association between the votes of a section of caste Madhesi, Muslims, and Madhesi Tribals with the agenda of the Madhesi parties, but other major groups like Tharus, and Dalits do not appear to prefer the Madhesi agenda. In fact, the Madhesi Dalit have a significant negative association with the preferences of the Madhesi parties. And the Tharus, who are considered as the indigenous population of the Terai, appear to have no association with the preferences of the Madhesi parties. If we see the actual voting patterns, in Dhanusha District, which is located at the very heart of the proposed Madhesh province, the Madhesi Parties jointly received 15% of the votes on the proportional system, whereas the national parties received 55%.

Another group who claim of internal colonialism by the state is the Newar community who mostly live mostly in the Kathmandu valley. During the unification of the country in the second half of 18th century, the King of Gorkha had invaded the Newar kingdoms of the valley, and since then, some Newari groups think that the Gorkha (later named as Nepal) state has marginalized their community by suppressing their language, culture and identity. Having said that, the Newars are considered to be the third most powerful group in the country after Bahuns and Chhetris. The Nepa National Party is the largest party representing the Newar community, which has demanded an autonomous ethnic Newa State in the Kathmandu valley.

The regression analysis shows some association of Newar voters with the Newa National Party. But, there is a significant association of the Newar community with the votes obtained by monarchist RPP and 'other' fringe parties, who oppose ethnicity based federalism. These results show that, in a stratified and demographically diverse society like Nepal, Hechter's theory of Internal Colonialism is inadequate to explain the regional question.

Karl Deutsch has proposed a social communication theory, which claims that in the process of modernization, the increased mobilization and communication reinforces regional and national identities. He also claimed that the nature of communication (standard stream) from the state interacts with the historical 'peculiar stream' of the ethnic groups and creates a 'feedback stream' as a response to the state's dominant communication (standard stream). He also claimed that the process of assimilation or dissimilation of the marginalized groups depends on which stream gets the upper hand: standard stream or feedback stream. Let us test this theory in the cases of the Limbu and Rai communities of eastern Nepal.

The Limbu community is an ethnic group living in the far eastern hills of Nepal. This group is represented by the Federal Limbuwan State Council who has demanded an autonomous Limbuwan State in the nine districts of far eastern Nepal[29]. This party is one of the most active in political mobilization to claim identity rights for the Limbus. In this area, there is also a large community of Rai people, who have also demanded a separate homeland for themselves, a Kirat Province. Because of the overlapping territorial claims between these two groups, there is no clarity on a clear division of territory among them.

According to the theory of Social Communication, we should expect a strong unity of political preferences within Rai and Limbu communities only if the communication takes place through the particular streams. However, the regression analysis shows a weak relation between the preferences of these communities with their political parties on the federal question. The association of the preferences of Limbu voters with the Limbuwan Party is very weak. Similarly, the association of the preferences of the Rai voters with their ethnic Khambuwan Party is also very weak (coef.=0.00, r^2=-0.198). Another regional party active in this region is the Federal

---

[29] Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limbuwan

Socialist Party Nepal (SSPN). There appears to be some association of the Limbu and Rai voters with SSPN. If we see the actual voting patterns in the area, we see that in Ilam district (i.e. at the very heart of the proposed ethnic Limbuwan state), the largest regional party (SSPN) received only 7% of the proportional votes, whereas the national parties received 78% of the votes. The ethnic parties of the Limbus and Rais (Limbuwan and Khambuwan) received a negligible percent of the votes from their own ethnic communities. This indicates that the relation between SSPN and the Rai and Limbu voters may be due to historical reasons[30] rather than the effect of social communication. If social communication had played a role here, we could have seen stronger association between the Khambuwan and Limbuwan parties with their ethnic constituencies. This also doesn't look like the victory of the 'dominant' stream because the struggle of the local ethnic groups for their identity is also ongoing. This indicates that there is neither assimilation nor dissimilation of the ethnicities as prescribed by the theory of Social Communication.

Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of Primordialism claims that group identity emerges naturally as a result of long period of cohabitation and the common experiences of language, culture, kinship, region etc. that consolidate bond between individuals. If Geertz's theory is true, we shall see a strong correlation between the demands of the ethnic parties with the individual preferences of the voters during elections. We have tested this theory in the cases of the Tharus, and Magar communities in Nepal.

The Tharus are considered as an indigenous group living throughout the Terai belt in the south of the country. They are tribal peoples of the Terai, who cleared the forests, cultivated the

---

[30] SSPN is a new regional party formed by the breakaway faction of one of the major national parties. It is a new party and its credentials as the guardian of ethnic identity of the local groups is still early to judge. The votes it received could be from the former supporters of the national party (UML) to which the leaders of SSPN belonged.

land and moved from place to place. After the eradication of malaria in the Terai in 1950s, the Terai has become migration destination both from the hills in the north and from India to the south. Due to this migration, the Tharus lost their land to the migrants and slowly became marginalized in their own ancestral lands. On the other hand, the Magars are considered as the indigenous peoples of Nepal who live in the western hills of the country.

Regression analysis on the preferences of these 'primordial' groups shows that there is some association between the preferences of the groups to the political parties who represent them. The Tharu have their political parties like the Tharuhat Party and the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum Lokatantrik (MJFL). The key demand of this group is Tharuhat, an ethnic homeland for the Tharus in the Terai-Madhesh. There is association on the preferences of the Tharus with Tharu political parties. The reason for the association seems to be not the primordial bond, but external demographic pressure from the settlers – both from the hills and the Terai. Especially, there is deep distrust between the Madhesi and the Tharus, and the Tharus have rejected Madhesi claim that they are also Madhesi. The Tharus believe that if they become Madhesi, they will not only lose their identity, but also their land to the Madhesi. Therefore, the Tharu support to their political parties appears more like a reaction against the Madhesi attempt for their assimilation, rather than internal primordial bonds between the Tharus. Bardiya district in the mid-west is considered to have the highest population of the Tharus in the country (53%, as per census 2011). However, in Bardiya, the national parties jointly received 77% of the votes, whereas the Tharu parties jointly received only 7% of the votes. These figures indicate that Tharu political preferences are divided ideologically favoring national political parties, rather than being united by the primordial bonds to claim their political rights.

The ethnic Magar community is represented by the Rastriya Janamukti Party which has demanded Magarat, a homeland for their ethnic group. The regression analysis shows weak association between the preferences of the Magars with the Rastriya Janamukti Party. However, there is stronger association of Magar preferences with the Maoist Party. This is because, the Maoist movement started in mid 1990s with their "base-area" in the proposed Magarat region of the western hills, due to which a section of the Magars became ideologically indoctrinated. Therefore, in the case of Magars, there is no conclusive evidence that primordial bond has caused unity of political preferences. Palpa district is considered as having the highest population of Magar ethnicity in the country (52%, as per census 2011). If we see the actual voting patterns here, the national parties jointly received 86% of the votes, whereas the Janamukti Party, the ethnic party of the Magars, received only 2.5% of the votes. This shows, that, like the Tharus, the Magars are also ideologically divided in their preferences and favor the national political parties, rather than being united in their preferences to translate their primordial ties into political capital to achieve the ethnic Magarat state.

As a summary of the analysis of the regression on the models of preferences of the identity groups and the political parties, we see that voters of the ethnic group are generally divided in their political preferences regarding the federal question. From this analysis, we conclude that the ethnic and identity groups in Nepal are in general divided along the ideological lines of the national political parties and the existing theories such as Internal Colonialism, Social Communication, Primordialism and Institutional Theory cannot adequately explain the regional question in Nepal.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nepal is a country with extreme socio-economic as well as demographic, cultural and regional diversity. Since the re-establishment of democracy after the second popular movement in 2006, there is ongoing debate regarding the federal question and granting political rights to the diverse ethnic and regional identity groups. Due to historical discrimination and marginalization of the identity groups, ethnic and regional movements are ongoing. At the same time, the political actors in the country are making efforts to find a long-lasting solution of this important question. Despite the discrimination and marginalization of the identity groups, the current research shows that, the preferences of voters from these groups on the federal question are divided along the ideological lines of the national political parties who oppose identity based federalism. Another important finding is that there is lack of coordination, communication and solidarity within the groups to fight the unitary state at the centre. How do the findings of this research stand with respect to the theories of regionalism?

In order to explain the regional phenomenon of Nepal, we had started this research with the theoretical propositions of the Internal Colonialism, Primordialism, Institutional Theory, and theory of Social Communication. Let us use the findings of the research to test these theories for possible explanation of the regional question in Nepal.

Samuel Huntington's Institutional Theory (1968) claimed that democratic transition in multi-ethnic societies of emerging states could be destabilizing as the hitherto oppressed groups who come to the political arena do not find institutional space for participation, and get alienated from the political process, leading to conflict in the society. Dalits in Nepal are one of such marginalized groups, who have been traditionally discriminated and marginalized and are

waging a struggle to establish their political rights since the establishment of democracy in 1950. If the Institutional Theory was valid, we would have seen a strong unity and coordination among the Nepali Dalits to fight the non-secular unitary state, and their political preferences would have been in alignment with the Dalit Political parties who have been demanding dalit rights. This research, however, shows that, there is no unity of preferences between Dalit voters and the Dalit political parties, especially the Dalit Janajati Party. Despite of the very active Dalit civil society organizations in Nepal[31] who are educating their community and advocating for Dalit rights, Dalit voters both in the Hills and in the Terai appear to be divided along the ideological lines of the national political parties, who oppose identity based federalism. Therefore, the Institutional Theory cannot adequately explain the federal question in Nepal.

Michael Hechter's theory of Internal Colonialism (1975) suggested that economic exploitation and socio-cultural domination by the Centre creates dependency of the periphery on the centre, and strengthens regional identities in the periphery. In Nepal's case, some of the ethnic and regional identity groups, namely the Madhesi and the Newari groups, claim that the state has used internal colonial approach in relation to them, and therefore, their demand for identity based federalism should be honored. If Hechter's Theory of Internal Colonialism was valid, we would have seen a strong unity of preferences among Madhesi and Newari groups with their regional and ethnic political parties. But we do not see any such unity of preferences among voters of these groups. Especially in the Terai-Madhesh, we see that significant local groups like the Tharus, and Madhesi Dalits do not appear to prefer the regional identity claims of the Madhesi parties. In fact, there is a negative association between the Madhesi Dalit and the preferences of the Madhesi parties, which is against the claims of the theory of Internal

---

[31] See Dalit NGO Federation in Nepal, http://www.dnfnepal.org/

Colonialism. Similarly, in the Newari case, there appears to be a stronger association with the monarchist RPP that prefers unitary state rather than with the ethnic party of the Newars. Therefore, in the context of Nepal, where there is extreme diversity and stratification of society, Hechter's theory (Internal Colonialism) is inadequate to explain the regional question.

Karl Deutsch's (1953) theory of Social Communication claimed that modernization leads to social mobilization and communication within the marginalized groups and reinforces regional and national identities in them. This theory also asserted that the process of communication flowing from the state to these groups can create assimilation or dissimilation depending on whether the 'standard stream' or the 'feedback stream' gets the upper hand. I have tested this theory on the preferences of the ethnicities in Nepal.

The Limbu ethnic group in far eastern hills is one of the most active ethnic movements in the country. However, this research shows that, the association of preferences of the Limbu voters with their political party (Federal Limbuwan State Council) is very weak. There appears to be some association between the preferences of the Rai and Limbu with the SSPN, a new regional party. However, SSPN is a new party formed by the breakaway faction of one of the national parties (UML) and it is early to judge how far this party will be committed to the demands of ethnicity based federalism. Despite the association of a section of ethnic voters to SSPN, national parties opposing ethnic federalism received absolute majority of votes in those districts, which shows that the Rais and Limbus are also ideologically divided rather than united as prescribed by the theory of social communication.

Far eastern Nepal is also relatively developed in terms of education and communication. There are 15 local FM radios in the area[32], not to speak of numerous other local or national

---

[32] Asiawaves, 2010. http://www.asiawaves.net/nepal-radio.htm

electronic and print media. In spite of these mediums of communication, we see neither assimilation nor dissimilation of the Limbus or the Rais through the processes of 'standard' and 'feedback' streams. The process of Social Communication has not created strong solidarity among ethnic voters in support of the preferences of their ethnic political parties.

Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of Primordialism is also used to explain regional phenomena. This theory claims that common experiences of history, language, culture, kinship, region, beliefs etc. lead to primordial identities. In Nepal, there are various groups who claim to be primordial to the land. The Magar[33] and the Tharu are such groups. This research shows that, there is some association of the Tharus with the political preferences of their political parties, but this seems to be due to external factors (pressure from the Madhesi for assimilation) rather than internal primordial bonds. On the other hand, there appears to be no coordination between the parties claiming to champion the rights of the Tharus, namely, the MJFL and the Tharuhat as these party fought elections against one another in the same constituencies. The Tharuhat Party has taken a stronger line in the demand for ethnic state, but the MJFL seems to be vacillating[34] and has seldom shown opportunistic behavior.

In the case of Magars, the association of their political preferences with their ethnic party is very weak, but the association with the Maoist party is very strong. This appears to be due to ideological indoctrination of the Magars, as the area used to be the "base-area" of the Maoists during their military campaign. Therefore, Geertz's concept of Primordialism is unable to explain the political behavior among identity groups of Nepal.

---

[33] Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magars
[34] The MJFL sometimes allies with regional parties and other times with the national parties, hence its commitment to the federal question is doubtful.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the existing theories of regionalism cannot adequately explain the regional question in Nepal, which leads us to the question of the peculiarities of the electoral system for possible answers. In Nepal, there's a mixed system of voting: the first past the post (FPTP) and the proportional system. Proportional voting was introduced in 2008 to encourage the participation of even smaller ethnic and regional groups in the structures of the state. Despite this, voters of regional and ethnic identity groups have preferred national political parties rather than their own ethnic and regional parties.

If we look into the electoral system in neighboring India, there is no proportional electoral system, therefore, it is difficult to make a judgement of the regional question. But in Nepal, however, the proportional representation system gives a better measure of the regional aspiration of the voters. This makes the study of the regionalism in Nepal still more interesting and important. Despite the provision of the proportional representation system through which majority (335 out of 601) of the members of national parliament are elected, the voters of the ethnic and regional groups seem to be divided in their political preferences. This raises serious theoretical questions and challenges the scholars of regionalism to study the case of Nepal in order to develop new theories.

The divided preferences of the identity groups have also protracted the process of Nepal's democratic transition. Andre Lecours has rightly said that in a developing country like Nepal, restructuring of state can be a very difficult and protracted process due to extreme diversity, long history of autocratic regimes, fragile democracy vulnerable to external influence, (Lecours, 2012)[35]. Neither the autocratic monarchy nor the liberal parties who came to power had visualized the need for federalization of the country. The federalization agenda came from the

---

[35] Andre Lecours. 2012. Negotiating Federal Accommodation in a Multiethnic Society: The Case of Nepal. IPSA http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper_11126.pdf

opposition groups, who mobilized the ethnic and regional issues to achieve their own political objectives. Therefore, as Lecours says, Nepal is an "accidental federation" where liberal political parties were compelled to accept the federal agenda due to historical circumstances.

Similarly, analyzing the Indian experience of federalization, Sunil Khilnani (1999) says that the Indian liberals who came to power after independence in 1947 focused on the group rights, instead of following on the prescriptions of their own liberal ideology (i.e. to focus on the universal rights of the individual). The focus on "group right" policy of India's founding fathers led to benefit the elites of each of these identity groups, whereas the plight of the poor and disadvantaged in every identity group has remained the same even after 60 years of independence[36]. This gives us some indication that, in emerging new states, the rights of the identity groups should be accompanied with the universal rights of citizens so that the poor and marginalized within each group could also be brought into the mainstream and not only the elite of those groups. On the question of individual rights vs. the group rights, Clifford Geertz (1963), argues that the leaders of the emerging new states should adopt policies to reform the state in order to "domesticate primordial attachments" and "reconcile them with the unfolding civil order" and also by "neutralizing the apparatus of the state" in relation to the identity groups and also by "channeling discontent into properly political rather than para-political forms of expression"[37]

Based on the findings of this research, I recommend that, for the national integration of Nepal, the ideas of Geertz on reforming the state and of Khilnani on fulfilling the universal rights

---

[36] Sunil Khilnani, 1999. The Idea of India. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York.
[37] Clifford Geertz, 1963. The Integrative Revolution. Ed Old Societies and New States, The Free Press of Glencoe, London.

of citizens should go hand in hand. Having said that, I urge the scholars of political science to conduct more research on the "Nepal Puzzle" in order to enrich the theory of regionalism.

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit (1): Economic disparity across identity groups (UNDP 2014, p 96-99)

| Caste/Ethnicity | Life Expectancy | Adult Literacy | Per Capita Income | HDI Index |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bahun Chherti | 73.99 | 76.32 | 1115 | 0.538 |
| Madhesi | 72.35 | 53.93 | 732 | 0.46 |
| Dalit | 67.19 | 52.27 | 755 | 0.434 |
| Ethnic (Hill) | 69.86 | 66.93 | 844 | 0.482 |
| Ethnic (Terai) | 69.44 | 62.24 | 822 | 0.473 |
| Muslim | 70.47 | 43.56 | 695 | 0.422 |
| All Hill | 70.25 | 72.35 | 1056 | 0.511 |
| All Terai | 70.95 | 53.27 | 744 | 0.454 |

- Exhibit – (2): Economic Disparity Across Regions (UNDP, 2014, p. 96-99)

| Region | GNI per capita | Region | GNI Per capita | Region | GNI per capita |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All Nepal | 1160 | Eastern Mountain | 1407 | Eastern Terai | 1047 |
| Eastern Region | 1088 | Central Mountain | 1077 | Central Terai | 1045 |
| Central Region | 1429 | Western Mountain | 2329 | Western Terai | 1097 |
| Western Region | 1104 | MW Mountain | 811 | Midwest Terai | 1117 |
| Midwest | 906 | FW Mountain | 538 | FW Terai | 940 |
| Farwest | 767 | Eastern Hill | 1107 | | |
| Mountain | 965 | Central Hill | 1878 | | |
| Hill | 1316 | Western Hill | 1100 | | |
| Terai | 1052 | MW Hill | 745 | | |
| | | FW Hill | 643 | | |

- Exhibit - (3): People Employed in Different Regions (UNDP 2014, p.116)

| Region | 1997 | 2002 | 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kathmandu valley | 99383 | 63993 | 38909 |
| Central Eastern Hills | 9211 | 7492 | 8227 |
| Western Hills | 5352 | 6175 | 6887 |
| MFW Hills | 544 | 451 | 524 |
| Eastern Central Mountains | 1383 | 802 | 537 |
| WMW, FW Mountains | 70 | 53 | 125 |
| Eastern central Terai | 59196 | 83832 | 92360 |
| Western Terai | 12376 | 17589 | 18092 |
| MFW Terai | 9993 | 11466 | 11889 |

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal. 2016.
   http://www.acorab.org.np/index.php?pagename=aboutus
2. CIA, 2015. "World Fact Book" https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html
3. Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) http://ucpnmaoist.org/Default.aspx
4. Federal Socialist Forum Nepal http://federalsocialist.org/
5. Gaige, Frederick H, 1975. Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal. University of California Press.
6. Geertz, Clifford. 1963. Old Societies and New States; The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa. The Free Press of Glencoe, London.
7. Government of Nepal, Central Bureau of Statistics. "Population Monograph of Nepal, 2014".
8. Hechter, Michael. 1975. Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966. Routledge, London
9. Hobsbawm, E.J. 1990. Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality. Cambridge University Press, New York.
10. Huntington, Samuel, 1968. Political Order in Changing Societies, Yale University Press.
11. Jha, Prashant, 2014. Battles of the New Republic. Hurst & Company, London.
12. Khilnani, Sunil. 1997. Idea of India. Farrar Straus Giroux, New York.
13. Lawoti, Mahendra & Hangen, Susan, 2013. Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal – Identities and Mobilization after 1990. Routledge, London.
14. Lecours, Andre, 2012. Negotiating Federal Accommodation in a Multiethnic Society: The Case of Nepal. IPSA http://paperroom.ipsa.org/papers/paper_11126.pdf
15. Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal. 2011-12. Consolidated Financial Statements. http://www.fcgo.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/Fiscal-year-2011-12-2068-69.pdf
16. Nepal Communist Party – UML http://www.cpnuml.org/
17. Pierson, Paul. 2004. Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis. Princeton University Press.
18. Raghavan, V. R. 2013. Nepal as a Federal State: Lessons from Indian Experience. Vij Books India, New Delhi
19. Rastriya Prajantantra Party (RPP) http://rppn.org/
20. Riker, William H. 1964. Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance. Little, Brown and Company, Boston.
21. Rokkan, Stein & Urwin, Derek W. 1982. The Politics of Territorial Identity: Studies in European Regionalism. Sage Publications.
22. Smith, Anthony D, 1986. Ethnic origins of nations. Basil Blackwell, New York.
23. Statista.com http://www.statista.com/statistics/425750/nepal-gdp-distribution-across-economic-sectors/
24. Steinmo, Sven; Thelen, Kathleen and Longstreth, Frank. 1992. Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis. Cambridge University Press.

25. Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party http://teraimadhesh.org/
26. The 2013 National Election data were received from the Nepal Election commission website. http://election.gov.np/CA2070/CAResults/reportBody.php?selectedMenu1=2&rand=1472227323
27. The Constitution of Nepal, 2015. http://www.nepalembassy-germany.com/pdfs/Constitution_full_english.pdf
28. The Kathmandu Post, Oct 12, 2014 http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2014-10-12/6-7-states-official-nc-position.html
29. The Nepali Congress (NC) http://www.nepalicongress.org/
30. The Republica, August 13, 2016. http://admin.myrepublica.com/opinion/story/25232/the-conservative-consolidation.html
31. Treisman, Daniel S. 2002. After the Deluge: Regional Crises and Political Consolidation in Russia. University of Michigan Press.
32. Turin, Mark. Nepali Times, 26 Jan 2007. "Harka's Maps". http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=13160#
33. UNDP, 2014. The Federalism Debate in Nepal. Page 64 http://www.np.undp.org/content/dam/nepal/docs/projects/UNDP_NP_SPCBN_the-federalism-debate-in-nepal.pdf
34. University of Texas, Austin. 2016. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/nepal_ethnic_80.jpg
35. Wikipedia. www.wikipedia.org

VITA

Graduate School

Southern Illinois University

Kedar P Badu

kedarbadu@hotmail.com

Tribhuban University, Kathmandu, Nepal

Intermediate in Science (Eng.), July 1979

Byelorussian Polytechnic Institute, Minsk, Belarus

Master of Science (Eng.), June 1986

Research Paper Title:

    Politics of Identity in Nepal – Implications for Theories of Regionalism

Major Professor: Dr. Stephen Bloom