

“LIMBUWAN IS OUR HOME-LAND, NEPAL IS OUR COUNTRY”: HISTORY,
TERRITORY, AND IDENTITY IN LIMBUWAN’S MOVEMENT

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Dambar Dhoj Chemjong

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Dambar Dhoj Chemjong, Ph. D.

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This dissertation investigates identity politics in Nepal and collective identities by studying the ancestral history, territory, and place-naming of Limbus in east Nepal. This dissertation juxtaposes political movements waged by Limbu indigenous people with the Nepali state makers, especially *aryan* Hindu ruling caste groups. This study examines the indigenous people’s history, particularly the history of war against conquerors, as a resource for political movements today, thereby illustrating the link between ancestral pasts and present day political relationships. Ethnographically, this dissertation highlights the resurrection of ancestral war heroes and invokes war scenes from the past as sources of inspiration for people living today, thereby demonstrating that people make their own history under given circumstances. On the basis of ethnographic examples that speak about the Limbus’ imagination and political movements vis-à-vis the Limbuwan’s history, it is argued in this dissertation that there can not be a singular history of Nepal. Rather there are multiple histories in Nepal, given that the people themselves are producers of their own history. Based on ethnographic data, this dissertation also aims to debunk the received understanding across Nepal that the history of Nepal was built by Kings.

This dissertation is a case study of Limbu claims for their collective identity and Limbu resistance to the state of Nepal. This dissertation illustrates that identity politics in Nepal and the Limbu quest for Limbuwan identity is better studied in terms of their contending relationship with the state-led making of the collective *aryan* Hindu identity in Nepal over more than six centuries.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dambar Dhoj Chemjong was born and brought up in a mountain village of Limbuwan in east Nepal in a Limbu Subba family with local *kipat* land holding functionary rights. After finishing his School Leaving Certificate, he taught as a primary school teacher for three years. He did his Intermediate and B.A. degrees from Dhankuta Campus in east Nepal. He did his Masters degree in anthropology from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu and started teaching there from 1996. He did his M. Phil. in anthropology from the University of Bergen, Norway in 2002. He also worked in the Nepal government civil service for ten years.

In 2007 the Government of Nepal appointed him to the Electoral Constituency Delineation Commission, which delineated the country into 240 constituencies for the purpose of the post-conflict Constituent Assembly election in 2008. He is currently lecturer at the Central Department of Anthropology at Tribhuvan University. He lives in Swoyambhu, Kathmandu with his spouse Hema, and two sons, Mukum and Muksam.

*Dedicated to the memory of my
Grand Father
Subba Darwar Singh Limbu*

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Many peoples and institutions have unconditionally helped me in research and writing this dissertation. David Holmberg, my committee chair, has been a remarkable mentor and teacher, who not only showed me the way to Cornell but also taught me to think differently about culture. I learned anthropology not only from his classes but also through informal conversations with him over 15 years now. Had he not shown me the way to Cornell I would have ended up elsewhere nor would I have had a valuable perspective to look into societies, including my own. The intellectual product I have at hand here has been possible only because of David's unconditional support and academic guardianship. I shall remain forever grateful to my committee chair, David Holmberg, for all the support he has given me both on and off campus in Ithaca and Nepal. I feel proud and fortunate to be his student and thankful to him for accepting me as his student. My committee member, Kathryn S. March, has been so remarkably helpful both academically as well as in helping me navigate through difficulties with Cornell's bureaucracy as an international student. I learned so much about the conceptual and theoretical differences and similarities between non-Hindu *adivasis* and Hindu caste cultures in Nepal from her class on Peoples and Cultures in the Himalayas. I would also like to recognise Kathryn for all her support, guidance, and care not only for me but also for my spouse Hema, and my boys, Mukum and Muksam. My committee member, Magnus Fiskesjö, has been a great help in relation to choosing my research topic. During my first semester at Cornell, I took his class on Asian Minorities in which his discussions and readings on the Wa people from the

borderlands between Burma and China were greatly helpful for me as I looked into Limbu society. Limbu lifeways and customs seem similar to the Wa in many respects.

At the Department of Anthropology at Cornell, informal meetings and conversations with Terence Turner were serendipitously helpful in whetting my anthropologically blunt intellectual edge then. To me, Terry's concept of synchronic pluralism is a theoretical capsule that is useful in dealing with the problems facing multi-cultural societies like Nepal. His phrasing of Marx and anthropology together, by "anthropologizing Marx and [the] marxification of anthropology" during his talk on "Indigenous Peoples' Movement and Marxism" in Kathmandu in May 2012, was profoundly helpful in conceptualizing my research. Terry is no more with us now but the anthropological theoretical capsules he has left behind are so useful and perfect for interpreting indigenous peoples movements in particular, and societies in general. I am really grateful to the late Professor Terence Turner for providing me with a uniquely different understanding of anthropology, which helped me to look towards a different horizon. Jane Fajans was the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department when I came to Cornell. It would not have been easy for me in starting graduate school at Cornell without her support and guidance. In my first semester, the proseminar class with Steve Sangren was intellectually stimulating as well as enlightening. I am thankful to Steve not only for that class but also for thoughtful conversations, focusing mainly on politics. I am also grateful to Audra Simpson for her class on the Anthropology of Colonialism. The class mainly discussed native Americans, and The First Nations' historical and political issues in the face of European colonization. Her class really helped me to think through the *adivasi* Limbu situation in Nepal.

My travel between Ithaca and Nepal for my research was supported by the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies and the Graduate School at Cornell. The Department of Anthropology's emergency fund also provided invaluable financial support. I am grateful to these organizations for financially supporting me.

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My association with Cornell began through the Cornell Nepal Study Program (CNSP) in Kirtipur, when the program recruited me as a Tribhuvan University student in 1995. CNSP's Program director Banu Oja unconditionally helped me in when I was a Tribhuvan University student, and even thereafter by recruiting me as Teaching Fellow at the program. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Banu *didi* for her support not only for me but also for Hema, Mukum, and Muksam. In Ithaca, I am extremely thankful to Shambhu Oja for all the support and care he gave our family including myself, Hema, Mukum and Muksam. Shambhu even hosted all of us at the Oja home for a whole week in summer 2015, taking us to different places around New York and Washington, DC.

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to James Sharrock for reading and meticulously copy-editing and formatting this dissertation. I am truly indebted to James for his contribution I also thank Pauline Limbu for her constant suggestions and curious questions about my research. I also appreciate Pauline for suggesting the title of this dissertation. I would like to thank Yogendra Gurung for his unconditional help in solving the formatting issues in the dissertation. I would also like to thank Sher Bahadur Gurung for his help in designing the maps in the dissertation.

Finally, the source of my inspiration for this research is my grandfather, late Subba Darwar Singh Limbu, who constantly taught his six grandchildren to live a life with dignity and identity. I dedicate this work to the memories of my grandfather. My

sincere gratitude is for my mother, Kaushila, and my father, the late Gorakh Bahadur Limbu, for giving me such a beautiful life and the entire world. My three brothers and two sisters provided much support to me while I was growing up. My little family: my beloved wife Hema, *jetha chhora* Mukum, and *kanchha chhora* Muksam are the ultimate source of inspiration for my work, life and living. It is my sincere understanding that I would be no one without the support and love of my family and society.

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NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTION

In this dissertation, I have transcribed Nepali words into the Roman alphabet as they are pronounced in vernacular Nepali. I have also transcribed Limbu language words into the Roman alphabet as they are pronounced by the native Limbu speakers. I have also used “L” and “N” in parenthesis: (L) and (N) in which L = Limbu, and N= Nepali. Non-English terms are italicized. I have also pluralized Nepali and Limbu words by adding “s” wherever appropriate. Nepali or Limbu proper names are not modified. The official calendar used in Nepal is based on the Vikram era (Vikram Sambat) which is approximately 56 years and 4 months ahead of the Gregorian calendar. Materials consulted in the Nepali language are generally dated in Vikram Sambat based calendar. They are indicated with the abbreviation “v.s.” following the date. All translations and images are mine unless stated otherwise.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AJJF = *Adivasi-janajati* Joint Front
- CA = Constituent Assembly
- CNSP = Cornell Nepal Study Program
- CPN (Maoist) = Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
- CPN-ML = Communist Party of Nepal- Marxist Leninist
- CPN-UML = Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist
- EC = Election Commission
- ECDC = Electoral Constituencies Delineation Commission
- FDF = Federal Democratic Party
- FDNF = Federal Democratic National Forum
- FDNF = Federal Democratic National Front
- FDP = Federal Democratic Party
- FILSC = Federality Implementation Limbuwan Struggle Committee
- FLP = Federal Limbuwan Party
- NP = Nationality Party
- FLSC = Federal Limbuwan State Council
- FPTP = First Past the Post
- FSP = Federal Socialist Party
- IPO = Indigenous Peoples Organization
- JLF = Joint Limbuwan Front
- KNLF = Kirat National Liberation Front
- KPGSC = Kirat Peoples Government State Council
- KYC = Kirat Yakthung Chumlung
- LLF = Limbuwan Liberation Front
- LLM = Limbuwan Liberation Front

LNLF = Limbuwan National Liberation Front

LRA = Limbuwan Reform Association

MJF = Madhesi Joint Front

NC = Nepali Congress

NFSF = Nepal Free Students Front

NGO = Non-Governmental Organization

NPLP = National People's Liberation Party

PLP = Peoples Liberation Party

RLF = Revolutionary Limbuwan Front

RPP = Rastriya Prajatantra Party

TV = Television

VDC = Village Development Committee

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY, TERRITORY, AND IDENTITY OF LIMBUWAN

You can not erase our identity
We will not let our self-respect down
We are the first settlers, this country's pride
You can not erase our identity¹.

- Rajan Rai

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the politics of Limbuwan based on the movements for collective identity [*pahichan ko andolan*], ancestral history [*purkhauli itihās*], territory [*that-thalo*²], and naming of the Limbuwan province by the Limbus in east Nepal. The description and interpretation of the Limbuwan movement vis-à-vis the dominant “Hindu” state of Nepal showcased in this dissertation comprises the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century when the state of Nepal was in the process of drafting a new constitution through the two tenures of the Constituent Assembly (CA). This includes the first CA from 2008-2012, and the second CA

¹ मेट्न सक्दैँनौ तिमीले हाम्रो पहिचान ।

ढल्न दिदैँनौ हामी हाम्रो स्वाभिमान ।।

मूलबासी हौं हामी, यो देशको शान ।

मेट्न सक्दैँनौ तिमीले हाम्रो पहिचान ।। (Lyrics, music and vocal by Rajan Rai) [my translation].

² The word ‘territory’ is often translated into Nepali as *bhugol* [geography]. The Nepali term *bhugol* does not provide us the meaning of political sovereignty and autonomy to the extent by which the term “territory” or “territoriality” (Godelier 2009) does both denotatively as well as connotatively. Hence I shall translate ‘territory’ into Nepali as *that-thalo* based on common parlance in Limbuwan. For the Limbus and the Limbuwan politicians, *that-thalo* means a territory that belongs to a group which first-settled and ruled in the area before the arrival of any other groups. Limbuwan politicians classify the population groups in Limbuwan also in relation to *that-thalo*, namely *that-thalo khuleko* (those whose ancestral territories are known) and *that-thalo nakhuleko* (those groups whose ancestral territories are unknown) meaning that the *adivasi-janajatis* are the *that-thalo khuleko* groups as their ancestral territories are the same area they inhabit now, and the Bahun, Chhetri, Dalits are the *that-thalo nakhuleko* groups, since their ancestral territories are elsewhere.

from 2013-2015. As the aim of Limbuwan identity politics was to ensure a Limbuwan federal state in the constitution, this dissertation juxtaposes the *aryan*, Hindu, casteist [*jatiya*] identity (Hindu *jatiya pahichan*) with the non-*aryan*, non-Hindu, non-caste indigenous-nationality [*adivasi-janajati*] identities, focusing on the Limbus and their quest for Limbuwan. Lionel Caplan, on the expansion of the Hindu *aryan* civilization across the mountains and the foothills of the eastern Himalaya, states:

The spread of Hindu civilization throughout most of South Asia has taken place over many centuries. An important aspect of this process has been manner in which the Hindus, advancing here by military conquest, there by migration, have interacted with the tribal communities lying on the route of their progression (Caplan 1970:1).

Caplan's statement above is succinct and accurate as Limbuwan was the last territory to the eastern frontier to be incorporated under the Hindu Gorkha Kingdom through a conciliatory agreement (Regmi 1978; Chemjong, 1967; Kurumbang 2009; Baral and Tigela-Limbu 2008; Tigela-Limbu, Tunghang, and Angla 2013) between the two in 1774.

The political and historical trajectories portrayed in this dissertation will demonstrate that Hindu rulers initiated identity politics in Nepal as early as in the 14th century during the rule of the Malla dynasty in the Nepal valley³, by legally protecting the cows and Brahmins⁴ during the King Jaysthiti Malla's reign⁵, the early Shah period in the 17th century⁶, and throughout the Shah monarchy ever since the expansion of the Gorkha Kingdom in the 18th century. These legal examples illustrate the Hindu *Aryan* caste supremacy in Nepal for more than six centuries. The making of the Hindu state of Nepal was based on casteist [*jatiya*] politics, initiated through legal injunctions and orders that culminated in the promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* 1854 (Civil Code),

³ The present capital of Nepal, Kathmandu valley, was known as Nepal, Nepal *khalto* [valley], *tin sahar* Nepal [three cities Nepal] in common parlance until the 1940s.

⁴ Brahman is called *Bahun* in common parlance as well as in vernacular Nepali writing. Both the terms Brahman and Bahun will be used interchangeably in this dissertation.

⁵ NAYAVIKASINI (MANAVANYAYASHASTRA): Laws Made by King Sthitiraj Malla in Bikram Era 1436 B.S. [1379 CE] (Nepal Era 500) (Nepal Law Commission. <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en>)

⁶ Rules Issued by His Majesty's Ram Shah (Nepal Law Commission. <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en>)

thereby classifying the populations of Nepal into vertical hierarchies of a caste system classifying the Bahun and Chhetri - *tagadhari jat* - as the high and symbolically pure castes, and the artisan groups as untouchables. The *Muluki Ain* 1854 (Civil Code) also incorporated non-Hindu, non-Aryan, non-caste indigenous-nationalities [*adivasi-janajati*] groups by classifying all of them as *matawali jat*⁷ [liquor drinking castes]. Various injunctions in relation to prohibiting beef consumption and respecting Brahmans in the Hindu land in the names of mainly *adivasi* Tamang, Limbu, Rai, were already in place (Regmi 1979) but the *Muluki Ain* 1854 (Civil Code) was the legal consolidation of the process of constitutionalizing Hindu *Aryan* identity as the Nepali state's identity:

[It is] a Hindu Kingdom, the law of whose court maintains that the killing of cows, women and brahmans shall not be allowed. [It is] a sacred land of the Himavatkhanda⁸, of the holy shrines [dedicated] to Vasuki, the effulgent phallus of Pashupati and Guhyesvari...It is the only Hindu Kingdom in the Kali Age (MA:1:1:8 quoted by Sharma [2004:xvi]).

The promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* in 1854 legally institutionalized Nepal as a Hindu State in all terms of the state polity, governance and bureaucratic administration and, above all, in terms of the cultural identity of the people including the non-*aryan*, non-Hindu indigenous-nationalities [*Adivasi-janajatis*]. The *Muluki Ain* assigned the *adivasi-janajati* groups with a new, but in many ways, derogatory sounding *matawali jat* [liquor-drinking caste] that also brought about an enormous impact on their commensal, religious, social, cultural and customary practices. In this regard, present day political movements led by Nepal's *adivasi-janajatis* in

⁷ The Civil Code 1854 classified the populations of Nepal into broadly five hierarchical strata: i) Wearers of the holy cord [*tagadhari*]; ii) Non-enslavable Alcohol-Drinkers [*namasinya matawali*]; iii) Enslavable Alcohol-Drinkers [*masinya matawali*]; iv) Impure but touchable castes [*pani nachalnya chhoi chhito halnu naparnya*]; v) Impure and untouchable castes [*pani nachalnya chhoi chhito halnu parnya*] (Höfer 2004:9–10; Sharma 1977:281–284; Bista 1991:35–44).

⁸ Part of the Himalaya.

relation to their collective identity and history should be viewed in juxtaposition with their ever-contentious relationship to the making of the Hindu state of Nepal.

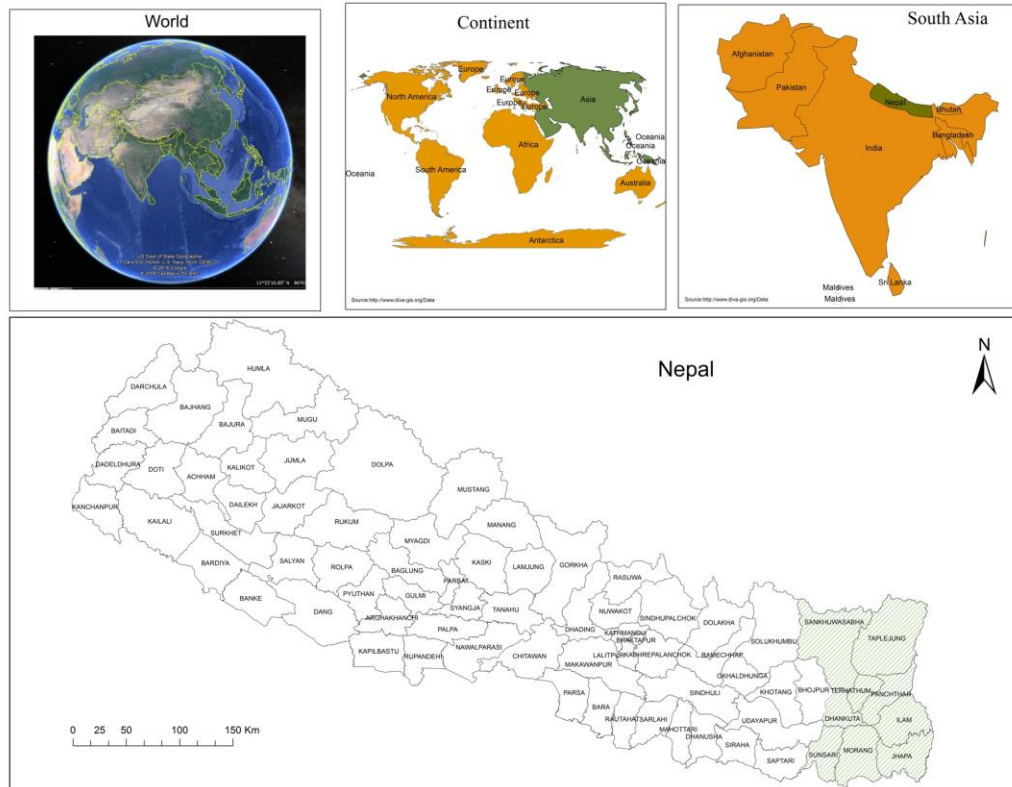


Figure 1.1 Showing Nepal in the World Map

This dissertation is a case study of Limbuwan identity politics focusing on the Limbus' claims of their collective identity based on the war-history, territory, and place-naming, and resistance to the state of Nepal. This dissertation is a double-edged depiction of identity politics in Nepal in which the Limbus' quest for Limbuwan identity may be better studied in terms of their contending relationships to the making of the collective *aryan* Hindu identity in Nepal over more than six centuries.

Exploring the Research Topic

In the summer of 2008, I returned to Nepal from Ithaca to explore my possible field research sites as well as my research topic for my Ph.D. dissertation. Although I had decided to work among the Limbu in east Nepal, I was not yet sure if I would pursue the topic about the ‘*kipat*⁹ ownership of land among the Limbus’. The Limbus were one of the “aboriginal inhabitants” (Campbell 1840:595) whose geographically contiguous territory [*that-thalo*] was divided into three different states (Subba 2006)¹⁰ “following the absorption of Limbuwan into the Nepal state” in the 1770s. Mahesh Chandra Regmi (1977) and Lionel Caplan (1991) have studied the socio-economic aspects of Limbu *kipat* land in relation to the Nepali state’s constant efforts over two centuries to transform the autonomous Limbu tribes into tax paying Limbu peasants (Caplan 1991). With the loss of *kipat* land, Limbus were alienated from their culture and identity too:

With the abolition of *kipat* the Limbus lost their 'claim to the past' and to do so is 'to lose part of who one is in the present' (Weiner 1985:210, quoted by Caplan). The consequences of changes in land tenure, therefore, may be less severe in terms of livelihood than in terms of sense of 'self'... How can there be Limbus without *kipat*? *Kipat* provided a means of belonging, to a place and a distinctive community - one was not separable from the other. Conversion of the land to *raikar*¹¹ has severed that

⁹ Clan based communal land ownership. Limbus did not hold land as individual property until the Land Reform Act 1964 abolished the *Kipat* land right. The word *kipat* is not from Limbu language. Limbus seemed to have used the phrase *Tangsing Khoksing* (Chemjong 1966) meaning ‘clear forest and cultivate’. The communal land ownership prevalent among the Limbus prior to the Gorkha conquest was recognized by the state in the very days of Gorkha expansion in 1774-75 by a royal decree, which is considered by the Limbus, as the treaty between the Gorkha Hindu King and the Limbu Chiefs. The treaty described Limbus as the “true owners” of the land and territory. From the 1770s until the 1960s, Limbu headmen (*Subba* functionaries assigned by the state) were the ones who assigned land cultivation rights to any non-Limbu immigrants willing to settle in Limbuwan. The state encouraged other non-Limbus — particularly Bahun and Chhetris - to emigrate to Limbuwan, also by issuing royal orders instructing Limbu headmen to assign cultivable land to the immigrants. In Limbuwan, *Subba* were exclusively from the Limbus enjoying the jurisdictional rights as the collective owners of the territory and land. *Kipat* land was the inalienable cultural property of the Limbus, alienation from which created a cultural disruption and crisis in Limbu identity, which the Limbu community seems to have understood as being associated with their territorial autonomy. The state also assigned *kipat* land to other communities for different purposes. For example, the Majhi community were assigned *kipat* land in exchange for ferrying the governments’ logistics, postal service, military, ammunitions across rivers.

¹⁰ Gorkha Hindu State, British-India, and Sikkim (Sikkim was an independent state until it was annexed into India in the 1970s).

¹¹ A form of land ownership whereby land was transferable as individual ownership.

connection, and rendered the land what it had never before - a commodity. By legalizing for the alienation of what had previously been inalienable, the state effectively inaugurated the last phase in the transformation of a tribal into a peasant community (Caplan 1970; Caplan 1991:319).

My initial research interest was motivated by scholarly works of various scholars (Caplan 1970; Sagant 2008; Shrestha 2042; Sangraula 2067 v.s.) focusing on Limbu's *kipat* land, and based upon the movements and claims by Limbus themselves in their quest for their ancestral *kipat* land ever since Limbuwan's annexation under the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal in 1774 (Chemjong 1957). In this short reconnaissance trip, I wanted to explore if *kipat* was an important collective reference for Limbuwan's identity politics in the wake of the success of the People's Movement II or April Revolution in 2006. This movement subsequently led to Nepal being declared officially a republic country in May 2008 by the Constituent Assembly (CA). I wanted to study if land or territory [*that-thalo*] was also a resource for organizing collective political activities and movements to claim their right to cultural identity. I considered this in the light of Lionel Caplan's findings from his study on the changing social relationship vis-a-vis mutually conflicting interests over the land between Limbus and *Bahun*s in the 1960s. Caplan has demonstrated that the Limbu wanted to maintain the *kipat* land whereas the *Bahun*s wanted to transform the land into an individual ownership system. Since the *Bahun*s were socio-culturally and politically well connected to the state bureaucracy and the court system they were able to capture the Limbu land. With the formal abolition of Limbus' *kipat* land by the state in the 1960s the Limbus were not only dispossessed of their ancestral land but also became alienated from their culture. I wanted to investigate if the Limbus were still trying to bring back the bygone *kipat* land in order to solve a broader question: what binds together the Limbus as collective sociopolitical agents? Is it the memory of the collective *kipat* land - right over the ancestral land - or some other social, cultural, historical elements that Limbus embrace as the common

referential resource for their identity and culture? For my research topic, I wanted explore the elementary cultural substances that bind the Limbus as a collective society irrespective of the vast differences amongst Limbus.

The Limbuwan Movement and Spectacular Displays of Limbuwan Identity

Slogans of political, territorial claims, and Limbuwan are painted on roadside walls, posters, banners hung by the trees, or tied to the utility poles across streets, billboard-like. They look like the welcome signs for any visitor to the entrance of Dharan city - located at the immediate end of the mid-hills. Dharan is also a border city where both the hills and the plain-land Tarai meet. As soon as one approaches the southern entrance to Dharan from the south, signboards with different messages welcome visitors:

- i. “Welcome to Bijaypur-Dharan, the historic capital of Limbuwan”.
- ii. “Victory to the unity of Limbu and Limbuwan! Cheerful greetings to you in Limbuwan”.
- iii. “Let’s establish the Limbuwan autonomous state, with right to self-determination”

These three greeting boards were put up by the Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parishad [Federal Limbuwan State Council] (FLSC), a political party established in December 2005.



Figure 1.2 Welcome to Bijaypur, the Historic Capital City of Limbuwan - FLSC



Figure 1.3 Victory to the Unity of Limbuwan- FLSC



Figure 1.4 The Sign Board Displaying the Text of the Treaty with Gorkha Kingdom, and Map of Limbuwan, Erected by KYC

The photographs above are some of the political landmarks announcing the identity, history and territory of Limbuwan.

Hardly one hundred meters ahead is an intersection called Tinkune, an entrance to Dharan. Two greatly important objects are placed together at the corner of Tinkune and are no less pronounced evidence to speak about Limbuwan than those of the signboard messages mentioned above.

The statue of Sirijanga, the propagator of the Limbu script in Limbuwan, stands about 25 feet tall on a marble platform. This statue is an epitome of the invention of the script and beginning of a writing tradition in the Limbu community. In the 18th century, while campaigning for the Limbu script (now called Sirijanga) and writing in Sikkim - then an independent state ruled by the Buddhist rulers of Tibetan origin - Sirijanga was captured following an order by rulers and brutally murdered. They tied him to a tree and shot with arrows. Sirijanga is one of the

trio of Limbu national heroes together with Phalgunanda (a religious social reformer) and Imansingh Chemjong (historian, politician and Kiratologist). Sirijanga is also considered by many to be the first hero to achieve martyrdom for the cause of the Limbu writing tradition.



Figure 1.5 Sirijanga, the Propagator of the Limbu Script and Language. Erected by KYC

Besides Sirijunga's statue is a signboard displaying the full text of the royal decree - considered as the treaty between the Gorkha King and the Limbu chiefs - issued by King PN Shah in July 1774. The text of the treaty is translated into English and it reads:

We desire peace and harmony. Our intent is good. We hereby pardon all of your crimes and confirm the customs and traditions, rights and privileges of your country. Join our nobles and render them assistance. Take care of the land as you did when it was being ruled over by your own chieftains. Enjoy the land from generation to generation as long as it remains in existence. As mentioned above, remain under your chieftains and enjoy

your traditional rights and privileges and your lands. In case we confiscate your land, may our ancestral gods destroy our kingdom. We hereby inscribe this pledge on a copper plate and also issue this royal order and hand it over to our Limbu brethren (Regmi 1978:626q; Chemjong 1957).

Also included in the signboard is a map of Limbuwan showing 17 *thums*.¹² The Map is entitled: “Pallo Kirat, Das Limbuwan, 17 *thum*” which refers to a historical fact that Limbuwan was also called Pallo Kirat [far Kirat], *Das* Limbuwan [Ten Limbuwan]¹³ meaning that the Limbuwan was founded by ten chiefs defeating other chiefs during the early 2nd millennium. On the top of the board with the Limbuwan map and treaty text is a slogan that reads:

*“aitihasik sandhi samjhautama Limbuwanko sthan!
Limbule arjeko sangharsha ra biratako shan!!”*
[Limbuwan’s status within the historical treaty and accord is the dignity of bravery earned by the Limbu]

To me, the signboards and the statue, as spectacular displays, were speaking so much about Limbuwan’s historic memory of the treaty preceded by war with the Hindu Gorkha Kingdom. Their territorial claim, as shown in the map defined by the treaty, and the heroics of Limbuwan were evidence of the Limbus unique and different history.

As I reached the center, the main square of Dharan city, only about 1.5 miles north from Tinkune, to travel further north towards the hills, mountains and the Tamor river valley, there were dozens of buses and jeeps travelling between Dharan and different hill towns to the north. Those buses and jeeps were also carrying slogans about Limbuwan politics such as the State of Limbuwan or ‘Limbuwan State’ painted on their front.

I took a bus heading to Raja Rani, a hill village in Dhankuta district, about 35 kilometres north-east of Dharan. As we reached Bhedetar, a hill town 18 kilometres north from Dharan, the bus

¹² *Thum* means an administrative region. Nepal was divided into 75 districts and more than 450 *thums* in 1962. The districts remained and prevailed over time whereas the *thums* were deliberately made obsolete.

¹³ Limbuwan was ruled by ten chiefs before it was annexed into the Gorkha kingdom in the 1770s.

stopped for a brief tea break. In the middle of Bhedetar town square is a shining golden statue of the historian and Kiratologist, the late IS Chemjong.



Figure 1.6 The Statue of Historian IS Chemjong in Bhedetar.

My bus left Bhedetar and stopped for another break at a town called Danda Bazar where I could see various political messages painted on roadside walls, house walls, and mile-posts. There I saw an appealing and telling statement on Limbuwan identity in particular, and the politics of identity in Nepal in general. A slogan painted on a building wall read:

“Limbuwan binako Nepal ra Nepal binako Limbuwan Kalpana samma pani garna sakidaina -L.V.”

[One cannot imagine of Nepal without Limbuwan and Limbuwan without Nepal - Limbuwan Volunteers].

Some other slogans painted here and there by the roadside included:

- i. *mero jyan, mero Limbuwan* [My Life, My Limbuwan];
- ii. *jaga Limbuwan, maga Limbuwan* [Rise-up Limbuwan, Fight for Limbuwan];
- iii. *hamro bhasha hamro bidhyalay* [Our Language Our School];
- iv. Welcome to Limbuwan.

All the slogans were painted and put up by the Limbuwan volunteers.

I had hardly travelled 25 kilometres of distance in my trip, but I came across plenty objects, messages, and unique ways of telling visitors what is happening in the region regarding the identity movement. Beginning from the sign-boards at Tinkune, Dharan, multiple agents associated with the Limbuwan movement or the Limbu community were involved in putting together these politically telling symbolic objects. Dharan's entrance point, Tinkune's first three greeting sign boards were put up by the Federal Limbuwan State Council party (FLSC).¹⁴ Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (KYC or Chumlung),¹⁵ a representative *adivasi* association of the Limbus founded in 1989 (described further in chapter 5), established the statue of Sirijanga in Tinkune. Similarly, the signboard with the Limbuwan map and the treaty text was erected by the *Limbuwan sangharsha samanbaya samiti* [Limbuwan Struggle Coordination Committee]. The paintings on the front of buses and jeeps were said to be done by the FLSC's Limbuwan Volunteers (LVs). And the political slogans in Danda Bazar were also painted by the LVs.

¹⁴ The FLSC party was established in December 2005.

¹⁵ KYC, founded in 1989, with its central office in Kathmandu, has organizational branches and extensions all across the villages and the districts in the Limbuwan area. KYC is one of the members of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) and involved in both Limbuwan politics as well as *adivasi-janajati* identity politics through cultural and social movements.

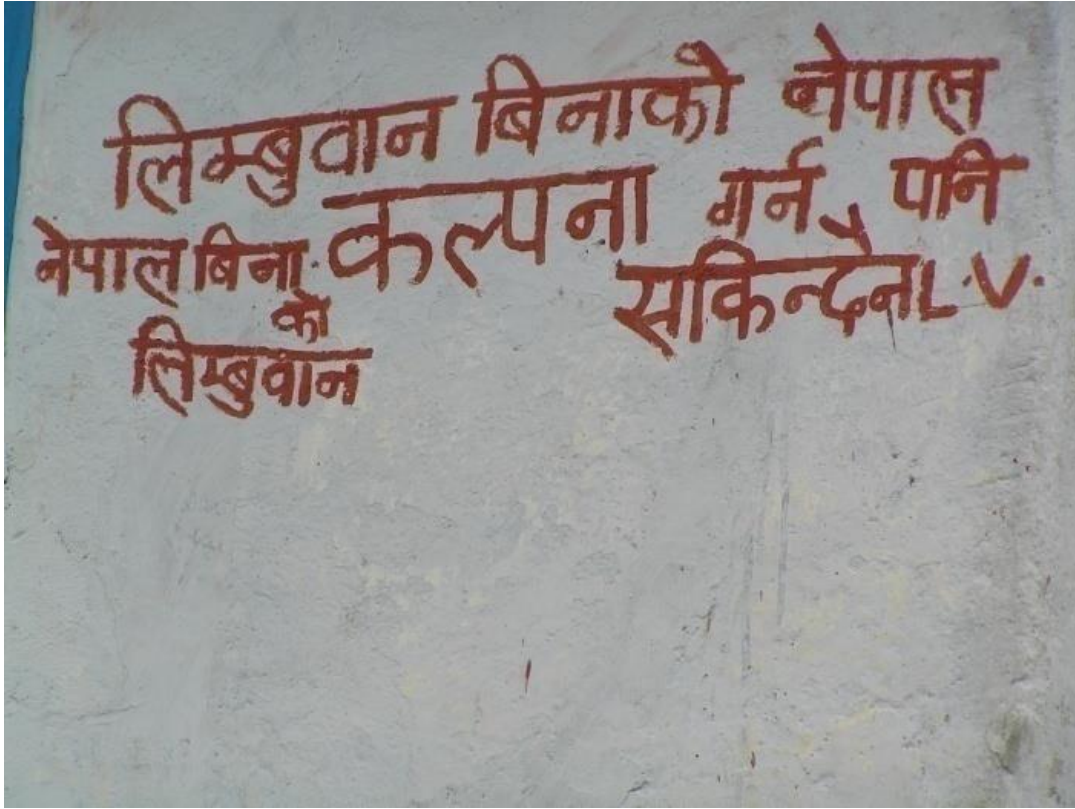


Figure 1.7 Wall Painting Message: It Cannot be Imagined of Nepal Without Limbuwan and Limbuwan Without Nepal

Having observed these objects and the involvement of multiple actors, agents, and associations of the Limbu community in putting up those objects I realized that the movements vis-à-vis the *kipat* land was no longer as much sought after among the Limbus as it was during the 1960s and 1970s when anthropologists Lionel Caplan (1970), Rex Jones and Shirly Jones (1976) and Philippe Sagant (2008) were undertaking studies among the Limbus in the same region. The *kipat* land was the culturally binding factor for the Limbus in the 1960s and 1970s. But the spectacular objects erected at the intersections and along the roadsides, including the slogan paintings in and around Dharan were telling the fact that the Limbus inalienable association with the *kipat* land seemed to have now been transformed into the politics of Limbuwan. The shift of the movement from *kipat* land to the Limbuwan federal state could be

clearly read in the LV's (Limbuwan Volunteers) slogans: "My life: My Limbuwan" and "Rise up Limbuwan: Fight for Limbuwan."

Having seen those objects in relation to Limbuwan politics I could say that the idea of 'Limbuwan' was an important binding factor for the Limbu *adivasi* society. There might be some other elements that I have overlooked but in my observation, the politics of Limbuwan was the most visible and spectacular movement that brought Limbus together for their political cause. To me, Limbuwan was the socially binding referent for the Limbus. While I agree on the definition of "culture as human capacity to produce themselves as well as their own society" (Turner 1997; Turner 2008; Turner 1999; Turner 2007b; Holmberg 2012) and culture as the result of collective "human imagination and simultaneous enactment for actualizing the imagination" (Godelier 2009; Godelier 1999a; Godelier 1984), I will demonstrate with ethnographic data that Limbuwan is the culture of present day Limbus, regardless of where they live now. To me, the Limbus history of war against the Gorkha King, the Limbu belongingness to their *that-thalo* [territory] that their ancestors laid their lives to defend, and their *that-thalo* were the substantive cultural elements that set the Limbus apart from others, and historically and culturally different from the society and culture of the Nepali state-makers. To me, those arresting displays of everything about Limbuwan suggestively resonated with the Limbu imagination and enactment of cultural difference. It was their quest for that difference to be recognized by the Nepali state by ensuring a Limbuwan federal state in the constitution to be drafted in the years ahead. Fully agreeing with the statement: "Ethnography is an artefact of cultural differences" (Holmberg 1989:9fn) I will juxtapose between two fundamentally different cultural identities, namely the culture of *adivasi* Limbus vis-à-vis the dominant *arya* Hindu

cultural domination in Nepal. The identity politics of Limbuwan is, in other words, the politics of difference.

Field-Work, Data Collection, and Interpretation

I mentioned at the outset that this dissertation mainly comprises political trajectories of the quest for Limbuwan within the time-span of around 15 years, during the first one and a half decades of the 21st century. Those were the tumultuous years facing Nepal and Nepali politics. I did a reconnaissance visit to Limbuwan during summer 2008. During my three-months stay in summer 2008, I visited Limbuwan's Dharan city - then claimed by Limbuwan as the capital city of Limbuwan - and a village of Rajarani in Dhankuta district for four weeks. From that first visit, with the purpose of exploring possible research topic and field research sites, I took scores of photographs and collected stories and anecdotes about the Limbuwan name and its history. At that time, I was also fortunate to be invited by Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (KYC or Chumlung) to participate in series of meetings among the different Limbu leaders, held in Lalitpur at the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung office. This culminated in the establishment of the Joint Limbuwan Front, (JLF) which included the representatives of eight or nine political parties. The meetings were coordinated and facilitated by Kirat Yakthung Chumlung.

I was in Nepal for four years from fall 2010 until August 2014 for field research. Considering the dynamic nature of the Limbuwan's political movement, which was mainly concentrated in the lowland districts of Sunsari, Morang, Jhapa, and Kathmandu valley's Lalitpur and Kathmandu my observations of the movements or my participation in them were not limited to a specific location or research site. Rather, I tried to participate in the movements and programs wherever they were organized and listened to the leaders' speeches, talked to the

cadres and heard the LV's slogans about Limbuwan. The Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC) was well-known for organizing the movements in a different style. Among such programs, the FLSC organized March-Pass rallies both in Limbuwan and in Kathmandu. I partially participated in a March-Pass rally - from Uurlabari to Itahari in Limbuwan (distance about 35 kilometres) - in December 2011. Similarly, I also participated in a complete March Pass rally around the Ring-Road (27 kilometres) in Kathmandu on May 5, 2012. During this I listened to speeches, voice-recording them, talked with cadres, took photographs and marched along with them. I mainly used a voice recorder. Sometimes I also video recorded the programs and speeches and transcribed them later.

In April 2015, while I was writing my dissertation in Ithaca, a devastating earthquake hit Kathmandu and the surrounding districts, killing nearly nine thousand people and causing enormous destruction of physical properties. I returned to Nepal in the summer of 2015. During my two months stay in Nepal, I observed the Sanghiya Limbuwan Party's (Federal Limbuwan Party - FLP) meetings held in Dharan in July 2015. I also observed different meetings organized by the KYC as it was planning to forge an alliance for a new movement in the face of the draft constitution that proposed an unnamed seven provinces and a promised secular state qualified by some constitutional recognition of Hinduism. I also helped facilitate the Limbuwan Study Center (LSC), a division of Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, to organize two interaction or discussion programs in July and August in Kathmandu that focused on the strategies and directions of the Limbuwan movement in the face of the draft constitution's regressive clauses from the vantage point of Limbuwan and the *adivasi-janajatis*. Those two meetings organized by LSC were so fruitful that chapter six of this dissertation is based on the discussions in those meetings.

My main interlocutors were the leaders, cadres, volunteers, of the Limbuwan parties, the KYC's committee officials and members, Limbu student leaders and other Limbu intellectuals. I have collected data from the orations, speeches, and opinions delivered by leaders during mass rallies, processions, and demonstrations and from their interviews with the media. As I showed above, the signboards, slogans painted on walls and placards with slogans are also part of the information this study relies on. Furthermore the poems, songs, and novels composed in invocation of Limbu war heroes, historical personalities and the patriotic, nationalistic songs composed to describe Limbuwan's historicity and identity also form part of my data that speak about Limbuwan's identity politics founded on its unique history, place-naming, and territorial belongingness.

Fredric Barth suggests that anthropology students take on three levels of inquiry in undertaking studies on identity politics: micro, median, and macro levels of inquiries, which I find useful for my research as well. By the term micro, he means local individual levels, interactions and activities, as the real foundations of movements. Similarly, by median level, he means intermediary organizations (Limbuwan-based organizations in this regard), which actively mobilize local people for the movement on one hand and, on the other hand, also put pressure on the state or even bargain with the state for the fulfillment of their political cause. Such intermediary organizations play a vital role in staging movements, and for that purpose, they persuade their people locally and also put pressure on or negotiate with the government to fulfill their political cause. Finally, Barth considers the state or the constitutional and legal arrangements as the macro level context. Barth suggests us to undertake the study of ethnicity by looking into the detail at the roles performed at these three levels by different actors and agents (Barth 1994:21–26).

To me, Barth’s suggestion is helpful as my field research is primarily focused on what Barth calls the intermediary organizations, namely in my research’s case the Limbuwan based parties and the Chumlung (KYC). These are the median level organizations that mobilize the local peoples on the one hand and also put pressure on the government on the other.

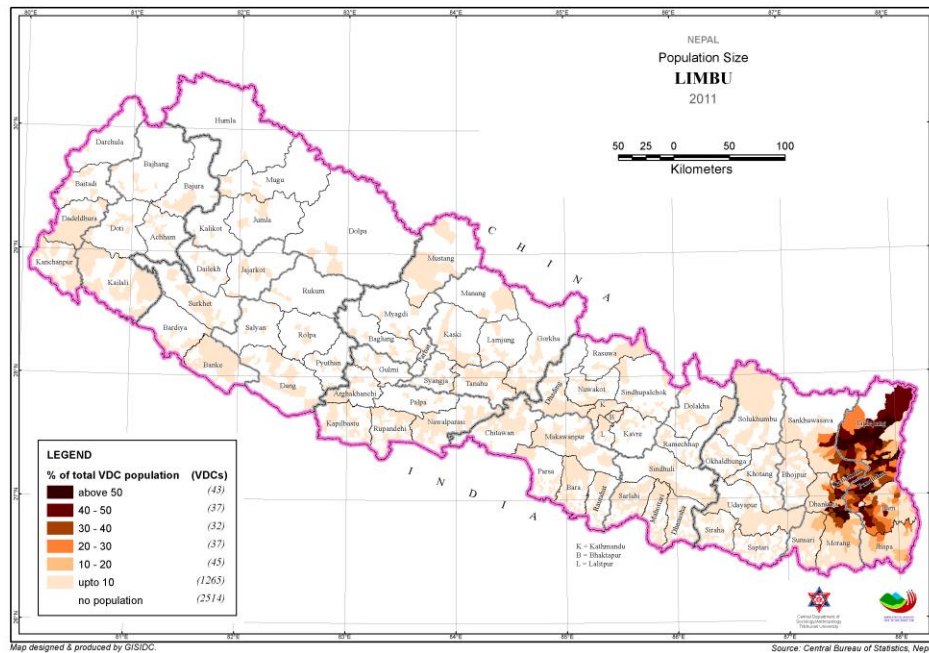


Figure 1.8 Map Showing the Density of Limbu Population in Nepal

My presentation of the data and analysis are primarily based on the Limbuwan movement as it has occurred over the past 15 years, essentially from the turn of the century until the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015. However, every movement, demonstration, rally, speech, and activity staged during those 15 years were only the continuation of events from the past. I have interpreted the present day movements of Limbuwan in relation to their war history, which the ancestors of the Limbus were involved in to defend their territory. In this regard, my dissertation also partially relies on secondary sources of the data in terms of linking

the present with the past. The constitution, since its draft stage, led to further violence in *madhes* costing about four dozens lives. The Limbuwan movement's organizers, supporters and sympathizers disowned the constitution by burning it at public intersections in different parts of Limbuwan, and abroad (e.g. in London and Hong Kong) from where the Limbuwan based parties' sister organizations were actively supporting Limbuwan movements in Nepal. This does not mean that everyone disowned the constitution. Equally large masses in Nepal embraced and celebrated the constitution. But the objective of this research is also to interrogate the constitution making process from the perspective of Limbuwan, and to look into the political trajectories of how the state-makers and the dominant political parties succeeded in promulgating a constitution that embraced the dominant symbolic markers of the Hindus while failing to embrace the collective cultural differences and diversity in Nepal.

The data presented in this dissertation demonstrates that imagination and enactment of Limbuwan is what unites most of the Limbus and their organizations in a single thread. This is the way that the Limbus have been producing and reproducing the notion and practice of Limbuwan for many decades now. Their involvement in the Limbuwan movement will make them realize their Limbu identity. Therefore, taking on the fundamental definition of anthropology as the science of culture and culture as a capacity to reproduce itself (Turner 1997; Turner 2008; Turner 2007a; Holmberg 2012; Godelier 2009; Godelier 1999b), I argue that the politics of Limbuwan is synonymous with the culture of the Limbus.

Limbuwan: Geography and Population

The nine districts¹⁶ eastwards from the Arun river and westwards from the Mechi river—that borders with India—are historically known as Pallo-Kirat or Limbuwan. These nine districts

¹⁶ Taplejung, Pachthar, Ilam, Jhapa, Sankhuwasabha, Terathum, Dhankuta, Sunsari, Morang

are the territories where the Limbuwan movement is mainly concentrated. But Kathmandu valley—the capital of Nepal—is also no less important for the Limbuwan movement. Limbuwan based political parties maintain their offices in Kathmandu while the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung’s (KYC) central office is in the Kathmandu valley too.

The Limbu population comprises about 0.39 million—1.5 percent—of the total population of Nepal, of which more than 97 percent of the Limbu population lives in the nine districts in the eastern most corner of Nepal. While about 375,000 Limbus inhabit the area east of the Arun river, there are only 231 Limbus in Bhojpur district, 456 in Saptari, and 458 in Udayapur, which are the immediate three districts to the west of the Arun river. Such a high concentration of the Limbu population just in the nine districts shows that the Limbus have a very limited pattern of migration even within Nepal. After the nine districts of Limbuwan, the largest population concentration of Limbus is in Kathmandu valley. There are 11,149 Limbus in Kathmandu, 4,358 in Lalitpur, and 1,101 in Bhaktapur. Although the Limbu population in the Kathmandu valley is small compared to Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Rai, and Newar populations the Limbus’ organization, KYC, is one of the strongest organizations among the *adivasi-janajati* associations in Kathmandu valley. The following table shows the Limbu population distribution in Limbuwan by districts.

Table 1.1 Limbu Population in Limbuwan by Districts

S. N.	DISTRICT	Limbu Population	Percent
1	Dhankuta	21305	5.86
2	Ilam	45626	12.54
3	Jhapa	53721	14.76
4	Morang	40771	11.21
5	Panchthar	80339	22.08
6	Sankhuwasabha	8682	2.39
7	Sunsari	24256	6.67
8	Taplejung	52784	14.51
9	Terhathum	36375	10.00
	Total	363859	100.00

Source: CBS, Nepal.

Panchthar district has the densest concentration of Limbus among the nine districts while Taplejung and Terathum also have fairly large Limbu populations.

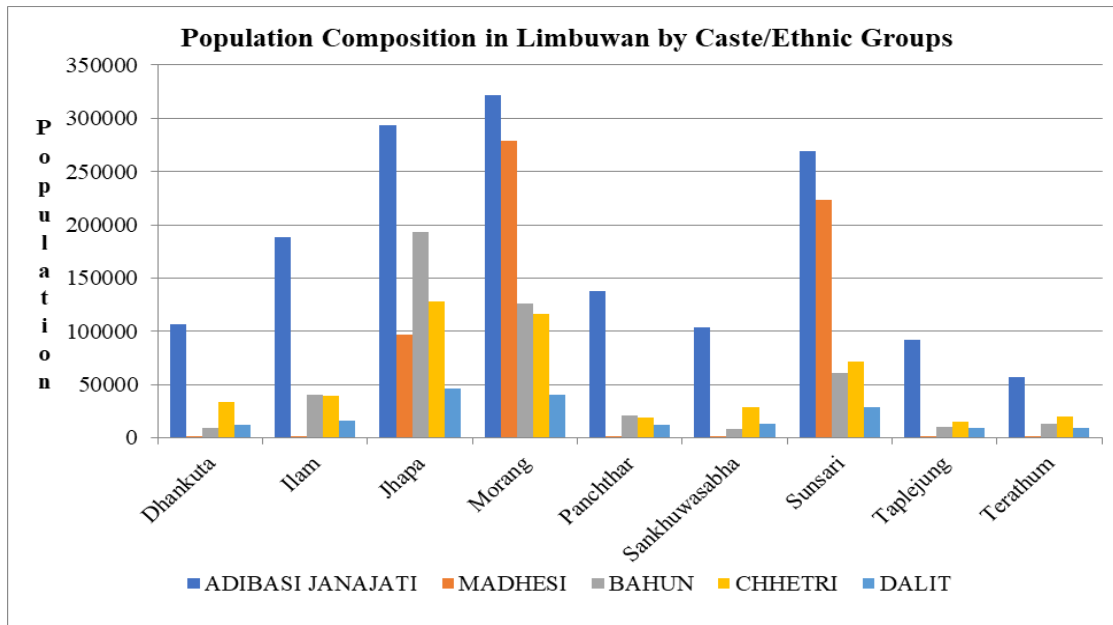


Figure 1.9 Diagram Showing Caste and Ethnic Populations in Nine Districts of Limbuwan

The above table shows that the *adivasi-janajati* population outnumbers other populations in the nine districts of Limbuwan. Such a population composition indicates the need for an *adivasi-janajati* alliance in the area.

The Emergence of *adivasi-janajati* Political Parties in Nepal and Theoretical Concerns

Before the *adivasi-janajati* movement peoples usually got involved in politics and political parties were formed so as to create a society based on economic equality, and ultimately to create an exploitation-less society from the vantage point of economic life and living. This seems to be the fundamental political agenda of mainstream political parties in Nepal, even today. Overly focusing on economic aspects alone is likely to eclipse other problems and different types of exploitation facing people with different cultural backgrounds, meaning that exploitation and domination may not occur only within the economic sphere. Exploitation and domination in social, cultural spheres can be even more profound and enduring for generations. While the *adivasi-janajatis* in Nepal have started to establish political parties in their own leadership, scholars and leaders from the dominant parties criticized *adivasi-janajati* identity based parties and said they would not succeed as their movements lack theoretical foundations. Do the indigenous peoples movements really need to be buttressed by conventional political or anthropological theories, as pointed out by some scholars and political leaders in Nepal? Anthropologist Terence Turner has a different view on whether the theories support the movements or vice versa:

The 'indigenous question'...constitute the sort of total challenge that puts a theoretical discipline on its mettle. The inadequacies of the responses to that challenge by anthropologists directly reflect fundamental shortcomings in anthropological theory...One reason [of shortcomings] is surely the predominantly static orientation of anthropological theory, which has concerned itself primarily with traditional cultures and social institutions in the ' ethnographic present' rather than with situations of inter-ethnic contact, conflict, and irreversible historical change. A corollary of this static orientation is that anthropological theory has focused primarily upon understanding the systematicity of social structures and the rationality of cultural classifications and symbolic forms at the expense of seeking to relate these phenomena to a theory of action (Turner 1979:1–8).

To me, Turner's statements are enlightening in many ways for those interested to study *adivasi-janajati* movements in general and Nepal in particular. Turner also says elsewhere that the

indigenous peoples' movements, beginning from the 1970s at the world scale, have also motivated anthropologists to revise their own theoretical positions, which means that received perspectives have been transformed. The contexts and the tropes have changed, as those involved in *adivasi-janajati* politics in Nepal now seem to believe that economic inequality alone does not explain the exploitation, which is unlike the leaders of the mainstream political parties in Nepal. In Nepal, for the *adivasi-janajati* movement organizers, cultural inequality and cultural exploitation imposed and initiated by the Nepali state seems to be the most pressing problem. So nowadays those involved in identity politics are well aware of the fact that they may need to fight for the creation of a society in which the State shall treat all different cultural groups on an equal basis as guaranteed by a constitution. Therefore the *adivasi-janajatis* and *madhesi* peoples in recent decades have been organizing themselves politically to build a new Nepal in which all kinds of cultural inequalities, including the state's exclusionary treatment towards 'other cultures' on the basis of 'differences', should come to an end. Be it in the form of 'recognition' of cultural identity, or the 'inclusive democracy' or as 'compensation for the historical injustices inflicted upon now marginalized populations, or through federalism based on cultural identity, all these measures should be directed towards building a new Nepal where all different cultures shall be understood as "contemporaneously existing at spatially different" locales (Turner 1999:115). This is as opposed to an understanding of cultural differences as surviving across hierarchically linear stages as the very first generation of anthropologists, EB Tylor and LH Morgan, suggested. Nowadays the understandings of what comprises a society is shifting in Nepal and across the world, with rising of the fourth world, with the upsurge in identity movements led by the indigenous nationalities over the world. Thomas Kuhn (1974) rightly argues that new ideas that can shift the existing paradigm may arise often from youths and from

the marginalized groups of society. So what is the basic fabric of society, which threads are any society woven by? Nowadays the new political movements in Nepal suggest that exploitation and domination are multidimensional. Hence equality and equity in society should not be measured by economic categories alone.

Marginalization and exclusion of certain groups in society has reasons as Godelier says: 'Capitalism and the state are responsible for some group's exclusion and marginalization from broader society. Once excluded, it is very difficult to be included back in the society' (Godelier 1999).

Cultural Equality is Achievable but Economic Equality is a Utopia

In Nepal non-government organizations (NGOs) have, since the early 1990s, contributed to economic and community development to some extent but have not contributed in terms of real political empowerment as well as ensuring people's cultural rights, particularly *adivasi* people's rights. NGOs in general depoliticizes people, if not actually blocking them from being involved in organized politics. This might have been one of the reasons that the Maoists vehemently opposed the NGOs presence in Nepal during the *jana yudha* (Peoples War, 1996-2006). The economic development perspective grossly ignores cultural contexts. Ever since Limbuwan was absorbed by the Hindu state, Limbus have been trying to achieve their territorial, historical, and cultural rights. However, the state and NGOs - particularly after the advent of democracy [*prajatantra*] in 1951 - have dealt with the Limbus as though economic progress and community development are all they need as a society. This might be a reason that once a self-ruling, self-reliant, and autonomous Limbu society - when measured by economic standard - was

relegated to being among the poorest communities by the end of the second millennium as UNDP's Nepal Human Development Report in 1998 reported:

“Among the various caste/ethnic groups, the incidence of poverty is highest among Limbus, followed by socially downgraded formerly untouchable castes (Kami, Damai, and Sarki)” (NESAC 1998:131).

As soon as the above report came to the notice of officials in the KYC, Limbu *adivasi* organization, they interpreted that such an economic regression was a consequence of the abolition of Limbus ancestral *kipat* land by the state. While the Limbus' would seek reasons for their economic “backwardness” in the context of state-imposed cultural exploitation and domination, the state and developmental NGOs would simply look into Limbu society from a lop-sided vantage point of economic progress. If one looks at Nepal's progress from the vantage of culture, the Hindu state of Nepal may be seen to have advanced at the cost of cultural regression of the *adivasi-janajatis*.

In fact, modernization, development and the state's goal is to universalize or homogenize the society in general and Nepal in particular. If homogenized, it will be the ruling caste or class gaining the most benefits from the state of Nepal. Creating equality in societies in terms of economic, political, or developmental relations is problematic and not even possible in the present day “economically globalized politically differentiated” (Turner 2004:198), globological (Frank, 1998) world.

In fact equality on the basis of economic standard cannot be created but cultural equality may be achievable if cultures are conceived as collective and uniquely different identities. If there is treatment of all cultures equally in the eyes of legal arrangements, cultural co-existence is achievable and possible as well. Achieving economic equality, educational equality, and developmental equality seem to be utopian goals that a state can hardly achieve. Furthermore,

states' roles have now been reduced to "defending the interests of their own as well as international development and finance organizations" (Turner 2007a:118–119). The state of Nepal is not an exception in terms of what Terence Turner writes about the state's reduced role as well as its control over its citizens. This is even more so the case when regarding the *adivasi* populations as now about 20 per cent of the total Nepali population are working abroad as migrant workers to remit money back home to maintain their livelihoods. Regarding the theoretical relevance and possible solutions to the Limbuwan's quest for state recognition of their *pahichan, itihasa ra that-thalo* [identity, history and territory], I find Terence Turner's formulation of synchronic pluralism as a concept helps us better understand the problems in the *adivasi-janajati* quest for recognition in relationships with the state.

Limbu and Limbuwan Identity in View of the European Anthropologists and Administrators (c.a.1800s-1950s)

EB Tylor, who is said to have defined culture for the first time in anthropology in his book *Primitive Culture: Researches in the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* published in 1874 mentioned the Limbus as practicing sacrificial rituals including sacrifice of cow:

So, in India, the Limbus of Darjeeling make small offerings of grain, vegetables, and sugar-cane, and sacrifice cows, pigs, fowls, &c., on the declared principle "the life breath to the gods, the flesh to ourselves." It seems likely that such meaning may largely explain the sacrificial practices of other religions...in conjunction with these accounts, the unequivocal meaning of funeral sacrifices (Tylor 1874:392).

Tylor's mention of Limbu sacrificial ritual was also to exemplify the 'philosophy of religion among the "lower races of mankind" (Tylor 1870) to support his classification of religion into animism, polytheism and monotheism based on a hierarchic concept of cultural

evolutionism. As for the factual information, his mention of Limbu animistic religious ritual was based on A. Campbell's article entitled 'On the Tribes Around Darjeeling' published in the Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London in 1869 (Campbell 1869:148–159).

The above is an example of how the 19th century 'armchair' anthropologists, particularly in the British version of anthropology, generalized in classifying culture and customs by relying on information published by the British government's administrators in their colonies. It is anthropologically interesting as well as thought provoking to read in Tylor's book about the Limbus in the 1860s that 'they sacrificed cow, and soul was for the god but meat was for themselves'. All of this took place while the Hindu state of Nepal had been issuing injunctions against slaughtering cows and the consumption of beef.

A. Campbell, the then British-India colonial government's resident representative in Darjeeling, India, who frequently wrote about the Limbus and also found, through the help of a military lieutenant, a book written in Sirijanga script subsequently published that script in the Journal of the Asiatic Society (Campbell 1855; Campbell 1869:153–155). Campbell introduces the Limbu peoples thus:

The word "Limboo" is a corruption, probably introduced by the Goorkhas, of "Ekthoomba" the correct denomination of these people; and is generally used by foreigners to designate the whole population... the Limboos consider themselves to be the aboriginal inhabitants of the country they now occupy, at least they are satisfied that none of the neighboring tribes have any claims of preoccupation" (Campbell 1840:595).

Much earlier than Campbell, Kirkpatrick, in 'An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal (Being the Substance of Observations Made During A Mission to that Country in the Year 1793)' writes:

The mountainous tract is inhabited by various uncivilized nations, ...the principle of these tribes are ... the Limboos or Limboos, whom the Nepal government finds it no easy matter to keep in order" (Kirkpatrick 1811:281).

Hodgson, the permanent resident representative of British government to Nepal for more than two decades in the 1830s-40s and later stationed in Darjeeling, India in the same capacity for more than a decade, also wrote extensively about the Limbus, and their culture and languages. The Description of the Gorkha-Limbuwan War, hand written in Sirijanga Limbu script and now saved among the unpublished manuscripts of Hodgson, is reportedly based on Hodgson's interview of then Limbus about the Gorkha-Limbuwan war. Linguist RK Sprigg who met with IS Chemjong in 1955 in Nepal and Kalimpong later "sent out those manuscripts to him [Chemjong] to translate into English" (Sprigg 1999:ix).

Risley (1891) and Vansittart (1894) also described the Limbus and relied on details from their predecessors' writings, in which Limbus were described as "quarrelsome" and "intractable" peoples for both the Hindus and the Buddhists. In this regard, Hamilton (1971[1819]) writes:

The Kirats, being vigorous beef-eaters, did not readily submit to the Rajputs [i.e., Hindu Kshetriya ruling caste]. Among the Kiratas was settled a tribe called Limbu... and it would not appear that the Lamas had made any progress in converting the Limbus (Hamilton 1819:54).

Furthermore, Vansittart writes:

There is one regiment of Limbus in the Nepalese army, called the "Bhaironath " but on account of their quarrelsome nature they were always quartered apart. The Limbus are born shikaris (hunters) (Vansittart 1894).

In fact the Limbus inhabited (and still do) the geographically contiguous hills located between Nepal, India, and Tibet. So their territory adjoins the borders of three different countries. In fact, the making of the three different states, namely the Hindu state of Nepal, British-India and the then Kingdom of Sikkim, cut across the Limbu national territory, thereby separating the Limbu population into three different countries (Sikkim was an independent country until it was annexed by India in 1974). Being a borderland people, Limbus might have

experienced different identity crises compared with other *adivasi* populations of Nepal too. This could be a reason why they were ‘difficult to deal with’ and quarrelsome in the eyes of others.

Historicizing Identity Politics in Nepal

For many scholars and commoners alike, identity politics in Nepal now seems to be like a unnecessary fuss. Dominant political parties and dominant caste groups argue that identity, as a resource of political mobilization, is divisive for social harmony. It will only lead to dividing the country. In fact, identity politics has created a deep division in Nepal’s politics, which is good for social change. Only divisions, conflict and contradictions will create new avenues for better solutions. From a superficial perspective, *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajati* people started identity politics in Nepal, but this is only a lopsided view. The CPN-Maoist party espoused identity based politics for multiple groups so as to organize *adivasi-janajatis* in support of their peoples’ war. Gopal Kirati, now a main leader in the CPN-Maoist Center, says that his Khambuwan Mukti Morcha (Khambuwan Liberation Front) merged with the CPN-Maoist towards the end of the 1990s only because the Maoists had embraced identity as the main political agenda. Even the Maoists leaders may have believed that class [*bargiya*] revolution is possible only after solving the problem of national [*jatiya, rashtriya*] liberation. But in reality, identity politics in Nepal was initiated by ruling groups. The state began to take such steps ever since the 14th century, during the Malla period and the Brahmans played an instrumental role. Baburam Acharya writes

The Thakuri Kings who came to establish new Thakurai (Thakuri dominion) only arranged the administrative dealings. The Brahmans used to propagate the Hindu religion amongst the Magars and Gurungs” (Acharya 1967:7).¹⁷

Hindu State-Making as Identity Politics

¹⁷ नयाँ ठकुराईको स्थापना गर्न आएका ठकुरी राजाहरू प्रशासनको प्रबन्धमात्र गर्दथे । ब्राह्मणहरू मगर र गुरुङमा हिन्दू धर्म प्रचार गर्दथे ।

In Nepal, the Hindu state was the identity maker or imposer in a true sense during the 19th century. Injunctions on cow slaughter, beef-eating, various commensal norms, and practices associated with legal punishments in accordance with one's caste status (Civil Code 1854) were all the formal institutionalization of the process of imposing hierarchized order upon others. Assigning the *matawali* caste for the non-Hindu, non-Aryan *Adivasi* peoples including the Limbu, may be taken as exhibit A of the imposition of 'inferior' identity upon others lives on behalf of the state in Nepal. Limbus were either called *yakthumba* or Limbu then, but they were classified as *matawali* [liquor-drinker] caste by the state. Only recently, after the 1990s, did those formerly classified as *matawali* begin to be classified as *adivasi-janajati*, mainly for the analysis of development indicators. From the 1990s, Limbus were known as *adivasi-janajati* [indigenous nationalities]. Many peoples and scholars may think that Limbu began to be known as Indigenous Nationalities only after the 1990s. This is not true. As early as the 1840s, Campbell mentioned that the "Limbu are the indigenous nation of that territory" (Campbell 1840:592). Therefore, in Nepal's case, identity politics is also an imposition as well as a consequential response of the Hindu state making process. Identity based political parties had been denied registration by the election commission or by the state ever since 'democracy' was founded in Nepal in 1951. In the general election in 1960, Limbuwan Sudhar Sangh [Limbuwan Reform Association] was denied registration after it was alleged that the Party name sounded "communal" or it did not meet the basic requirements for a democratic party in its naming. Therefore, there has been an old ploy of denying excluded groups of populations the right to found their own party for the cause of their political interests. Indigenous peoples were discouraged to establish their party, and encouraged to join the mainstream and exclusionary parties. Because of such discouragements by the state, and also because of the lack of confidence

among *adivasi-janajatis* themselves, they could not found the parties of their own. Yet a more important obstacle was that since 1960 political parties were banned, and only the Communists and democratic parties remained in existence but underground for the next three decades. During those three decades, thinking about identity - because of the influence of the mainstream parties - was considered divisive and communal. This was a problem. Indeed, Nepali Congress, Communist parties and all the political forces thrived by espousing the rhetoric of *mukti* [liberation], never defining clearly what kind of liberation they were fighting for. I am interested to know, what sort of *mukti* the different *jana-mukti sena* [peoples liberation armies] who led the liberation movements in the 1950s, 1960s, throughout the underground politics of the Panchayat regime, and even during the Maoist peoples war might have imagined. Edwin Wilmsen writes: "to discuss ethnicity [in South Africa during 1990s] was felt to legitimate its existence as a divisive force and thus to sanction the apartheid state". The situation in Nepal in relation to adopting identity as a political agenda is allegedly said to be creating divisive politics. The dominant parties and leaders, including the prime minister KP Oli often scaremonger about identity politics, referring to the "horrors of Rwanda".

Limbuwan Politics and Globalization:

In Limbuwan's case, globalization has had both a beneficial as well as disintegrative impact on its movements. Out migration of the work force has been rampant for two decades now in Nepal. Now an estimated ten per cent of the total population of Nepal work abroad, mainly in the Gulf countries and Malaysia. Yet India hosts the largest number of Nepalese unskilled workers. Since the active work force from villages live abroad, it might be higher than one third of the total actively productive force that are outside of the country. There have been many instances that women have started ploughing the field due to the unavailability of men in

the village. People have begun to complain about not having enough males in the villages when someone dies. Cremation or burial of a body is considered a male job. There has also been a severe impact on agriculture production because of the lack of labor force that is invested on the agro-fields. One may find many lands left fallow in rural Nepal.

Regardless of these economic and social, cultural impacts, the political movement is no less affected by globalization, that is, work opportunities available at a global level for Nepali workers. Limbuwan politics is no exception in terms of losing its cadres and LVs (Limbuwan Volunteers) everyday as most of the LVs from seven or eight years ago might be now migrant workers somewhere in this globalized world.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FORMATION OF LIMBUWAN BASED POLITICAL PARTIES

All students of the country, unite for ethnic liberation and national freedom

(Nepal Free Students Front, 1990)

This chapter is aimed at introducing the formation of the Limbuwan party and subsequent movements. Nepal witnessed historic epochal transformations in the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1990s, and the 2000s, each time bringing to an end to old regimes as well as originating new political movements and democratic organizations. I want to raise a question at the outset: Did these political transformations really address or fulfill the aspirations of indigenous peoples (*adivasi-janajatis*)? The *adivasi-janajati* – who were not in the leadership of any of these movements - dedicated their lives to the revolutions that occurred in Nepal every other decade. They contributed in no less a way than the dominant caste groups, who now self-define as *arya*. But from the *adivasi-janajati* vantage point, every other revolution seemed to have ended, as the saying goes: “much bruit [from French for noise] little fruit.” The Limbu experiences and their political movements in the wake of different revolutions in the past have shown that the revolutions in which they fought for their own goals, actually accomplished very little of concrete value. The Limbus have therefore, since the 1950s, expressed a consistent desire to establish a political party representing their interests.

The armed revolution of 1950-1951 under the leadership of the Nepali Congress¹⁸ Party-led *jana mukti sena* [people’s liberation army] brought to an end the 104 year old Rana

¹⁸ The present day Nepali Congress Party was founded in April 1950 through the merger of two parties, namely the Nepali Rastriya Congress (founded in January 1947 in Calcutta, India) and the Nepali Democratic Congress (founded in August 1948 in Calcutta, India) (taken from the Nepali Congress website).

oligarchic family rule¹⁹ (1846-1951 AD). The Declaration of Democracy [*prajatantra ko ghosana*] by the late King Tribhuvan²⁰ on 18 February 1951 not only formally brought people-based political parties to the frontline of Nepali politics but also reinstated the centuries old Shah dynastic monarchy, which had been rendered as symbolic ‘titular heads of the state’ by the Rana family prime ministerial rule. There are numerous instances throughout the country where *adivasi-janajati* commanders led the *jana mukti sena* [people’s liberation army] in different fronts of the revolution in 1951.²¹ The *adivasi-janajati*, especially the Tamang, Rai, and Limbu, returned to Nepal from Darjeeling and other parts of India to join the people’s liberation army. However, after achieving the overthrow of the Ranas and the advent of democracy, none of the *adivasi-janajati* could be seen at the head of the Nepali Congress (NC) Party’s organizational pyramid, unlike the dominant Bahun and Chhetris castes. Some of the commanders of the *jana mukti sena* with *matawali* or “alcohol drinking” ethnic backgrounds were later given jobs in the newly formed Nepal Police. G. B. Yakhumba (Limbu), for instance, who was the second-in-command during the founding of the *jana mukti sena* in Calcutta in December 1949.²² became the Inspector General of Police after the transition. Yakhumba had served in the British Army in Burma during World War II and had given the name “*jana mukti sena*” to the newly founded freedom fighting force (Tamang 2005; Malagodi 2013). Many other Tamangs, Rais, Limbus, and

¹⁹The Rana regime was founded by a junior courtier called Jung Bahadur Rana who killed more than three-dozen other courtiers at an event known as the *kot parva* (*Kot Massacre*) in September 1846. Jung Bahadur Rana started the hereditary prime minister system for his own family, a dynastic rule which only ended in 1951.

²⁰ Since King Tribhuvan made *prajatantra ko ghoshana* (declaration of democracy) he was known as *rastra pita* (father of nation) - echoing the King PN Shah as the *rastra nirmata* (nation builder) among monarchist followers in Nepal.

²¹ See Shyam Kumar Tamang’s book *Jana mukti sena: Euta Nalekhiyeko Itihas* [Peoples Liberation Army: An Unwritten History] for details. And also <http://www.tamangsamaj.com/nepal/931/history-with-shyam-kumar-tamang-part-1>

²² Shyam Kumar Tamang, who was among the founders of the *jan mukti sena*, said in an interview with Amrit Yonjan in 2015, that G.B. Yakhumba Limbu was the one who named *jan mukti sena* the freedom fighting force. Tamang also says that Yakhumba had served in the Burma platoon, and he was the second in command when the *jan mukti sena* was founded. Later, G.B. Yakhumba became the IGP of the Nepal Police force. Within three months of revolution, the number of *jan mukti sena* reached about 10,000 strong (Tamang 2015).

Magars served in the Nepal Police force in different ranks after the establishment of democracy. Pahal Singh Lama, also a freedom fighter, also rose up the ranks to head the Police force after Yakthumba. In one sense, these developments may be considered as positive for the *matwali* populations who contributed in significant ways to the very first revolution for democracy in Nepal. They were, however, appointed almost exclusively in public security institutions (the Nepal Police and Military). In this regard, they can also be interpreted as having been excluded from decision-making positions in mainstream politics and in power centers occupied exclusively by high castes Hindus. As non-*aryan*, non-Hindu, and non-caste ‘others’ they were structurally excluded. If politics is considered to be a pivot point in determining the direction, design, and proceedings of the state, *adivasi-janajatis* were not in positions of political influence.

I want to raise a hypothetical question in consideration of the *adivasi-janajati*’s involvement in the *jana mukti sena*: How did they perceive *mukti* [liberation] at the time when they fought the *mukti sangram* [liberation war]? It is quite understandable that the dominant castes fought to form political parties and establish the liberation army to revolt against the Ranas for democracy but why did the *adivasi-janajati* groups take part? Although the *adivasi-janajati* Limbu, Tamang, and Rai were among the founders of the *jana mukti sena*, what passion inspired them - in addition to fighting for democracy in its most abstract sense - to fight against the Rana regime? What did the term *mukti* [liberation] mean to those groups who were disparagingly classified in the old order as enslaveable and non-enslaveable, “drunkard” castes by the state? Was the founding of democracy alone a solution to the question of *mukti* for them? To me, this question is important given the fact that the non-*aryan*, non-Hindu, non-caste Tamangs, Rais, and Limbus had different experiences and relationships to the Hindu state and the Rana regime than the self-defined *aryan* Hindu Bahuns and Chhetris.

The Tamangs who now imagine their home territory as Tamsaling, the Kirat Rais who imagine their home territory as Khambuwan, and the Limbus who imagine theirs as Limbuwan were all conquered by the Hindu King PN Shah from the principality of Gorkha over a span of two decades between the 1750s and 1770s during the consolidation of what became the state of Nepal. Subsequent rulers, including the Rana regime, carried out different forms and strategies of domination and exploitation upon the conquered groups of people that they imagined as ‘enemies.’²³ In other words, the Aryan Hindu high caste Bahuns and Chhetris belonged to the conquering group while *matawali* groups belonged to the conquered ones. Members of conquered groups joined with sectors of the conquering groups to establish the *mukti sena* and overthrow the Rana regime. Nevertheless it seems logical that the ‘conquered’ groups would have perceived the notion of liberation at that time in a way that was quite distinct from those of the ‘conquering’ groups. The Limbus’ constant struggle for forming a political force of their own with their own leadership not only resisted the state but also the Bahun and Chhetri castes that dominated the organs of the state. The desire of the conquered groups for liberation and their understanding of democracy would both have been different from those of the ruling groups.

Democracy, modernization and development in Nepal after the 1950s could not adequately address the *muktiko chahana ra abasyakta* [need and desire for liberation] of the *adivasi-janajatis*. Their ancestors had lived thorough devastating transformations to their forms of life and struggled to save what they could of their socio-cultural integrity. Domination and ensuing catastrophes in social, cultural, political, and territorial aspects of their lives led to the reality of the exclusion of *adivasi-janajatis*, an elemental fact unrecognized in the types of democracy, development, and modernization that the state of Nepal initiated after the 1950s. To

²³ Holmberg (2006:34) describes how the Nepali bureaucracy, including military officers described his fieldwork area, i.e., Tamang territory, as the ‘enemy territory’ or even ‘non-Nepal’.

put this another way, the democracy that was established in 1951 in Nepal was desirable and acceptable for the ‘conquering’ caste groups, while it was not as acceptable for the *adivasi-janajatis*. Therefore one can see that the advent of democracy in 1951 continued to sustain a population divided into dominating and dominated groups from the vantage point of the state. In a similar vein, the 2015 Constitution of Nepal has enshrined culturally specific privileges to *aryan* and *sanatan-dharmi* [Hindu-religious] groups into law, thereby favoring one sector of the population while denying recognition to non-*aryan* and non-Hindu populations. The same constitution thus has been largely welcomed by some sectors of the population but has been considered utterly unacceptable for *adivasi-janajati* groups. This context of exclusion from the very origin of democracy in Nepal set the stage for the desire of the Limbus to form their own party representing their *itihās*, *that-thalo*, and *pahichan* [history, territory and identity].

The Formation of the Dominant Political Parties in the 1950s and 1960s

The first political parties of Nepal were founded just before or after the revolution of 1951. The Nepali Congress (NC), Nepal Communist Party (CPN), Praja Parishad (Mishra), Praja Parishad (Acharya), Sanyukta Prajatantra Party, and Gorkha Parishad all trace their origin to this period. They all fielded candidates in the first general election held in February 1959 in which the Nepali Congress was victorious, winning a two-thirds majority in the parliament. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the late IS Chemjong unsuccessfully struggled to register the Limbuwan Sudhar Sangh (Limbuwan Reform Association or LRA) as a political party with the Election Commission (EC) for this election. The Limbuwan Reform Association (LRA) wanted to field candidates for the general election of 1959. The Election Commission denied registration and justified their decision by asserting that a party with a name beginning with ‘Limbuwan’

sounded like a *jatibadi* [casteist] and *sampradayik* [communal] organization. The LRA was thus denied registration. As a consequence, IS Chemjong had to file his candidacy from a different party called Nepal Prajatantrik Mahasabha, whose leader was Ranga Nath Sharma. Thus with the inception of democracy, a subtle exclusionary practice was initiated. Even though all the registered political parties were implicitly *jatibadi* [casteist] and *sampradayik* [communal] in the exclusive presence of Bahun and Chhetri in leadership roles, it was the Limbu party that was disallowed registration on these grounds, even though it was explicitly not communal (described below). This pattern has structured Nepal's democratic politics from the beginning.

The Limbuwan Sudhar Sangh (Limbuwan Reform Association, LRA): The Genesis of the Limbuwan-Based Party in the 1950s.

The LRA was founded in 1952. In the beginning, this organization was conceptualized as a non-political, non-party organization. Even *Bahun*s were initially involved in this organization. IS Chemjong, however, wanted to develop and run the LRA as a political party. At the second LRA convention in 1954, the LRA passed a set of resolutions in reference to the autonomy and federal rights of Limbuwan. The second convention clarified the rationale of founding the LRA in these terms:

Limbuwan is a different group from other Nepalese populations. We have our own state, own history, own geography and own language too. Before 1831 BS (1775 AD), we were with our own state system based on our customs and traditions. But after that we agreed to accept the King PN Shah as the King of the central government, and ever since we have been living as a Protectorate State [*Sangrachhyit Rajya*] under Nepal... We have also equally contributed to overthrow the Ranas and to reinstate the monarchy in Nepal... The Ranas tore apart our ethnic history. When we realized this, then we founded the LRA (KYC 2004:180–185).

The second conventions further stated that governance in a democratic system should be controlled and implemented by the people, however, the three million people of Limbuwan did

not have rights to govern themselves. In response to charges that the LRA was communal, the second conventions asserted:

Limbuwan Sudhar Sangh is not an organization of the Limbus alone. Limbuwan is a name of the territory, just like the Kirat province is place's name, Koshi province is a place's name. These three are interchangeable names. Limbuwan belongs to all the inhabitants living in this territory.' The LRA wanted to honor and promote the pride and dignity of Nepal and it also wanted to see a federated Nepal into different provinces with their own system of governance except for foreign policy, military, and transportation. With the federal autonomy, Nepal would not be divided into pieces but this will keep Nepal even united. This is our principle, policy and ideology. Our slogans are:

- i) Rise up – Limbuwan;
- ii) End to the Communalism;
- iii) We must establish Unity;
- iv) Peoples' Rule is the Must.
- v) *Jaya Limbuwan* [victory to Limbuwan];
- vi) *Jaya Kirat* [victory to Kirat];
- vii) *Jaya Nepal* [victory to Nepal] (KYC 2004:180–185).

Two years after its establishment, the LRA held its second convention in June 1954 in Ilam district with more than five hundred participants from different parts of Limbuwan. The LRA Chairman, IS Chemjong, informed the convention that there were more than two hundred branches and about hundred and fifty thousand members in the LRA. The LRA also managed to lead Limbuwan delegations to the King in Kathmandu in 1951 and 1952, delegations that demanded autonomy and land rights for Limbuwan.

In spite of its strong presence and strong foundation in Limbuwan in the 1950s, the LRA did not continue after the general election of 1959. Chairman IS Chemjong became politically frustrated after his defeat in the 1959 election and quit politics. He devoted the rest of his life to research and writing about the language, religion and history of Limbus and the Kirat people. Chemjong was a historian at Tribhuvan University from 1961 until he died in 1975. Although the LRA could not continue as a political party, it initiated and put forward the principles of federalism and Limbuwan autonomy in its political agenda. Both principles are still awaiting

fruition. One of the main reasons that the LRA could not survive long was the Limbus themselves. They had become politically divided and did not seem to recognize the LRA as a political party. In this regard, Limbu political motivations and aspirations were co-opted into the Nepali Congress's slogan of liberation. Ironically, "it was only the Nepali Congress which demanded, in absolute terms, the abolition of the *kipat* system...In spite of the Nepali Congress stand on Kipat, the party's candidates - only four of whom were Limbus - won all eight parliamentary seats from Pallo-Kirat [Limbuwan]" (Regmi 1978:578) in the February 1959 election.

As mentioned before, the Nepali Congress (NC) secured a two-thirds majority and formed a government in May 1959. The NC rhetorically offered people democracy, nationalism, and socialism in the abstract with little concrete plans. The Limbus overwhelmingly voted for Nepali Congress, with very little understanding of what the terms democracy and socialism meant in the context of their history, land, and territory, for which their ancestors had laid their lives to defend. The elected government with an overwhelming majority lasted for a mere 20 months before King Mahendra dissolved parliament and suspended the constitution in December 1960. King Mahendra declared a new regime called the Panchayat system, that lasted until 1990.

The Panchayat Era and Limbuwan in the 1960s

The Hindu Monarchy and its *de facto* ruling mechanism, the Panchayat system, constitutionally banned all political parties and barred people from any kind of organized political practice. Restrictions were also placed on freedom of speech. The then monarch promulgated the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1962:

[f]or all-round progress of the Kingdom of Nepal and of the Nepalese people to conduct the government of the country in consonance with the popular will... is possible only through the partyless democratic *Panchayat* system...I King *Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah*

Dev, in exercise of the sovereign powers and prerogatives inherent in us... as handed down to us by our August and Revered Forefathers, do here by enact and promulgate this constitution (Preamble, Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 2019 [1962]).

Sovereignty lay with the Hindu king, and multiparty democracy was abolished forcing democratic political leaders to go underground, to quit politics, or to adhere to the rules of *Panchayat* politics.

The four precepts of the Panchayat polity were i) a Hindu Kingdom or the Hindu monarchy based on the idea of supreme divine right; ii) Khas /Nepali language, the mother tongue of the ruling castes, as the only official language as well as the only medium of education; iii) a party-less political structure with no opportunity for people to organize to express themselves politically; and iv) monarchy as the only recognized form of sovereignty. These four fundamentals of Panchayat polity²⁴ were deliberately designed to create the state of Nepal as an absolute monolithic, ‘all-assimilative’, ‘all-encompassing’ and culturally “universalizing” society. From the vantage of a liberal, democratic point of view, the Panchayat regime was autocratic. The Nepali Congress party - which had launched armed revolution to establish democracy in 1950-51 - once again initiated armed revolution in the wake of King Mahendra’s coup d’état in 1960. They sought to restore democracy and ‘re-liberate’ the people from the autocratic Panchayat regime. Panchayat politics and the mono-cultural state policies implemented in all of Nepal’s diverse social and cultural landscapes had profound effects on the social, cultural, religious, and political lives of *adivasi-janajati* communities. These effects were especially significant for Limbus and the Limbuwan movement for the following reasons: i) Panchayat era laws abolished the indigenous land ownership system of the Limbu through which they produced and reproduced their unique socio-cultural system; ii) the Panchayat era also saw

²⁴ For an elaborate discussion of this, see Michael Hutt’s *Nepal in the Nineties* (1994).

the introduction of a new administrative system that divided the country into 75 districts and 14 zones²⁵, erasing the name Limbuwan from the official bureaucratic system. Nevertheless the name Limbuwan seems to have been retained in common parlance well into the 1970s and even until today despite its erasure in constitutional or legal terms.

Even though the Panchayat polity had a variable impact upon caste-based and *adivasi-janajati* societies, everyone in Nepal was oppressed. To alleviate that oppression, the Nepali Congress invoked the rhetoric of the *mukti andolan* [liberation movement] once again and unsuccessfully waged an underground, armed revolution against the Panchayat regime in 1961 and 1962. Many Limbus took part and devoted their lives to this movement (Basnet and Portel 2016). For the Nepali Congress or similar dominant political parties, the term ‘liberation’ perhaps meant the re-establishment of democracy based on western liberal democracy. Liberal democracy, however, would not lay the foundations or fulfill the aspirations and imaginations of liberation among the Limbus, Tamangs, Tharus, Kirat-Rais, and other indigenous groups because their political-historical as well as territorial problems vis-à-vis the Hindu state making process were fundamentally different from that of the political problems facing Bahuns, Chhetris, Dalits, and *madhesis*.

Since the late 1950s, like elsewhere in the world, mainstream politics in Nepal began to revolve around questions of economic inequality and equality. For many underground political parties and their leaders, the term *mukti* meant liberation from economic exploitation. The ideal of a classless society and exploitation-less society focused almost exclusively on the questions of labor and compensation. Such an excessive domination of economic issues in politics and the formation of political parties eclipsed the cultural, historical and territorial exploitation that were

²⁵ Nepal was divided into 14 zones and 75 districts in 1962 after the start of the Panchayat regime. For more details see Grishma Bahadur Devkota’s *Nepal ko Rajnitik Darpan* [Political Mirror of Nepal] vol. 3.

key issues for *adivasi-janajati* communities and their leaders. In Nepal in the late 1960s and the 1970s to assert one's own culture, language, customs, or religion was considered *sampradayik* [communal, narrow-minded] and retrograde; to express such things publically was not even allowed. This hegemony of a perspective that focused on the inequality and equality of citizens who were seen as isolated from their communities dominated political discourse. *Adivasi-janajatis* and their leaders lacked the confidence to organize themselves based on the idea of diverse identities in Nepal and thus had to rely on the Bahuns for leadership. In this regard, Arun Baral, a scholar and Bahun himself writes "At the end, even the ideology is formed in relation to the power. The ideologies of those who are in power, gain the legitimacy easily" (Baral 2067 v.s.:v). Because alternative avenues were explicitly outlawed, *adivasi-janajati* political leaders and organizers were channeled into political parties with high caste leaders even though those leaders had no appreciation for the political problems that stemmed from the unique historical, territorial, and socio-cultural circumstances of *adivasi-janajati* communities. Thus ruling caste groups were able to coopt *adivasi-janajatis* into their political agendas.

During the 1970s, another stream of politics, namely the expansion of underground communist parties across the country, strongly influenced Limbu political life. Immediately across the border from Limbuwan in West Bengal, India, the Naxalite armed rebellion erupted and communist leaders in east Nepal imported slogans of *mukti* that had a strong appeal and captured the imagination of Limbus. This ideology undergirded an armed communist movement in east Nepal in 1971.

The Panchayat era did not provide much scope for continuing the efforts of IS Chemjong to establish a Limbuwan party. Limbu activists were funneled into mainstream parties including the communists who received new inspiration from the Naxalite movement in West Bengal,

India in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, in 1986, towards the end of the Panchayat era and the difficult days when political parties were still banned, Bir Nembang from Panchthar district founded the Limbuwan Mukti Morcha (Limbuwan Liberation Front or LLF). For founding a political party during the Panchayat regime, Bir Nembang was punished with multiple arrests and prison terms. The LLF eventually merged with the Sanghiya Limbuwan Party (Federal Limbuwan Party or FLP) in August 2014 when five Limbuwan-based parties declared unification. I will now explore these developments further.

The 1990s: The End of the Panchayat, Reinstating Multi-Party Democracy, and the Continuity of Monarchy and Hindu Nepal

The *jana andolan-I* [People's Movement-I] in early 1990 overthrew the Panchayat regime and led to a new constitution for Nepal in 1991. Although the 1991 Constitution ensured multi-party political democracy, it denied recognition to *adivasi-janajati* and their collective identity based politics. It also did not recognise the demand for a secular state. Despite demands from *adivasi-janajati* leaders to declare Nepal to be constitutionally secular, the 1991 constitution clearly stated that Nepal is a "Hindu constitutional monarchical" country. That may be one of the main reasons why *adivasi-janajati* political activists, particularly youths and students, did not take ownership of the 1991 constitution and began to look for a new political organization. They wanted a new political movement that would liberate *adivasi-janajati* people from Hindu cultural as well as political domination. In this regard, Surya Makhim, then a young student and now a leader in Limbuwan politics, wrote:

Whether you say it is the blunder of the rulers or the misfortune of the Nepali people, the suggestions and the voices raised by *adivasi-janajati*, *madhesi*, *dalit*, and women and

minorities were not included in the Constitution of Nepal 1991. The 1991 Constitution once again discriminated against the aforementioned excluded groups by constitutionalizing a caste's monopoly in the rules and again the afore-mentioned excluded groups were made second-class citizens by the constitution (Makhim, 2062 v.s.:4).

Likewise Singh Man Tamang, Tamsaling Autonomous Council's Vice Chair and Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch's (FDNF) Finance Secretary, asserted the following at a political rally in Dhankuta:

On behalf of the Tamsaling Autonomous Council, I would like to welcome with cheerful greetings of *phyafula* and hearty *sewaro*! This is not the first time we are bringing you the message of this national liberation [*jatiyamukti*] but for many years now, the oppression, suppression, exploitation, that our ancestors and ourselves are facing now cannot be described here in detail, but I would like to tell you how we have been struggling to liberate ourselves from such suppression. After the political change in 2046 (1990), the constitution of Nepal was in the drafting process. During the draft period, the majority of the indigenous nationalities' leaders and communities had suggested that the constitution must embrace a federalist structure, not the unitary polity anymore. The constitution of unitary polity before could not do any justice to indigenous nationalities for the past 240 years but only suppressed, oppressed and exploited indigenous peoples and marginalized groups. The upcoming constitution must guarantee the rights of all caste and ethnic groups of the country. But the state just ignored the indigenous nationalities' demands and suggestions. They lopsidedly promulgated the constitution without any glimpse of federalism and secularism in it. The ruling groups of this country, promulgated the constitution in 1990 and began to claim that the constitution would last for 100-200 years. But after five years, the Nepal Communist Party Maoist began the People's War against that constitution and it came to an end in 2006.²⁶

In this regards, Mara Malagodi writes "The 'unity in diversity' approach adopted by the Nepali state actors led to growing discontentment among many social groups since 1990 and fierce opposition to the 1990 Constitution itself" (Malagodi 2013). Although it could not become functional (see below), the Janajati Party proposed and envisioned concrete names of provinces based on ethnic identity and history, and also demanded a secular state.

Denial of Rights as an Opportunity for Political Organization

²⁶ I listened to the voice recording of the speech Singh Man Tamang delivered at a rally in Dhankuta, and transcribed it. Since I could not be there, I am thankful to D.B. Angbung for making available the data from that program.

It was in this political climate that *adivasi-janajati* leaders started to found their own political parties. They formed new parties because their rights were explicitly denied by the constitution and the state and not just because political opportunities were unavailable to them. One of main demands or suggestions put forward by *adivasi-janajatis* during the 1990 constitution drafting process was that Nepal be declared a secular state and initiate a federal structure so as to incorporate *adivasi-janajatis* into the political mainstream. As the Constitution denied their demands for a secular Nepal and federalism, *adivasi-janajatis* felt a responsibility to establish political parties in their own leadership. Therefore, in Nepal's case, the denial of *adivasi-janajati* claims for their collective cultural rights by the state may be considered as a helpful opportunity and push towards establishing political parties for the quest of identity politics. Some politicians with an *adivasi-janajati* background formed a political party named the Janajati Party [Nationality Party] in the wake of the people's movement in 1990.

The Janajati [Nationality] party was established under the Chair of Kajiman Kandangwa (Limbu). Khagendra Jung Gurung, a staunch advocate and supporter of *adivasi-janajati* movements was the general secretary and Bhadra Kumari Ghale was the Treasurer of the party. The then prime minister of the interim government, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai - one of the founders of the Nepali Congress Party - accused this party of being a *jatibadi*²⁷ [castiest/communal] organization and barred the party from operating. Bhadra Kumari Ghale, frustrated by the Prime Minister's utterly negative response towards the 'name' of the party that denoted *adivasi-janajati* nationality, retired from active political life thereafter. The Janajati Party, in its party manifesto had envisioned and proposed a total of 12 ethnicity-based federal provinces: namely Limbuwan, Kochila, Khambuwan, Sherpa, Tamsaling, Newa, Bhojpura, Mithila, Magarat, Tamuwan, Tharuhat or Tharuwan, and Khasan.²⁸

Khagendra Makhim, now a leader of the Federal Socialist Forum, writes "In its party manifesto, the Janajati Party had proposed 12 provinces and had a party flag with 12 stripes representing the 12 provinces."²⁹ However, the Janajati Party was not allowed registration

²⁷ The term *jat* is the Nepali or Hindi translation of the English term 'caste'. I will translate the Nepali term *jatibadi* as casteist [advocate of caste-based principles in politics].

²⁸ Based on conversations and communication with Khagendra Makhim, now a leader of the Federal Socialist Forum (FSF).

²⁹ Personal communication.

[*darta*] by the Election Commission. In Nepal, the legal provision for any political party is that if they opt to participate in general as well as local elections, the Election Law stipulates that the parties must be registered with the Election Commission. The Commission is the constitutional body administering elections at all levels in the country. In this regard, the *adivasi-janajati* political leaders who were barred from registering a party with a name reflecting ethnic identity could either participate in the election as independent candidates or they could try to form a party with a different name that would not be barred.

Split of the Janajati Party

When the Janajati Party was not allowed registration by the Election Commission, one of the leaders formed a new party called the Jana Party (People's Party) and registered with the Election Commission. This move created confusion and raised mutual suspicion among Janajati Party leaders. The unregistered party's Chair and its General secretary afterwards stood as independent candidates in the general election.

The Janajati Party, for its part, unified with the Janamukti Morcha (People's Liberation Front), a party that operated mainly in the Magar areas of western Nepal. This new party, after the unification with the Janajati Party in 1991, called itself the Rastriya Janamukti Party (National People's Liberation Party or NPLP). However, both the Chair and the General Secretary of the party, MS Thapa and Gore Bahadur Khapangi (both Magars) respectively, were from the former Jana Mukti Morcha. The main difference between the Janajati Party (Limbu) and the Jana Mukti Morcha (Magar) was that the former had a plan for ethnicity-based names for federal states whereas the latter had no such plan except for the 'proportional representation of all caste and ethnic groups in parliament'. To put it in other words, the Janajati Party believed in

an ethnicity-based federal structure of the state and was on a quest to restructure the state. On the other hand, the Jana Mukti Morcha's main political quest regarding identity issues was limited to the inclusion of all caste and ethnic groups in the state system on the basis of population composition. These problems of leadership as well as political differences generated conflict within the party and a split could not be avoided in 1994. The main playmaker was an Athpahariya Rai, Kamal Chharahang, from Eastern Nepal, who initiated the split and formed a new party called the Janamukti Party, Nepal, with its chairperson being Nil Bahadur Thing, a Tamang from Sindhuli. After some time, Kamal Chharahang became the Chair and Kumar Lingden became the General Secretary of this party. Jitendra Raj Chemjong (Limbu), Atalman Rai, Jagan Kirat (Rai), Bishwa Artist (Rai), Shobha Khajum (Limbu), Man Kumari Yakha, Laxmi Tuladhar (Newar), and MB Maden (Limbu) were the central committee members of this party. The Janamukti Party aspired to be a regional party concentrated in east Nepal. Subsequently, in 2001, the Rastriya Janamukti Party and the Janmukti Party united together. The main reason they re-united once again was that both the parties experienced poor defeats in the 1999 election. Kamal Chharahang (Athpahariya Rai) and Kumar Lingden (Limbu), the chair and the general secretary of the former Janamukti Party, Nepal became central committee members of the newly unified party that was called the Unified National Janamukti Party. Sanjuhang Palungwa (Limbu) was the Chair of the eastern region (Limbuwan) chapter of that party.

The Formation of the Nepal Free Students Front (NFSF): The First *adivasi-janajati* Students organization in Nepal

In Nepal, every political party has a party wing comprised of school, college and university level students. In fact, one may consider the student wings as the backbone of political parties in terms of the recruitment of party cadres as well as staging the movements,

demonstrations, election campaigns, rallies, and conventions. No such collective campaigns and rallies are performed successfully among well performing political parties in Nepal without mobilizing student wings. The Nepal Students Union is the student wing of Nepali Congress; the All Nepal National Free Students Union is the students wing of the Communist Party of Nepal-UML; and the All Nepal Revolutionary Students Union is the similar wing of the Communist Party of Nepal- Maoist. Similarly, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal, and *madhesi* parties all have their own student wings.

In Nepal, students have proven themselves to be the vanguards of political demonstrations and rallies as they are the ones who make programs of protests against the old regimes leading to the transformation of society. When the political parties were banned during the Panchayat regime, political party leaders remained underground or in exile. In those days, the colleges and schools were the centers of politics and the students would stage various protests in different ways. But the hidden objective of such protests was to weaken and harangue the old regime. It was students staging demonstrations in Kathmandu in 1980 that culminated in an announcement of a referendum to choose between the then Panchayat regime and multi-party democracy in Nepal. Student wings of different parties played a decisive role even during the first *jana andolan-I* [People's Movement I] in 1990.

A few dozen *adivasi* students who opposed the key provisions of the 1991 Constitution of Nepal established the Nepal Free Students Front (NFSF) on March 31, 1991. The key points of disagreements that they had with the new constitution were i) the declaration of Nepal as a Hindu state and ii) a provision that banned people from establishing political parties with names signifying or denoting ethnic content. The latter provision meant that *adivasi-janajatis* could not register an *adivasi-janajati* Party with the Election Commission. Conscious of their collective identity, they declared the NFSF to be the student wing (sister organization) of the *Rastriya Janamukti Party* (National People's Liberation Party or NPLP) in 1992.

On October 4, 2002 King Gyanendra dissolved the government and the democratically elected parliament and appointed a new prime minister who was responsible to the King alone, rather than parliament. King Gyanendra's undemocratic move proved to be a historically defining moment for Limbuwan's politics as the King appointed the Chair of the Rastriya Janmukti Party, Gore Khapangi Magar, as the Minister for Women and Social Welfare. The Chair of the Party and now the King's appointee minister was seen to have submitted the *adivasi-janajati* political movement to the King for its dissolution. Gore, who had initiated a movement among *adivasi-janajatis* to boycott Dasain [*Dasain bahiskar*], appeared to go against his earlier beliefs when he received a blessing (tika) from King Gyanendra on the occasion of Dasain in 2003.³⁰ The leader, whose political popularity was once based on the Dasain boycott, was now said to have betrayed the *adivasi-janajati* people. This event caused a rift between the party leadership, the chair himself and the students organization (the NFSF). The students and youths truly believed in the Dasain boycott and they also opposed the decision of the party to join the King's government. The NFSF continued to focus on student politics through its own activities and organizational extension. The NFSF organized various workshops in Kathmandu and elsewhere focusing on such topics as the 'Present State Structure and Lingual Rights' or the 'New Structure of the State in Nepal.' The NFSF was also involved in various *adivasi-janajati* movements whenever needed.

On February 1, 2005 King Gyanendra seized complete control of the government and ruled directly. The Rastriya Janamukti Party welcomed the King's move in a press conference whereas its sister organization, the NFSF, condemned the decision and issued a press statement against the monarch's move. The party instructed the NFSF through an official letter to rescind the press statement and instead welcome the King's move. The party stated that if they refused

³⁰ "[Receiving] tika is a sign of one's inferiority to and dependency on the one giving the tika" (Forbes 1999:3; Holmberg 2006).

they would face disciplinary action. The NFSF retaliated and disowned the party. The King's move, also known as the Royal Coup, proved to be the catalyst that separated the student wing from the Rastriya Janamukti Party. The Party joined the monarch whereas the students joined the movement against the royal coup. In October 2005, the NFSF organized a press conference calling upon politicians, intellectuals, students, youths and all common people to come together to form a common political movement for *jatiya mukti* [ethnic liberation] and *sanghiya loktantra* [Federal Democracy] in Nepal.

The NFSF, founded 15 years earlier and comprised mainly of youths from the Limbu, Rai, Magar, and Tamang communities, decided to establish a new political party that would fight for ethnic liberation and federal democracy in Nepal. They held a meeting on December 11 and 12, 2005 in Birtamod, Jhapa in East Nepal, and established the Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch (Federal Democratic National Forum or FDNF) in a model previously not seen in Nepal. The FDNF was founded with a bottom up organizational structure that matched the proposed 12 province federal structure. The party's main slogan was "Let's Unite All the Federal Republicans". The Federal Democratic National Forum (FDNF) was based in Kathmandu as the central party coordinated all the 12 provincial level parties for an envisioned future federal state: i) Limbuwan, ii) Khambuwan, iii) Kochila, iv) Sherpa, v) Tamsaling, vi) Tharuhat, vii) Bhojpora, viii) Mithila, ix) Newa, x) Magarat, xi) Tamuwan, and xii) Khasan based parties would come together. In this regard, there would be little or no interference by the center of the party in the provincial level parties. For example, the FDNF was the coordinating party center under which Limbuwan Autonomous Council, Khambuwan Autonomous Council, Tamsaling Autonomous Council, Tharuhat Autonomous Council and so forth existed independently of each other. In Limbuwan's case they had established the Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC).

The most important element uniting all these different provincial level regional parties was that they all shared the same election symbol, which belonged to the FDNF, meaning that only the FDNF had to be registered with the Election Commission (EC). Therefore, these twelve different ethnic parties could come together when needed, for example, during the election and for other common issues when politically bargaining with the state.

As a provincial level Limbuwan based party inside the FDNF, the Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC) was established together with the FDNF in December 2005. Such an organizational structure is very different from those of the dominant parties that are centrally based in Kathmandu and control all the lower level branches right down to the local village level. In this sense the mainstream political parties organizational framework is done through a top-down format whereas the Federal Democratic National Forum and its associated parties organizations are bottom-up.

FLSC Split and CA Election 2008

The FLSC suffered a split within a few weeks of its establishment thereby creating two different FLSC parties in Limbuwan: FLSC (K) and FLSC (SH).³¹ However, the majority of the FLSC cadres and members remained with the establishment side in 2006 and the establishment FLSC (K) began to call itself the FDNF-affiliated FLSC (Forum-affiliated FLSC) because the FLSC (SH) was not affiliated with the FDNF. The forum-affiliated FLSC (K) was able to persuade the Tamsaling Autonomous Council and the Tharuhat Autonomous Council to join the FDNF. These three parties fielded their candidates with the same electoral symbol for the

³¹ Led by Kumar Lingden (K) and Sanju Hang Palungwa (SH). Ironically, a political party that was established for the cause of Limbuwan collective identity came to be known by Limbu individuals personal names immediately after the establishment of the party.

Federal Democratic National Forum in the first Constituent Assembly (CA) election in 2008. In the election they secured two seats in the proportional electoral system in the 601 member body of the CA. Of the two one Limbu (male) from FLSC (K) and one Tharu (female) from Tharuhat represented the FDNF in the CA. The Tamsaling Autonomous Council could not secure a seat. Unfortunately the FDNF could not hold on to its two CA members. Both the Limbu (from FLSC (K) and the Tharu (from Tharuhat), taking advantage of the CA rules and regulations, quit the FDNF and formed their own political parties. On the other hand, the FLSC (SH) boycotted the first CA election.

After the first CA failed to promulgate a new constitution, a second CA election was held in 2013. This time the FLSC (SH) took part in the election but did not win a seat whereas the FLSC (K) boycotted the election.

Weaknesses in Electoral Politics

There were more than half a dozen Limbuwan based political parties by 2012. None of them could come together to forge an alliance for the movement or for the election. Rather all of them seemed to be hostile and in conflict with each other. The period between 2006 and 2015 was the prime time in Nepal's political history when political circumstances necessitated alliances and fronts among the Limbus as well with other *adivasi-janajatis* but unfortunately that did not happen. Instead of forging alliances and coming together for a common political cause the *adivasi-janajatis* kept quarrelling and shouting at each other for almost a decade. As the Nepali proverb goes: *abhagilaai Khane belama ris uthchha* [the unfortunate one becomes angry when it is time to eat].

Strength in Political Movements

Although the FLSC were neophytes in electoral politics, it emerged as one of the most influential movements among *adivasi-janajati* political parties in Nepal. There are multiple factors contributing to the success of the movements organized by the FLSC: i) the FLSC had formed a support organization composed primarily of youths called Limbuwan Volunteers (LV). The Limbuwan Volunteers (LV) moved swiftly and created momentum around particular issues; ii) the spontaneous involvement of Limbus in the movement; and iii) financial backing from the Limbus living or working abroad. By 2013, the FLSC had affiliate organizations in at least 20 countries in Europe, Asia, USA, and Middle Eastern countries. FLSC movements in Limbuwan or in Kathmandu were partly funded by these foreign-based “branches” affiliated with the FLSC.

The Limbuwan Movement’s Martyrs

Martyrdom and martyrs are highly respectfully invoked in Nepali politics, and even more so among communist parties. Martyrs are remembered and revered before the beginning of every formal program of political parties. All official meetings and programs begin with the observation of one minute’s silence whereby those gathered pay homage to the martyrs. The FLSC lost two of its Limbuwan Volunteers as the police shot them dead during movements in Limbuwan.

Rajkumar Angdembe Mangtok 20, a Limbuwan Volunteer, was married and had a four-month-old daughter when he died. Police shot him dead on October 7, 2007 at Kamal Khola during a Limbuwan general strike and protest. The government declared him a martyr on December 10, 2008 after series of talks between the Limbuwan movement and the government.

Mangtok was declared by the FLSC to be the first martyr of the present day Limbuwan movement.

The second martyr of the Limbuwan movement was Manil Tamang 21 from Jhapa. He was studying in grade 12. He was shot dead by the police on March 19, 2009 in Dhulabari, during the Federal Students Union³² protest against the unitary rules for holding Students' Union elections in Dhulabari campus. Manil Tamang was also declared a martyr by the FLSC.



Figure 2.1 Photos of the two FLSC Martyrs Placed on the Table in Front of the Party Dignitaries. The Third Photo is of Kangsore, the Limbu Commander, Shown Fighting the Gorkha Commander in the 1770s

The two martyrs are highly revered and respected in the party. Formal programs, meetings, and processions do not begin without paying tribute to their names and photos. The party respectfully remembers the martyrs in each and every formal program. Other dominant parties, such as the Nepali Congress (NC), the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, the Communist Party of Nepal-UML (CPN-UML) also have their own declared martyrs. Martyrdom

³² The Federal Students Union (FSU) is a sister organization of the FLSC. The Federal Students Union has a proven strong presence in different campuses in Limbuwan as well as in the University Campus, Kirtipur. The Federal Students Union demands in Dhulabari campus were that the election of the student union seats and officials be held on the basis of proportional representation.

is highly revered inside political parties and it seems to be an asset of the party that is incomparable with other things.

Republic, Federalism, and Secular State are the Fundamentals of Limbuwan Politics

Regardless of the internal conflict and competition between Limbuwan based political parties, all of them seem to agree upon the fundamental political principles and importance of the Republic of Nepal [*ganatantra*], federalism [*sanghiyata*], and a secular state [*dharma nirapekshya rajya*]. When it comes to the question of how to realize these principles of federalism and a secular state, Limbuwan politics diverges from mainstream politics as the basis of Limbuwan's politics are identity [*pahichan*], history [*itihās*], and territory [*that-thalo*]. Limbuwan's persistent quest for federalism is based on their unique territorial [*that-thalo*] belongingness and the history [*itihās*] of having fought a war against the conquerors in the past. FLSC leaders and cadres will not compromise on the province's name of Limbuwan as their leader proclaims: *Limbuwan ko lagi hajar barsh ladna tayar chhaun* [we are prepared to fight for one thousand years for Limbuwan]. Similarly, the FLSC's struggle for a secular state is not for the secularity defined by *sanatan dharma* and also not with cow as the national animal. These political issues of federalism and secularism in relation to Limbuwan will be discussed in the next chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

LIMBUS AND LIMBUWAN IN LIGHT OF THE POLITICS OF PLACE-NAMING AND MAPS

Introduction of Place-Naming in Relation to Indigenous Identity and State Making

At the beginning of the 1970s, anthropologists took a new direction by studying place-naming from the vantage of relationships between the state and indigenous peoples. They began to focus on naming as a discursive practice employed by dominant groups, particularly in the name of “nation-state building to secure and maintain power that served their own interests” (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002:20), and the re/naming of indigenous place names and the subsequent erasure of the identity and history of indigenous peoples and their places (Basso, 1996; Gengenbach, 2000; Jenson, 1995; Vom Bruck & Bodenhorn, 2006). Further, anthropologists considered such processes as the colonial exploitation of indigenous peoples by nation-states (Scott, Tehranian, & Mathias, 2002). Indeed, there was no “state-making without naming” (Scott et al., 2002) and, as Yeoh states, “toponymic inscriptions in the landscape are shaped in line with the instructions of the nation-state” (Yeoh 1996:304). Magnus Fiskesjö, in his study among the Wa Peoples of the border lands between China and Burma, found Chinese bureaucratic officials using only Chinese writings/publications about the Wa place-names. Fiskesjö observes that in “failure to promote Wa writing” the “Wa State leaders are often known publicly mainly by their Chinese names”(Fiskesjo 2010:132). The Limbus, having had a similar experience in terms of their language and script, have a similar problem now.

Scholars have also argued that ethnonyms, and place names among indigenous societies are rooted in concrete customs and “lived realities” (Dean 2005:808). In addition, Emmerson

argues that "names also express the power of the namer over the things named"(Emmerson 1984:4). Therefore, the territorial space names that indigenous peoples deploy, rooted as they are in culture and historically significant political relations, cannot be easily obliterated by the efforts of state actors or any other colonial forces. State power looms large in re/naming places in the 'earned' territories or dominions of colonists, with efforts to change all kinds of names including both social and geographic: those of individuals, groups, societies and nations as well as regions, territories, trails, streets, and neighborhoods. Nevertheless, these efforts simultaneously generate political consciousness among indigenous populations to protect the names "practiced" by and "lived" in their everyday lives (Dean, 2005:808-809). Hence, both the "namer" and the "named" exercise power to fulfill their own purposes. Regarding place naming, Alderman writes: "Naming is a powerful vehicle for promoting identification with the past and locating oneself within wider networks of memory... It is also a form of symbolic capital as well as symbolic resistance to the state. Naming is not always controlled by elites and dominant groups. It can also be appropriated by marginalized stakeholders who wish to have a greater voice in determining what vision of the past is inscribed in the landscape" (Alderman 2016:195). In other words, indigenous peoples and the state have distinct purposes, meanings, and values in reference to place-naming and peoples. Galasinacuteski and Skowronek write: "Names are means of taming reality. They are a cultural way of making distinctions in what surrounds people... what is without name does not exist"(Galasiński and Skowronek 2001:51). Therefore individual, group, and place names bear social, political and cultural implications. "Names, and more particularly, names related to peoples or nations, become part of "national identities" (Galasinski and Skowronek 2001:51). In this regard, names, particularly ethnonyms at the national scale, become

established through a dialogic process between the concerned groups (Bakhtin 1981), namely the indigenous peoples and the state-makers.

In Nepal, institutionalization or specifically the constitutional status of specific place-names may be integral to the politics of recognition of history, and collective identity between different communities and collective cultural groups involved in the process. In other words, institutionalization and naturalization of any place-names proceeds as part of the competitive politics between marginalized indigenous peoples and the dominant political parties.

Disagreements as well as dissenting voices and movements in relation to the naming of federal states during the constituent assembly's two tenures in Nepal (2008- 2012, and 2013-2015) showed us that place-naming could be part of a dialectical political process between indigenous peoples and the state makers.

Cultural Colonization of a Hindu State Over Indigenous Peoples Through Transformation of Place-Names in Nepal

There is no unanimous understanding on how Nepal was named. Historians have mainly relied on old *puranic sanskrit*—Indo-European language, and Newari—Tibeto-Burman, language texts in interpreting the etymology of Nepal as a place-name. The same problem lies with the name Gorkha—the territory from where the rulers of a consolidated state of Nepal originated— in terms of how the place-name Gorkha came into existence or how the name was founded. In Nepal, the persons in bureaucratic control, holding power [*satta*] and in writing practice [*lekhan parampara*] have remained dominant and decisive in terms of place-naming and renaming of place-names if they are found to be unfit or unintelligible in the language of the rulers.

Baburam Acharya, a historian who extols the history of the Shah dynasty, writes that “the name Gorkha was chosen because the Yogis of the *nath* sect had created an idol of *nath* and had left it with a stone inscription on a hill that was later called Gorkha when Drabya Shah conquered that part of the Magarat” (Acharya 1967:3) [my translation]. This interpretation by the author appears to provide legitimacy to the Hindu ruler’s conquests and reflects the rulers’ desire to expand their own dominion rather than to ‘unify’ the country. Some authors even claim that the name of the Kingdom of Gorkha is associated with protection of cows (*go* in Sanskrit) in the Hindu land. Chakrapani & Keshabji, (2013 B.S.: 1) assert that “our country Nepal is called 'Gorakha' and the inhabitants of Nepal are called 'Gorkhali'. The name Gorkha is the corrupted form of 'gorakshya, 'go=cow, *rakshya*=protection, and the Gorkhali name is given to the 'protectors of cow', it is said by the historian scholars.” [my translation]. Kirkpatrick was perhaps the first European scholar to describe how King PN Shah from Gorkha invaded and conquered the cities of Nepal in the 1760s. He mentioned that the “native Newars called [the cities] Yin, Yulloo, and Khopo whereas the Parbatiya Gorkhali called those three cities Kantipur/Kathmandu, Lalit/Patan, and Bhatgang/Bhadgaun” respectively (Kirkpatrick 1811:159–165). Kirkpatrick’s observation is succinctly summarized by Hamilton:

[T]he changes in the names of places, since the Hindu conquest, has been rapid [and] almost beyond conception; for instance, the capitals of the three principalities into which Nepal was divided, and which are now called Kathmandu, Lalit Patana, and Bhatgang, and which, in 1802, I always heard called by these names, were, during the Newar government, which ended in 1767, called Yin Daise, Yulloo Daise, and Khopo Daise. (Hamilton 1819:25).

The above observations corroborate the assumption that appropriation and change of indigenous place-names in Nepal began with the Gorkha invasion. The Tibeto-Burman place names that were found to be unintelligible to Indo-European speaking conquerors were bound to be changed. Govinda Neupane writes: “Districts and zones were founded with new names that

displaced the old and ethnicity oriented names. The Khasas were smart in the renaming process since long ago. An example of this can be taken from the changes of the place names in the Kathmandu valley”(Neupane 2000:124) [my translation]. In this regards, Malla’s study has shown how the names of the rivers and different places, which were originally in Tibeto-Burman Newari language, in the Kathmandu valley began to be changed from the early first millennium. He states that the Hindu political cultural domination in Nepal began as early in the 5th century “in the course of the Hindu political-cultural domination by the Lichchavis (A.D. 464-789), the Thakuris (A.D. 880-1200), and the Mallas (A.D. 1201-1769), the tribals were Hinduised or Sanskritised; and in the process, different species of tribal toponyms were Sanskritised, including the name of the country itself” (Malla 1996:1). Malla, in a different article entitled *River-Names of the Nepal Valley: A Study in Cultural Annexation* asserts that changes in the Kathmandu valley’s place-names—which were originally in the Newari language -into the Indo-*aryan* immigrants’ language were made so as to follow suit with the rulers’ language, thereby colonizing indigenous peoples’ languages and cultures. He writes: “Aboriginal cultures are subjugated and annexed by Indo-*aryan* immigrants through changing the river names in the Kathmandu valley from the Newari language into the Khas Nepali language...The puranic river-myths are unacknowledged statements of the process of cultural conquest of toponyms. What is more embarrassing is that a majority of aboriginal names have survived if only to uncover this cultural subterfuge. Thus we know how Tibeto-Burman *nwa-khu* (mouth-river or murmuring river) has become Indo-*aryan*, *Vak-mati* = *Vagmati*” (Malla 1983:57–62). Dr. Malla further states that the Nepal valley was the first victim of colonial Hinduization of place-names. He writes: "An overwhelming number of older place-names of this ancient valley are increasingly submerged under the "Nepalized" substitutions. Many more of the less familiar place-names are

receding into the world of oblivion with each passing generation. Place-names are as much a part of one's cultural heritage as personal surnames are of one's social history"(Malla 1983:68). But such unique cultural and social identities embedded in indigenous peoples' territorial names are often vulnerable to transformation and even extinction in the face of the state's bureaucratic expansion. Malla observes three stages of cultural annexation through the Sanskritisation of place-names, namely "Approximation; Translation; and Substitution"(Malla 1983:64). These processes of place-names changing with political subjugation and cultural colonization can be observed even among the Limbu *adivasi's* place-names in east Nepal. The following sections will demonstrate how Limbus have suffered such colonial consequences through place-names' changes in Limbuwan.

In Limbuwan, the Limbus have names in their own Limbu language, of their *that-thalo* [territory], villages, mountains, rivers, forests, and other places. But the place-names of Limbuwan *that-thalo* have been changing rapidly only in favor of the state bureaucracy, colonial development, and culturally exploitative governance. For example, a famous pilgrimage site Mukum Lungma³³ (L) is called Pathivara in Nepali. The Limbus' sacred mountain Faktanglung (L) is Kumbhakarna or Jannu in Nepali. Mount Everest's is called Sagarmatha in Nepali but it is Chumjan Lung in Limbu language. These are examples of how the Limbus have names of their places in their own language. But the Limbus collective identity, which is also embedded in their place-names has been in crisis, as Nepal's ruling caste groups favor their own Indo-European language over the Limbus' Tibeto-Burman. Acclaimed poet, writer and former Chancellor of the Nepal Academy (and a Limbu), Bairagi Kainla said:

Nepal's modernization, or Nepalization was to be founded on the destruction of the diverse mother tongues, scripts, religions, cultures, indigenous knowledge, and skills. The

³³A pilgrimage site famous for both Hindus and Limbus, located in Taplejung district.

adivasi peoples of Nepal consider the Nepalization process as the Sanskritization or Hinduization of Nepal. The Nepali state has always favored Khas-Nepali language over others in the name of ‘national unity and indivisibility’ of the country. As a consequence, the state has been encroaching into other non-Hindu, non-caste cultures. One of the forms of cultural destruction still continuing is a planned change of place-names from the Limbu language into Khas-Nepali. During the Panchayat regime, names and boundaries of different villages were changed to serve the interest of the ruling groups. Even after the Panchayat regime, the shape, size and names of different VDCs have been changed. These changes in the place-names have been exclusively in favor of Khas-Nepali language (Kainla 2059 v.s.:4) [my translation].

Kainla’s observations suggest that the Hindu state of Nepal proved to be culturally as well as linguistically colonial for the Limbus. Numerous cases could be presented to show the Limbus’ ancestral territory’s place-names were transformed into Nepali so as to make them intelligible for the rulers and ruling groups. However, irrespective of the Nepali state’s political as well as cultural exploitation, Limbus have been protesting against the state for claiming their territorial names due to need for their collective identity to be recognized.

One People, Three Ethnonyms: Kirat, *yakthumba*, and Limbu

The Limbus belong to three different ethnonyms, namely Kirat, *yakthumba*, and Limbu. The ethnonym Kirat—now also referred to as Kirat religion—is linked with the first known formal ruling dynasty who ruled over Nepal “from 2000 to 2500 years back” (Hodgson 1858:447; Acharya 2012 v.s.). Many scholars have stated that the Limbus were a nation belonging to the Kirat confederacy in ancient times (Hodgson 1858:447; Chemjong 1966; Chemjong 1975; Acharya 2060 v.s.; Acharya 2012 v.s.; Yongya 2050 v.s.). In this regard, Limbus were also called Kirat in the past but it is not used so often as an ethnonym now except in reference to Kirat as a religion. Similarly, the *yakthumba* ethnonym is exclusively used among Limbus themselves whereas “Limbu” is a common ethnonym used among Limbus to introduce themselves to non-Limbus. In the following sections, I will discuss these three terms, Kirat, *yakthumba*, and Limbu, in detail.

The Limbus and the Kirat Connection

Historians have written that the Kirat were the first ruling dynasty of ancient Nepal who ruled over Nepal “for 800 years (550 BC – 250 CE)” (Acharya 2060 v.s.:63). Under the Kirat dynasty, a total of 32 kings ruled the country and Yalambar was the first Kirat king. Historians and other scholars have traced genealogical connections between the Kirat kings and the Ten Limbu chiefs who founded their own chiefdoms during the first millennium (Chemjong 1966; Chemjong 1975; Baral and Tigela-Limbu 2008; Mabohang Limbu and Sharma Dhungel 2047 v.s.; Yongya 2050 v.s.). These scholars claim that the Limbu chiefs who founded Limbuwan in east Nepal were the descendants of the Kirat dynasty.

Brian Hodgson describes the history and vast extension of the Kirat territory and Kirati peoples:

The Kirantis, on account of their distinctly traceable antiquity as a nation and the peculiar structure of their language, are perhaps the most interesting of all the Himalayan races, not even excepting the Newars of Nepal proper...[W]e are assured that the Kiranti people was forthcoming in their present abode from 2000 to 2500 years back, and that their power was great and their dominion extensive, reaching possibly at one time to the delta of the Gangas (Hodgson, 1858, pp. 447–448).

The Kirat territory in east Nepal used to be known by three different names given on the basis of the geographical distance from the center, that is Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. The area nearest to Kathmandu was called Wallo-Kirat, and is mainly inhabited by Sunuwars. The territory in the middle was called Majh-Kirat, which is mainly inhabited by many of the Rai Kirati groups. Similarly, the farthest of the Kirat territory from the “center” was called Pallo-Kirat, and mainly inhabited by the Limbus. In this regards, the term “Kirat” denoted: i) the first ruling dynasty in Nepal; ii) the geographical territory or a kingdom; and iii) certain peoples inhabiting the territory and also believed to have been descended from the Kirat dynasty.

Scholars writing about the Kirat's political, social, and ethnic histories of have followed these categories in describing the history and the past politics of the present day Rai, Limbu, Yakha, and Sunuwars (Regmi 1978:536–539; Hodgson 1858:248–249; Acharya 2060 v.s.:18–26; Acharya 2012 v.s.; Yongya 2050 v.s.; Chemjong 1966; Chemjong 1952). Hodgson also described the Kirat territory on the basis of two provincial divisions demarcated by rivers. He stated that the sub-division of Kirant territory was called Khambuwan, which comprised the territories between the Sunkosi and Likhu rivers and the Likhu and Arun rivers. These are the territories inhabited mainly by the various clan groups of Rais including Sunuwars. In this way Hodgson described Khambuwan as a sub-province in the Kirat confederacy. Similarly Hodgson stated the territories between the Arun river and the Mechi river were called Limbuwan, inhabited by the Limbus, Yakha, Lohorung and Chintang (Hodgson 1858:248). Hodgson's descriptions of the Kirat groups show that they neither shared the same territory nor spoke the same language. Rather these different groups belonged to different ancestral territories, and followed different deities and divinities and different customs. In this regard, Hamilton's statement: "Among the Kirats was settled a tribe called Limbu, the manners of which were very nearly the same, and indeed the tribes intermarry," (Hamilton 1971:54) also suggests that the Limbus were considered a tribe under the Kirat. Furthermore, these different groups of Rais, Sunuwars, Yakha, Limbu were different nations with their own culture, language, and customs under the Kirat confederacy.

The term "Kirat" is preferred over "Limbu" in the writing traditions of older Limbu scholars. Limbu historian I.S. Chemjong wrote four books³⁴ (two in English and two in Nepali) on Limbu and Limbuwan's history but none of the four books used the term 'Limbu' in their

³⁴ 1. Kirat Itihas (1952) 2. History and Culture of Kirat People, Vol. 1 (1966). 3. History and Culture of Kirat People, Vol. 2 (1967). 4. Kiratkalin Bijaypur ko Itihas (History of Bijaypur During the Kirat Period) (1975)

titles. Similarly, the title of the booklet: “Pallo-Kirat Limbuwan ka Magharu” [Demands of the Limbuwan Pallo-Kirat] by B.B. Chemjong, published in 1957, also seems to follow the trend established by the previous authors. However, since the 1970s the term Limbu seemed to be used more than the term Kirat among authors who focused their studies on Limbu and Limbuwan. Anthropologists Lionel Caplan (1970), Rex Jones (1973) and Shirley Jones and Rex Jones (1976), Philippe Sagant (1996), Bedh Prakash Upreti (1976) used the terms Limbu and Limbuwan with little in relation to the idea of Pallo-Kirat. One may find the term “Pallo-Kirat” being replaced by the terms “East Nepal” in the titles of these anthropologists’ publications. More recent publications focusing on the history, politics and identity of Limbus provide central importance to the term “Limbu”. Shiva Kumar Shrestha’s “Limbuwan ko Aitihāsik Rup Rekha” [Historical Outline of the Limbuwan] published in 1985; “Limbuwan ko Rajniti: Vartaman ra Dastabej” [Politics of Limbuwan: Present and the Documents] by Bhawani Baral and Kamal Tigela (2008), and “Hodgson pandulipi ma Limbu Gorkha yudhda” [Limbu-Gorkha War in the Hodgson Manuscripts], by Kamal Tigela et al (2013), are a few examples.

Kirat Alliance for Cultural Recognition

Four *adivasi-janajati* organizations, namely the Limbus’ Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, the Rais’ Kirat Rai Yayokha, the Yakha’s Yakha Chhumma, and the Sunuwar’s Sunuwar Samaaj made a collective decision in 2001 that they should mobilize their respective local offices and people to report that their religion³⁵ was Kirat in the census held in 2001. They decided to start a

³⁵ Whether the Limbus should call their religion as Kirat or something else has been a contentious issue. The Limbus in Sikkim call their religion *yuma samyo* (*yuma* religion as the *yuma* divinity is the creator of all the living and non-living beings in this universe). The Limbus in Nepal are divided in this regards. It would be safe to say that around half the Limbus observe the religion known as “animism” by E B Tylor as they observe sacrificial rituals whereas the “true” observers of Kirat religion (also called *satya hangma*) do not sacrifice animals, do not offer alcohol to the divinities, and also abstain from eating meat and drinking alcohol.

collective campaign that all the Limbus, Rais, Yakha and Sunuwars should mention Kirat as their religion in the census form. All of those organizations' central offices printed leaflets, posters and distributed them across their territories. Kirat Yakthung Chumlung organized workshops and held other programs in different parts of Limbuwan as part of their contribution to the effort. Their efforts paid off. The census in 2001 reported the Kirat religion to be 4.5 percent of the total population compared with merely 1 percent who said their religion was Kirat in the 1991 census. In fact Rais, Limbus, Yakhas, and Sunuwars differ from each other in cultural and religious ritual observations. It is believed that they all belong to a broad Kirat group but the groups all have different deities and divinities. Their ancestral *that-thalo* are different and far apart. But why did they have to come together to forge alliance for Kirat religion? Their collective decision for Kirat religion should be understood in the context beyond their actual religious and ritual practices. In fact their decision's rationale may be clearly seen in relation to the politics of collective cultural identity and recognition of these groups as belonging to a different religion other than the dominant Hindu religion. The then chairman of Kirat Yakthung Chumlung explained that "one of the objectives of bringing together those four Kirati groups in the census report was to show the strength of the number of the followers of Kirat religion so that they could create a synergistic force for demanding a public holiday on their national festivals, namely *udhauri* and *ubhauri*.³⁶ After almost a decade long struggle on this issue by Kirat peoples, the government of Nepal has declared public holidays on the occasions of their main festivals, *udhauri* and *ubhauri*, since 2009. By forging the Kirati alliance, the Rai, Limbu, Yakha and Sunuwar succeeded in being recognized by the state as Kirat-religion groups with their own religion, culture and festivals. Gaining public holidays on *udhauri* and *ubhauri* was considered by the movement

³⁶*Udhauri* and *ubhauri* festivals are called *chasok tangnam* and *yakwa tangnam* respectively in Limbu language. *Chasok tangnam* is celebrated during crops harvesting time while *yakwa tangnam* is celebrated during the cropping time.

organizers to be a major success of their movement, particularly in light of the boycott of the Dashain festival by *adivasi-janajati* groups in Nepal. It is the Kirati groups themselves who forged an alliance and movement to meet the goal to be recognized as a different religion. The meanings of the term Kirat have been changed along epochal movements and time. Kirat was the name of a ruling dynasty and the Kirat kingdom extended all across the Himalayan regions during the remote past and they ruled over Nepal for about 800 years before the Kirats were overthrown by the Lichhavi dynasty (Hodgson 1858; Acharya 2060 v.s.; Acharya 2012v.s.; Chemjong 1966; Chemjong 1952). Once overthrown, they were diminished to the status of chieftains of the different chiefdoms in east Nepal (Chemjong 1966; Chemjong 1952; Mabohang Limbu and Sharma Dhungel 2047 v.s.). These Kirat chiefdoms were renamed as Wallo-Kirat, Majh-Kirat, and Pallo-Kirat, respectively eastward from the Nepal valley after the Kirat chiefdoms were annexed under the dominion of the Gorkha Kingdom in the 1770s. This is how the ancient Kirat dynasty gradually lost its political status from a kingdom that extended across vast territories to a confederacy shrunk within east Nepal.

Now the term Kirat, both as a territorial-historical confederacy and a category of religion, is contested within Nepal. Since the representative organizations of Rai, Limbu, Yakha and Sunuwar decided their own group of four belonged to the Kirat religion, the decision seemed to close the door for other groups. The Dhimals, at some point during the early 2000s, raised their voices to claim that they also belonged to the Kirat confederacy but those “original” Kirats did not seem to listen to the Dhimal claim. However, for the Limbus, their religion for the official census reporting is Kirat whereas they are called Limbu as an ethnic group. In a nutshell, “Limbu” is an ethnonym and “Kirat” is a religion for the Limbus

***Yakthungba/yakthumba* as Endonym of the Limbus**

Both the terms *yakthungba* and *yakthumba* are used interchangeably as common parlance among Limbus. I will use the term with the spelling *yakthumba* in this dissertation. Limbus call themselves *yakthumba* while communicating among themselves in their own Limbu language which they call *yakthung pan* (*yakthung* (L) = Limbu; *pan* (L) = language). *yakthung pan*, with a tradition of writing in its own script, has been reported as the 'Limbu' language by the census reports of Nepal. *Yakthumba* introduce themselves as a “Limbu” to other non-Limbus when communicating through the Nepali language with other non-Limbus. Limbuwan (Limbu territory or region) is called *yakthung laje* (L) (Limbu state/province) in the Limbu language. Scholars state that the territorial name *yakthung laje* preceded the name Limbuwan (Chemjong 1952; Laoti 2005; Baral and Tigela-Limbu 2008; Mabuhang 2063 v.s.; Chemjong 1975; Subba 1995; Nembang 1987). It is also widely believed and written by Limbu scholars that *yakthumba* was their endonym and Limbu was exonym (Laoti 2005; Subba 1995; Mabohang Limbu and Sharma Dhungel 2047 v.s.; Kainla 2059 v.s.). I mention this because many social scientists and others, including politicians who are not familiar with the details, believe that the terms/names Limbu and Limbuwan are words from the Limbu language. On the contrary, available writings, etymology and some political historical circumstances reveal that the names Limbu and Limbuwan were rather “introduced or given by the outsiders” (Campbell 1840:595; Campbell 1869:148) and established through the political negotiation between the tribal *yakthumba* and the “outsiders”. *yakthumba* and Limbu names can be explained in their own political and social relations.

Political/Territorial Basis of *yakthumba*

In Limbu language, “*yak* (L) means fort and *thum* (L) means physical strength, power; and *thung* (L) means war” (Chemjong and Kainla 2059 v.s.:191). Hence, etymologically, the group that belonged to the same fort or waged battles to defend their fort might have been named as *yakthumba* or *yakthungba*. The word, *thum* also means “an administrative unit” (Chemjong and Kainla 2059 v.s.:206). In this sense, *yakthumba* refers to the people united under the same fort or administrative unit.

The term *yak* has two broad meanings and contexts in Limbu society and Limbuwan territory: i) *yak* as an aspect of individual identity and dignity; and ii) *yak* as an aspect of collective identity, with reference to Limbuwan’s history and territory. Laoti writes: “*yak* is also called '*mangenna'yak*.” (Laoti 2005:22). The “Limbu-Nepali-English Dictionary” defines *mangenna* in three interrelated terms: the “place of origin of the Limbu tribes...to (perform) worship to raise one’s head high;...to perform a worship for one’s welfare and safety” (Chemjong and Kainla 2059 v.s.:324). In this regard, *mangenna yak* carries important connotations for the Limbus. Having one's *mangenna* low means (Nepali: *sir khasnu*) means that the person ultimately will lose his or her identity. Without his/her *mangenna* high, a Limbu can do nothing important; a person may even die, or will become socially non-existent, with no pride or dignity in society. This sense of personal ontology is directly linked to lineage identity. *mangenna mundhum*³⁷ or mythic accounts tell the ancestral origin of a lineage and the locales of where and how the lineage first started settled life. The *mangenna mundhum* helps the Limbus to

³⁷*mundhum* is the “holy Kirant- Limbu scripture based on oral tradition...scriptural knowledge...mythology”(Chemjong and Kainla 2059 v.s.:343). *Mundhum* is the whole of all the Limbu oral texts or mythologies that tell about the origin of this universe, world, living and non-living beings, and human-nature relations. For the Limbus, *mundhum* explains the meanings of the totality of human life and society including the rites of passage.

trace their lineage's territorial history. The ritual specialist known as a *phedangma*³⁸, while doing the *mangenna* ritual of a person, propitiates ancestors and recites: “you were originated in such and such a place, and you are the descendant of such and such an ancestor. Your main root is such and such, you have such and such foundation. You have such and such ancestors.” In this regard, a person losing his/her identity is equal to the loss of the person’s lineage and territorial affiliation.

Secondly, *yak* means fort or *gadhi* (N). *yak* is believed to be the sacred site of the origins of the Limbus. In Limbuwan, there are dozens of *yaks* which belong to different Limbu chieftains who ruled the territory in the past (Khajum, 2069 v.s.). Each Limbu clan group has their own *yak*, which may be understood as the place or territory where the ancestors of that clan originated or may have been the first settlers. The location of a *yak* is usually on a hill or a mountain top. The *yak*’s location also connotes the clan's political relations as the clan’s ancestors would have established the *yak* so as to defend their territory. In present day Limbu literature and *mundhum*,³⁹ a *yak* [fort] is also described as the palace of a *yakthumba* King. There are dozens of such *yaks* all across Limbuwan, each of them with their own history. Many of these *yaks* have been the sites for pilgrimage and cultural preservation. They are also being revived as sites for the heritage of Limbuwan. For example, the editorial of a souvenir report about one such fort says: “Forts had an important role during the rule of Limbuwan in the past but these forts diminished and lost their roles after the annexation of Limbuwan under Nepal. Now even the word *yak* seems to have diminished its meaning let alone its history” (Khajum, 2069 v.s.:2). Similarly, a Limbu oral text describes the grandiose and vast expansion of a

³⁸ A class of Limbu priest “well-versed in scriptures” (Chemjong and Kainla 2059 v.s.:313). *Phedangma* is a Limbu ritual performer priest.

³⁹The oral texts that describe the origin, history and all aspects of human lives and their relationships with this living world and beyond.

yakthumba King Lilim Hang and his fort in these terms: “From one side flows the Brahmaputra river up northward to China and Tibet and downward to the plain ocean. In the middle lies the Tawalung Susuwaden Taklung *yak*, the fort-palace of the King Lilimhang”⁴⁰ (Baral & Tigela-Limbu, 2008:83) [my translation].

Padam Singh Subba 'Apatan' (2062 v.s.; 2005 AD) writes in reference to the Limbus in Sikkim: "The Limbu are called by three interchangeable names: 'Chong', 'Limbu', and 'Subba'. But the Limbus do not call among themselves by these three ethnonyms. They rather call themselves *yakthumba*, meaning 'defenders of the fort’" (Subba 2005:242) [my translation]. Similarly, George van Driem writes: "The Limbus designate themselves by the name *Yakthunba* ... The component-*thunba* may derive from the etymon *thun-* of which the adjective *kedhunba* 'brave, heroic, manly, hold appears to be an active participle" (van Driem 1987:xix).

The word *yakthumba* as discussed above corroborates Maurice Godelier’s statements about the relationships between societal existence and territorial defense. Based on his study among the Baruya in the New Guinea highlands, Godelier wrote about the relationships between indigenous societies and the state in relation to how indigenous societies lose their autonomous status as a society, and are thereby diminished to the status of community, when they are incorporated under the state. He writes:

When [the Baruya] lost sovereignty over their mountains and their rivers, and over their own persons, the Baruya ceased to be a society, and became a local "tribal community" under the authority of a state, an institution totally alien to their history and their ways of thinking and acting... We thus see what it means to have a territory, a set of natural elements—lands, rivers, mountains, lakes, sometimes sea—that provide human groups with resources for their livelihood and development. A territory can be conquered, or inherited from ancestors who conquered it or appropriated it without a fight (if they settled uninhabited regions). A territorial border must be known, if not recognized, by the societies that occupy and exploit the neighboring spaces. In all cases, a territory must be

⁴⁰“थिक्नाङ्कर नुवा यु (दुधकोसी), थिक्नाङ्कर तुस्रोती उम्रोती यु (ब्रम्हापुत्र नदि), थो कर सिन्युक मुदेन मो कर तेमेन वलड, आवासो कावारे काक्मेन्देनेन., खाम्लुङ अइरे : पुन्मेन्देलेन, किधिदङ्गारे लिनमेन्देलेन, फक्कक मियारे कप्मेनदेलेन, साप्ची कुलुम याक्थुङ्हाड लिलिमहाङ् लेन हाङ्गुक्नादेन तावालुङ सुसुवादेन ताक्लुङ यक”।

defended by force, through the use of arms and organized violence, but also through rites that appeal to the gods and other invisible powers to weaken or annihilate enemy. (Godelier 2009:145–146).

Godelier's concluding statement based on the study of Baruya and their relationships with the New Guinea state is convincing. To me, Godelier's general points based on his ethnographic study are comparable to the situation of the *yakthumbas* in Nepal. The words: *yak*, *thung*, and *thum*, which in combined make up the term *yakthumba* connote the meanings of territorial strength and power through which the *yakthumbas* would maintain their autonomy. Following Bourdieu (1991) and Alia (2007), I argue that ethnonyms and place-names are integral to each other. In their anthropological essence these words speak about power relations and political motivation. Bourdieu writes:

[social scientists] must examine the part played by words in the construction of social reality and the contribution which the struggle over classifications, a dimension of all class struggles, makes to the constitution of classes... clans, tribes, ethnic groups or nations (Bourdieu 1991:105).

Names, particularly referring to any ethnic group or nation, are primarily loaded with politico-historical facts in which economic relations would occur only secondarily. In this regard, Valerie Alia, referring to her work on naming among the Inuits, writes:

The *politics of naming* has never been defined as such, but has existed between the lines of many disciplines...[which] provide the foundation for political onomastics, the politics of naming (Alia, 2007:6-7).

Alia argues that "naming is inseparable from other political phenomena and is an important key to analyzing power relations" (Alia, *ibid*:7). Inside the Limbu community, references about *yakthumba* exist not only in day-to-day conversation but also in rites of passage and other religious rituals. The word *yak* [fort] is invoked in almost all rituals, irrespective of individual or groups. Individuals belong to their clan *yak*, which the *phedangma* invokes in incantation of the *mundhum* and the individuals must be referred as belonging to a particular *yak* for the purpose of

all rituals that are performed either within the household or group. Chemjong (1966) in his book *History and culture of Kirat People* writes that the Limbus, before their conquest by the Gorkha Hindu kingdom, were politically administered under the ten fort system. He writes that the Limbu territory was divided into ten *Thums*- districts- in which each of the chiefs or *Hangs*[L] also built his *fort* and fixed the boundaries of his district. For example:

Thindolung Khokya Hang was elected king of the Yangwarok district. He built his fort at Hastapur and ruled Mabo, Thebe, Loksom, Setling, Tamling, Saling, Kambang and other tribes (Chemjong, 1966:67).

Similarly, Campbell's account of how the *yakthumba* Hangs [L] built and defended their forts also corroborates the present day Limbus' association with their *yak*:

Before the conquest of the whole of the country east of the Arun, the Limboos held a great portion of the country... They were then divided into many small chiefships... In each chiefship it was the custom to maintain a fort or stronghold of very difficult access, in which the chief generally lived, and to which his chosen followers repaired for its defence during a feud with a neighbor, or a dispute with the lord superior. It was to these strongholds that the Limboos retired during the incursions of the conquering Goorkhas, and in many of them they are said to have displayed the most heroic bravery against the common enemy of all the mountain tribes (Campbell 1869:151).

The etymology of the word *yakthumba* and political as well as cultural meanings associated with it indicate that the tribal name *yakthumba* is the endonym of the present day Limbus. Their tribal endonym *yakthumba* and its meanings also resonate with *aitihasik that-thalo* [historical territory] of the Limbus from the ritual, and political-cultural dimensions.

Limbu as a Negotiated Ethnonym

Both Limbu and foreign scholars have different theories on how the ethnonym Limbu came into existence. I find the observations of two foreign scholars, one from the 18th century and another from the very end of the second millennium, illuminating. Campbell, the then British -India colonial government's resident representative in Darjeeling, wrote:

The word "Limboo" is a corruption, probably introduced by the Goorkhas, of "Ekthoomba" the correct denomination of these people; and is generally used by foreigners to designate the whole population...the Limboos consider themselves to be the aboriginal inhabitants of the country they now occupy, at least they are satisfied that none of the neighboring tribes have any claims of preoccupation (Campbell, 1840, p. 595).

Another scholar Dr. R.K. Sprigg writes in the foreword for "The Limboos of the Eastern Himalaya With Special Reference to Sikkim" to say: "Limbus inhabited Limbuwan and parts of Sikkim even before they were known as Limbus! This is because the original name of the Limbus, the name that they prefer to use for themselves, is not Limbu but *yakthungba* or *yakthumba*" (Subba 1999:v. Foreword by Sprigg). I. S. Chemjong added further texts—on the basis of those new materials—to his book *The History and Culture of Kirat People* published in 1967.

I. S. Chemjong views Limbu as an ethnonym and *yakthumba* as a race and considers that *yakthumba* was adopted as a new name for a race:

After the partition of the Kirat land of Limbuwan into Ten thums, the representatives of the Ten Leaders of Shan Mokwan people again assembled in a meeting at their holy place Ambe Pojoma, discussed and decided to name their nationality. Accordingly, they resolved and changed the name of Shan Mokwan in *yakthumba* or Limbu. The Ten Leaders or chiefs became Ten Limbus and the word *yakthumba* was retained as the new name for race (Chemjong 1966:63).

Yehang Laoti seconds I. S. Chemjong's statement but also calls for further studies focusing on whether the word "Limbu" existed before the contact between Limbuwan and the Gorkha King, known in Limbu language as *Pene Hang* or King of the Chettri-Bahun (Laoti 2005:18). Swami Prapannacharya also writes: "To date, no proof has been discovered the use of the term Limbu before the 17th century. There remains this as a topic for inquiry" (Prapannacharya 2047 v.s.:18) [my translation].

To sum up the many views recounted above, initially a new group called *yakthungbas* diverged from a broader confederacy of Kiratas in the 7th-8th century CE. From 17th-18th century

onwards the *yakthumbas* appear to have received a new name, Limbu, after they came into contact with both Hindu Gorkhalis, European explorers and colonial administrators.

The word 'Limbu' has comparably reliable and variable etymologies. According to a Limbu dictionary, *Li* (L) means bow and *Pu* (L) means bird (Chemjong&Kainla, 2059 v.s.). It is said that the Limbus earned this name for being excellent archers and hunters. This ethnonym appears to be based on their subsistence patterns, especially hunting birds and other game. Another etymology traces the origin of 'Limbu' to the fact that the Limbus occupied their land by defeating their enemies with their *li* (L) = bows. The name "Limbu" however, does not seem to be convincingly derived from the Limbu language or economic practices as many scholars cited above state that the ethnonym Limbu was unfamiliar for the *yakthumbas* before they entered into political relationships with the Gorkhali Hindu *aryan* rulers (Laoti 2005; Prapannacharya 2047v.s.). Yet there is no mention of Limbu in *mundhum* too. A lot of references of the word *yakthumba* may be found in *mundhum* but not the word Limbu. The two issues namely that scholars view that the "Limbu" ethnonym was given to *yakthumbas* by the outsiders on the one hand and absence of the term Limbu from the *mundhum* on the other evoke further questions. How had outsiders, be it the Gorkhalis or the Westerners, introduced the ethnonym Limbu with reference to the *yakthumbas*?

So far we are only told by scholars that during the 18th and 19th centuries the Gorkhali conquerors or the colonists from Europe contributed to the genesis of the denomination 'Limbu' or 'Limboo' for the *yakthumbas*. What is yet unanswered is why did both the Gorkhali conquerors and other 'foreigners' alike call those people Limbu? Much earlier than Campbell, Kirkpatrick in his book "An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal (Being the Substance of Observations Made During A Mission to that Country in the Year 1793)" wrote:

The mountainous tract is inhabited by various uncivilized nations, ...the principle of these tribes are ... the Limboos or Limbooas, whom the Nepal government finds it no easy matter to keep in order (Kirkpatrick, 1969:281[1811]).

Several decades later, Hodgson, the then permanent resident representative of the British government to Nepal for more than two decades in the 1830s-40s and later spending his retired life in Darjeeling for more than a decade, wrote extensively about the Limbus, their culture, and their language. He used both *yakthumba* and Limbu denominations in the beginning but seemed to have stopped using the former term in his subsequent reports, writing “Limbu” exclusively. Risley (1891) and then Vansittart (1894) described the Limbus relying on the same details from their predecessors' writings. In this regard, Hamilton (1819) wrote:

The Kirats, being vigorous beef-eaters, did not readily submit to the Rajputs [i.e., Hindu Kshetriya ruling caste]. Among the Kiratas was settled a tribe called Limbu... and it would not appear that the Lamas had made any progress in converting the Limbus (Hamilton, 1971:54 [1819]).

Furthermore, Vansittart wrote:

There is one regiment of Limbus in the Nepalese army, called the "Bhaironath" but on account of their quarrelsome nature they were always quartered apart. The Limbus are born shikaris [hunters] (Vansittart, 1894).

These quotes drawn from the 19th century writings suggest, I would argue, that the denomination of Limbu, having been ascribed and deployed by outsiders, gradually came to be accepted by the Limbus in recognition of the outsiders.

The Limbus, as I recounted above, inhabited and still inhabit geographically contiguous hills located amidst Nepal, India, and Tibet. In fact, the creation of three different states, the Hindu nation-state of Nepal, the British colonial state in India, and the Kingdom of Sikkim, divided the Limbu population into three different countries—Sikkim was an independent country until it was annexed by India in 1974—by cutting through

traditional Limbu territory. Hence, the Limbus' problem of identity and national history is similar to the problems facing other ethnic minorities such as the Wa (Fiskesjo 2010), the Akha (Sturgeon 1997), and Kachin (Dean 2010) of South-East Asia. To demonstrate how the Kachin territory has been divided into three states, Dean writes: “The Kachin are a nation divided territorially and made into minorities in modern China, Myanmar and India by the imposition of so-called “international” boundaries” (Dean 2010:1). The Limbus’ case in relations to their territory being divided into three different states is similar to the situation of the Kachins. Understandably, outsiders who were dealing with the Limbus faced two immediate problems: i) how to control the *yakthumbas*, who as the border-land people did not succumb easily to state authority and ii) how to create a name for those peoples whose self-given endonym in a Tibeto-Burman language, *yakthumba*, was literally difficult to utter for the Indo-European language speakers (both Nepali and English belong to the same root). As (Sturgeon, 1997), Dean (2005), and Fiskesjö (2010) have demonstrated in their studies among Akha (China and Thailand borders), Kachin (China and Burma, even India, borders), and Wa (China and Burma borders), it has not been easy for outsiders to name and tame border-land peoples in Asia. Outsiders struggled to find intelligible and pronounceable words to denominate groups like the *yakthungba*. Gorkhali and British colonial administrators, thus, might have coined appropriate names to “tame” the “uncivilized” groups.

The encounters between the Limbus and the Hindu Gorkhali rulers occurred in two ways: firstly in battle at least three times as described by historians (Chemjong, 1967) and through the treaty between the Limbus and the Hindu King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1774. There is no *yakthumba* word used in the text of the treaty but the word Limbu is:

We have received your reply to our previous letter. We desire peace and harmony. Our intent is good... We hereby pardon all of your crimes and confirm the customs and traditions, rights and privileges of your country... Take care of the land as you did when it was being ruled over by your own chieftains. Enjoy the land from generation to generations. You are different from the 9,00,000 Rais, [of Majhkirat], because [their] chieftains are to be displaced, but not you... As mentioned above remain under your chieftains and enjoy your traditional rights and privileges and your lands. In case we confiscate your land, may our ancestral gods destroy our kingdom. We hereby inscribe this pledge on a copper plate and also issue this royal order to our Limbu brethren.

Kantipur: Shrawan Sudi 12, 1831 (July 1774) (Chemjong, 1967:115; Regmi 1978:626)

The treaty-paper above is the first formal document (discovered so far) written by the Gorkha King to the name of the Limbus. His descendants continued to write to the Limbus with no references to *yakthumba*. Limbus did not seem to have complained about the ethnonym. However, historical documents maintained and written by the Limbus show that the Limbus also did not call the Gorkha King by his real name: Prithvi Narayan Shah. Instead Limbus called him *pene hang*⁴¹ (Chemjong, 1967; Tigela-Limbu, Tunghang, and Angla 2013).

Names are integral to identity. The *yakthumbas* seem to have accepted the ethnonym Limbu because it recognized their identity as linked to a *that-thalo* or territory (Godelier, 2009) and provided them with a political status in the emergent order of the new state-nation in which they were now encompassed. Therefore it seemed that the Limbu name or identity was established in a "dialogic" process between the *Yakthungbas* and outsiders.

⁴¹*Pene* (L) = Chhetri; *hang* (L) = King

Place-Naming and State making

Having located the Limbu and *yakthumba* names in their politico-historical contexts, I shall now move further to see how the Nepali Hindu state apparatus dominated the Limbu people, a process that led to detrimental consequences for the Limbu's culture and language. In summer 2008, during a trip to Limbuwan in search of possible fieldwork area, I visited Rajarani village and interviewed local Limbus about the history and social aspects of the village's name. The place-name *Rajarani* sounds beautiful in Nepali language as the name *raja* (N) = king, and *rani* (N) = queen, are embedded within it. The question I posed was how did a Nepali place-name become established in an area where Limbus outnumbered all other population? If the Limbus in the past communicated with each other exclusively in the Limbu language, how did a place-name in Nepali become so popular and institutionalized in that area?

In fact the location to which one could exactly pin-point as Rajarani was the place where—as I was told by the elderly Limbus—the post-office, police post, and school had been established over the past seven decades. These services all represented the intrusion of the state into a locality. I wondered how such an amiable Nepali name— with the words *raja* and *rani*⁴² being among the most highly respected words during the monarchical era—became established in an area where majority of the people would speak Limbu. The landscape of Rajarani constitutes a small valley surrounded by hills with two small ponds or rather swamps on both sides of a small hill. People called these ponds swamps in the past. They were literally swamps. These two small swamps were called *Mawarak*⁴³ and *Pawarak*⁴⁴. After the names of these two swamps, a new place-name “Rajarani” was invented and appropriated as the whole VDC (Village Development Council) is called Rajarani VDC now.

⁴²*Raja* (N) = King; *rani* (N) = Queen

⁴³*Ma warak* (L) = female pond.

⁴⁴*Pa warak* (L) = male pond

There are also two villages located in the watersheds of both swamps by the same names Mawarok and Pawarok. Other villages in the vicinity, are also all named in Limbu language: *Singemba, Sambhekwa, Nangi*.⁴⁵ Hence, all these five village names remain with the Limbu names as they were. Why did Rajarani alone acquire a Nepali name while other village names remained in the Limbu language? This question is difficult to answer. Local Limbus could only guess that this place began to be called Rajarani after the government conducted the first informal official land survey in the 1930s. But the naming of Rajarani has created some conflict and disarticulation among other local place-names in this local Limbus' *that-thalo*. Firstly, Rajarani is the name of the administrative and political unit called a VDC, which is further divided into nine wards. Different villages and settlements surrounding the center of Rajarani are assigned ward numbers. For example, Mawarok village is assigned to ward number 6, Pawarok village is assigned to ward number 9, Singembato number 3, and Nangi tonumber 1. In this regard, the name of the VDC, Rajarani, and respective wards represent the Nepali state apparatus. Even village names that are in the Limbu language have lost their relevance for administrative purposes. Local people, including Limbus, as citizens have to acquire essential documents such as land ownership certificates, citizenship cards, passports, and marriage certificates. Such documents bear only the ward numbers but not the village name. So the state creates a different bureaucratic world through its agents, and name assignment is one of the ways it does this. Bourdieu states: "There is no social agent who does not aspire, as far as his circumstances permit, to have the power to name and to create the world through naming" (Bourdieu, 1991:106). Similarly, Scott et al. write:

"State naming practices and local, customary naming practices are strikingly different. [Naming] are devised by very distinct agents for whom the purpose of identification are radically different... Purely local, customary practices... achieve a level of precision and

⁴⁵ *Singemba* (L)= tall tree; *Sambhekwa* (L) = flattened rice available; *Nangi* (L) = snow fall

clarity, perfectly suited to the needs of knowledgeable locals. State naming practices are, by contrast, constructed to guide an official 'stranger' in identifying unambiguously persons and places, not just in a single locality, but in many localities, using standardized administrative techniques" (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002:4).

In Rajarani's case, locally, customarily, socially institutionalized names: Mawarak (L), Pawarak (L), Singemba (L), and Nangi (L) were replaced by the numerical assignments, that is, ward numbers 6, 9, 3, and 1, respectively with the standardized technique applied to all over the country. However, indigenous practice is so resilient that it is not possible to completely replace the place-names founded in local social and customary practices. Despite the state administration's effort to erase Limbu names, they remain intact and meaningful in Limbu social practice. For example, they not only remain in use in day-to-day social interactions between people but also are essentially used during social events, such as marriage ceremonies, death funerals, and other rituals. The Limbus of Rajarani have a custom of *chesung*⁴⁶ (L) and *hukwa*⁴⁷ (L) exchange between the affinal kins and within the lineages respectively. Households must keep the exact record or memory of *chesung* and *hukwa* gifts so that it may be gifted back with the same item and quantity (in *hukwa*'s case) in the future. Villages' names are exclusively used in keeping such records and memorization, and also for the labor exchanges. Hence, the state imposed names and numbers are deployed for the purposes of a state machinery while the Limbu place-names, which bear the social, historical and territorial meanings in terms of the Limbus' lived experiences as a nation, resiliently persist because the place-names "touches so many

⁴⁶*chesung* (L) is a gift mainly in the form of food (mainly meat) and drinks (alcohol). It is called *chesung* when received or gifted away between affinal kins, between the in-laws families. For example, in the first year of marriage, a married daughter, with her husband, visits her natal home and relatives with elaborate items of *chesung*: two whole pig carcasses, two vessels of liquor, different snacks (for the parents family) and pig legs, ribs, and bottles of liquor for other close kins.

⁴⁷*hukwa* (L) is an informal type of gift mainly in the form of food or drink givenaway or received within the same lineage. At the occasions of wedding feast, last funeral feast, and such events, the invitees from the same lineage bring in liquor, beer, and snacks. Such gifts that are exchanged within the lineage are called *hukwa*. *huk* (L) = hand; *wa* (L) = available. It is believed among Limbus that we are not supposed to visit anyone's house empty-handed. However, in practice, it is basically the women who bring in or receive *hukwa* and keep an excellent memory of who has brought what and how to gift back with the same item and quantity in the future.

dimensions” (Myers 1986:47) of Limbu life. Fred Myers states that a country [nation] is relevant in the system of significant places as "a projection into symbolic space of various social processes" (Myers 1986:47; Feld and Basso 1996:15).

In this regard, we are able to distinguish between a “nation” (cultural), and “state” (bureaucratic) as two different spheres in life with which the Limbus of Rajarani have to engage with. In other words, Rajarani’s local place-names still prevail in Limbu social practices in relation to their social history, their ecological reality, and relation to the land. I argue here that language, social institutions, relationships to land, kinship organization, customary practice, and a particular history are the foundations of the Limbu nation in parallel to the state’s apparatus. The persistence of place-names in the Limbu language and the everyday use of these terms in practice produce and reproduce among the Limbus a different sense of national unity. Yet, there is no denial that the Limbus are part of the Nepali state. All Limbus need citizenship cards, many need passports if they wish to travel abroad, have land ownership certificates, require voter registration cards to exercise their right to vote, and may require other documents for other benefits. Through these bureaucratic necessities, individuals become part of the broader political process. All these state-issued documents show information exclusively in the Nepali language. In their everyday lives Limbus, therefore, constantly switch between two realities. On the one hand, they define themselves as members of a collective Limbu society and, on the other, as citizens of the state of Nepal.

In the case of the invention of Rajarani as a designated place, one can clearly see how a change in place name made exclusively Limbu places intelligible and visible to the state through the official Nepali language. From the perspective of the Limbu language, state-imposed language displaced and marginalized Limbu place-names and colonized their lands and polity.

Views of Political Party Leaders and Scholars on Limbuwan

In July 2015, the Limbuwan Study Center (LSC), a research wing of the Kirat *Yakthung* Chumlung (KYC), the Limbus' organization in Nepal, organized an interaction program entitled: *Limbuwan: hiyo, ajara bholi* (Limbuwan: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow). The program was organized in the context that the Constituent Assembly (CA) had made public the preliminary draft of the constitution for public discussion and feedback, if any. Yet, the preliminary draft included seven federal states with no names, let alone the Limbuwan state for which the Limbuwan-based political parties, and the KYC had been struggling for decades (described in chapters 2 and 4). Since the final constitution was highly unlikely to have Limbuwan in light of a constitution draft with un-named states, Limbus and their organizations took the chance to interact amongst Limbu organizations as well as others. The Limbuwan Study Center's (LSC) program with the above topic was also organized in such a context around the uncertainty of Limbuwan. As a research student and a member of the LSC, I also attended the program. Three non-Limbu scholars and political activists were invited as the main speakers. One of the speakers, Khagendra Sangraula, an acclaimed author and a Marxist scholar said:

Limbuwan is a civilization, it is not a name alone, neither is an ethnic enclave. It has a historical basis. Limbuwan has its geographical continuity, and contiguity. The subjugation and oppression of the Limbuwan by the state has a history. Having been reminded of the oppression they experienced and having remembered their ethnic civilization, they have claimed for autonomy to be guaranteed by the constitution. There is legitimacy and strength in their demands. Talking about their organization, it does not seem to be well managed, as they are not well organized politically. The five parties of Limbuwan having come together, the central committee seems too large. But there is continuity in the Limbuwan movement, so there is possibility of Limbuwan [my translation].

Sangraula's view was supportive to the Limbuwan movement. He even praised and equated Limbuwan with a civilization beyond merely a name. He also criticized the Limbus for

not being well organized politically to create a decisive momentum for the movement against the defiant state of Nepal. He also criticized the dominant party leaders who seem to believe that having a Limbuwan federal state would be detrimental to national unity in Nepal.

Despite the dominant political parties disinclination towards Limbuwan, the leaders of the Limbuwan based parties had made claims for Limbuwan on the basis of history, identity and territory [*itihās, pahichan ra that-thalo*] as Bangai Dhimal, a leader of the Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC), speaking before a crowd in Dhankuta in March 2010 said:

I must tell you the history of Limbuwan. Limbuwan is the name of the land conquered by the Limbu with their bow and arrow about 1300 years ago. The name of Limbuwan is not dropped from the sky, neither is it dug out of the soil. Limbuwan is the name of the state triumphed and established by the Limbu archers some 1300 years ago. The Limbuwan then had 10 provinces and 17 *thums* [administrative districts]. Of the 17 *thums*, one *thum* was Mikluk *thum*. The place called Letang-Rajarani is the historic place. There is a place called Sanguri *gadhi* [fort] just westward from Bhedetar. That *gadhi* belongs to Dhimals. Dhimal have clans called Yonghang, Nembang, Makhim etc. It is written in a book on Yonghang Dhimal that the Yonghang Dhimal had ruled over their territory from Sanguri *gadhi*, [located] northward from Dharan. This means the ancestors of the Dhimal had settled in the Sanguri *gadhi* area. Therefore, the Dhimal of Mikluk *thum* had the self-rule. The area is now known as Morang, Jhapa and Sunsari. Friends, we have such a clear history. Limbuwan's border reached beyond Biratnagar to the south. And today, this is what is called the historical basis of delineating the federal states⁴⁸ [my translation]

Dhimal, himself a non-Limbu leader of a Limbuwan based party, presented Limbuwan's history and ancestral territorial identity based on *gadhi* (N) as a basis of a federal state. He clearly expressed this by reiterating the present day Dhimal historical and territorial connections with Sanguri *gadhi*. Bangai presented the ancestral political history of Dhimals as a part of Limbuwan's ancestral history when he highlighted in his speech about how the Limbu archers founded the 17 *thums* of Limbuwan by defeating the others. Of the 17 *thums*, his emphasis was on Mikluk *thum*, which belonged to the Dhimal ancestors. Also worth noticing in his speech was the similarity in some clan names that sounded similar to both Limbus and Dhimals. Some clan

⁴⁸ I listened to the voice recording, transcribed the speech in Nepali and translated it into English.

names, such as Yonghang, Nembang, Makhim, may be found in both Limbus and Dhimals. Such similarities and shared history in relation to the clan names, *that-thalo* and *gadhi* between the Dhimals and Limbus seem to have brought together the Limbus and Dhimals for the cause of Limbuwan. It might be because of these similarities, I have heard in many informal conversations among Limbus the saying that Dhimal *haru madhes ka Limbu ho*—Dhimals are the Limbu of the low land.

Limbuwan: Name and Nation

The name Limbuwan is a powerful source as well as resource in the production of a political consciousness of collective identity for Limbus. Through the large political parties [*thula dalharu*]⁴⁹, Nepali Congress and CPN-UML, regressive ideas against Limbuwan loom so large upon the political lives of the Limbuwan's citizens. However, other political forces based on collective identity and histories are being carefully developed within specific cultural nations in Nepal.

Limbu politicians, irrespective of their affiliation to the large political parties [*thula dalharu*] or small [*sana dalharu*] also seem to recognize and be loyal to a collective Limbu identity, albeit individually. For example, Limbus associated with different parties and organizations came together and formed the United Limbuwan Front (ULF) in July 2008 at the time of the first constituent assembly. Through this Front, they lobbied and organized different programs and demonstrations across Limbuwan to ensure that a Limbuwan province gained

⁴⁹ During both CA's tenures (2008-2012 and 2013-2015) a dichotomy of *thula dal* (large parties) vs *sana dal* (small parties) was popular in Nepali politics. The *thula dal* referred to Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, and the CPN-Maoist and *sana dal* referred to all other parties which had secured comparatively smaller number of members in the CA. Consensus among the three *thula dal* was highly influential in determining the course of the Nepalese politics. *Thula dal*, both as a new concept and practice in Nepali politics ultimately materialized as a dominant political force in terms of denying the collective identity of the *adivasi* peoples including the Limbus.

recognition in a new constitution. The *thula parties* wrote the constitution without taking into account that a majority of members of the first CA supported federal provinces including Limbuwan (described in Chapter 5). The *thula dals* thus mocked the will of the constituent assembly in their eventual declaration of only seven unnamed provinces in the second CA, instead of the proposed 14 named provinces during the first CA. Nevertheless, the struggle for the recognition of Limbuwan continues with new alliances and new movements.

Limbus have continued to erect signboards and welcome gates in their territory and painted slogans on walls, vehicles, and milestones along the roadsides of Limbuwan. These public affirmations of Limbuwan do not speak about cessation, isolation, separation, or an exclusive Limbuwan but of a Limbuwan as a nation within other nations inside the state of Nepal. The state's way of "place-naming reduces the landscape to an impersonal piece of territory"(Alia 2007:124) but among indigenous peoples, "place-names implies ownership [of land] by a person or group. More importantly, they establish power and territorial claims" (Alia 2007:124) through the place-names.

Naming Provinces is Naming Nations: Limbuwan as Home and Nepal as Village

One of most fascinating slogans I observed during my field research in Limbuwan was about Limbuwan as a metaphorical home and Nepal as a country. The slogan says: "*Limbuwan hamro ghar ho, Nepal hamro desh ho*—Limbuwan is our home, Nepal is our country/village. Lakoff and Johnson write: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another...Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in action but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature... Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in

defining our everyday realities... We act according to the things we conceive of' (Lakoff and Johnson 2003:5). Any individual Limbu owns a house which is an integral part of the village. We cannot have a village without households and families. Similarly, even if there is only one house in a particular settlement, it may have a village name. There cannot be a human settlement without a name. We cannot imagine a home without a village and we can not imagine a village without a name. We can further interpret the metaphor of *ghar* (N) and *desh* (N)—home and country—in the following terms: a *ghar* is a concrete, observable reality and a *desh* is an imagined reality (Anderson 1983). Both are real but home/house is more tangible than the country/village. Only the totality of home and village together would make up the whole of Limbuwan: the combination of home, village, and nation. Events and actions are conceptualized metaphorically as objects, and activities as substances.

During my field research, I once came across a slogan written on the roadside wall:
Limbuwan bina ko Nepal ra Nepal bina ko Limbuwan kalpana samma pani garna sakidaina—
One cannot imagine Nepal without Limbuwan and Limbuwan without Nepal. For the Limbuwan volunteers this slogan conveys a heartfelt sentiment symbolically reflecting their dual identity as Limbus and as Nepalis. This slogan suggests that the Limbuwan volunteers could not imagine Limbuwan in isolation or in the absence of Nepal. How could they? As Limbuwan is their home and Nepal is their “village”, how could one imagine of a home without village? Having carefully read those two slogans presented above, I would also conclude that “home”, i.e. Limbuwan signifies the Limbus identity as a nation and that being Nepali (country) is their identity as citizens of a state.

As the saying goes, faith can move mountains. Faith and the imagination of Limbu politicians and people coupled with their political actions and activities will keep Limbuwan a

reality in the hearts and minds of Limbus, irrespective of the outcome of constitutional debates and machinations. Limbus and their allies continue to enact Limbuwan in the form of demonstrations, banners, claims, processions, speeches, and orations, even if their claims go unrecognized constitutionally. One can see Limbuwan as an imaginary that sustains itself in the everyday political lives of the Limbus. However, Limbus still eagerly await the recognition of Limbuwan to be inscribed in the constitution. I can conclude that the cultural Limbuwan already exists but that a political Limbuwan, articulated in the modern Nepali democratic organization, is yet to be accepted and recognized by those who control the state.

The dominant castes seem to understand politics only partially and partly while the *adivasi-janajati* seem to have a holistic understanding of the politics, culture, and customs as being integral to politics. If one looks into the election manifesto of the *thula dal* or listen to their leaders' speeches delivered before the mass, they mainly highlight aspects of economic prosperity—*arthik sambridhdi* (N)—that is to be achieved through economic and infrastructural development. Also highlighted are points on democratic and human rights based on the concept of humans as individual units, with little understanding of the notion of humans as embedded in collective cultural content (Turner 1997; Holmberg 2012). The dominant parties main objective of political mobilization seems to be to create economic equality in the society, thereby undermining other dimensions of the society. A political party with the sole objective of creating economic equality will ultimately promote a society based on sameness, regardless of cultural diversity and multi-cultural movements. Such a uni-dimensional perspective on politics will be problematic for the *thula dals* of Nepal in understanding politics based on cultural diversity. But the indigenous peoples' political organizations, the way they mobilize their people for the movements, the way that their movements are embedded in their own cultural content are the

testimonies of politics in totality. This is why they came out to the street during demonstrations and political processions with their customary garbs, traditional musical instruments, and performances, implicitly telling, through their actions, that one cannot perform politics and political movements in isolation from the social and cultural context.

Constituent Assembly, Constitution Drafting and the Denial of Ethnic Names

The second constituent assembly (CA, 2013-2015) hastily promulgated the Constitution of Nepal 2015 just four months after the devastating earthquake in April 2015. This constitution declared seven unnamed federal provinces—only assigned with numbers, one to seven. *Adivasi-janajatis* have long demanded that, at the very least the names of the federal provinces should be on the basis of their historical, territorial, and cultural identities. The names proposed by the *adivasi-janajatis*, which denoted *that-thalo* [territory] and *pahichan* [identity], were misrepresented by the ruling group's leaders and scholars as being divisive for the state of Nepal. Their fear campaign against the provincial names and historical identity and territory yielded a federal structure with no provincial names. The ruling groups and the ruling parties seemed to have only thought of their own interests. As Karl Marx wrote:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Tucker 1978:72).

Since the constitution did not inscribe a Limbuwan federal state, the Limbuwan based parties disowned and vehemently protested against the constitution. Throughout the course of the contentious discussions during the first CA (2008-2012), *adivasi-janajati* leaders demanded that

the provinces be named based on the peoples’ territorial history—*aitihasik that-thalo*— and identity—*pahichan*. Secondly, they had also demanded that the total number of provinces must be more than ten or eleven, and include 23 autonomous areas [*swayatta ksehtra*]—because only that number, at a minimum, would accommodate the cultural, historical and territorial diversity in the country. The report of the then Restructuring of the State and Distribution of State Power Committee, which was tabled to the first CA in January 2010, had taken *adivasi-janajati* demands into consideration. This committee had proposed fourteen provinces⁵⁰ of which nine names were based on the identity and territory of major groups of the *adivasi-janajatis*, three of which were named after rivers whose names are in Nepali language one of which was named after a famous Hindu Yogi (Khaptad,) and one was named on the basis of its cold climate (Jadan) (Constituent Assembly Nepal, 2010). The report had also proposed 23 *swayatta kshetras* [autonomous areas]⁵¹ for *adivasi-janajati* groups with relatively smaller populations. The report had taken into consideration ‘cultural identity and economic capability’ as the main basis for delineating the provinces and autonomous areas. As the report said:

Identity and capability have been taken as the main basis for state creation. Under identity basis, fall the ethnic/community, linguistic, cultural, and historical continuity. The capability basis includes economic inter-dependence, economic capability, status of infrastructures and their viability, availability of natural resources and administrative accessibility...identity and capability, thus, have to be taken into consideration on the basis of some specific principles while creating the states. The states created on these bases would be able to exercise autonomy and self-rule. Nepal, therefore, has been divided into 14 states by restructuring the existing unitary structure into a federal democratic republic (Constituent Assembly Nepal 2010:18) [*original report in English*].

⁵⁰ 1. Limbuwan 2. Kirat 3. Sherpa 4. Mithila-Bhojpura-Koch-Madhes 5. Sunkoshi 6. Tamsaling 7. Newa 8. Narayani 9. Tamuwan 10. Magarat 11. Lumbini-Awadh-Tharuwan 12. Jadan 13. Karnali 14. Khaptad

⁵¹ 1. Kochila 2. Jhagad/Urau 3. Dhimal 4. Meche 5. Santhal 6. Lepcha 7. Yakha 8. Chepang 9. Dura 10. Kumal 11. Danuwar 12. Pahari 13. Thami 14. Majhi 15. Baram 16. Thakali 17. Chhantyal 18. Sunuwar 19. Danuwar 20. Surel 21. Jirel 22. Hyolmo 23. Byasi.

Regarding the naming of federal units, the same report states that “ethnic, communal, lingual, historical background and cultural identity” was the primary basis of naming provinces.

As the report states:

In areas where identities are linked to ethnicity/community and culture, and where communities have been continuously living there for centuries and still dominating the settlements, the demand for identities should be addressed while naming the provinces. In a region which has a majority of certain language, a federal unit may be named on the basis of the language. Similarly, regions without ethnic and lingual dominance may be named on the basis of the places of multi-cultural, multi-lingual, historical and cultural importance (Constituent Assembly Nepal 2010:89) [*original report in English*].

Immediately after the proposal was tabled by the CA’s own committee with the provinces names proposed on the basis of cultural identity and the autonomous areas for 23 *adivasi-janajati* groups, voices against such names as Limbuwan, Kirat, Sherpa, Tamsaling, Tamuwan, Magarat, Newa, began to be heard, mainly from the *thula dal*, namely the NC and the CPN-UML. The *thula dals* leaders began to claim that names based on ethnicity and identity would have a divisive impact on the national and cultural unity of the country. The *thula dals* also argued that all proposed provinces and areas are inhabited by a diversity of cultural groups and, therefore, having specific ethnic names would only create ethnic cultural domination in that province or area. The NC and CPN-UML seemed extremely uncomfortable about naming provinces on the basis of *adivasi-janajati* identity. The NC formally did not propose names or the total number of provinces during the first CA. One of the influential leaders of the CPN-UML initially worked out a plan for 15 provinces, with no specific names, but quickly dropped that idea. The agenda of the party leaders emerged as an effort to maintain the political status quo. The high caste ruling groups, through their control over the dominant parties, denied recognition of the *adivasi-janajati* as a way of maintaining their domination, even though they collectively constituted a minority of the population. For them, even *sanghiyata* [federalism], *rajya puna:sangrachana*

[state restructuring] and *naya Nepal* [creating a new Nepal] were deeply threatening because restructuring the state in a federal model that recognized cultural differences would dispossess them of the centuries old domination and control over the state that they enjoyed since the inception of the state of Nepal. Only the Maoist party seemed committed to constitutionally ensuring the collective identity of indigenous nationalities during the first constituent assembly because they had expanded their political constituency and forwarded their insurgency by voicing support for *adivasi-janajati* identity and recognition during the peoples war (1996-2006). But with the expiration of the first constituent assembly even the Maoist party seemed to have backed down from their commitment to recognition of indigenous nationalities.

For their part, the Maoist party - which was yet to be well accepted in international arenas- gradually dropped their support for recognition of *adivasis* in response to the negative campaign against the demands of the indigenous communities. As a consequence the ruling parties, completely under the control of high caste Bahuns, constitutionally established their own identity. Had the dominant politicians genuinely believed and thought that recognition and inscription of identity in the constitution would have politically divisive consequences, then why did the Bahun caste group, who controlled the writing of the constitution, include *arya* in the constitution? Did the dominant caste not enshrine their own identity as supreme by recognizing *aryans*, a term derived mainly from Hindu religious traditions? How shall we understand *arya* in its racial denotation? The term *arya* is meaningful only in opposition to something else; in this case, in the rhetoric of race, what in Nepal is termed the Mongol race, which includes the most significant of the indigenous ethnic communities in Nepal. The constitution thus rubs out all but the highest caste groups from recognition and appears to do so on a racial basis.

In such a political and constitutional environment, how will the Limbu continue to make a history of Limbuwan through its name? The Limbuwan movement will not only “preserve” their culture, as they say in common parlance, but also enact Limbuwan by raising its name and fame. Culture, in this sense, is not something to preserve and store safely in a museum. Culture itself is a capacity to reproduce itself (Holmberg 2012; Turner 1997) through human imagination and enactment (Godelier, 1999). Limbuwan is identified and defined by the movement and enactment of political power. This is what one can observe in all demonstrations and programs, as they are said to be *shakti pradarsan* or showing off power.

The Limbus claim the right to be a different and distinct society within Nepal. They struggle for this right on the basis of a specific political history of autonomy in the past and how they lost their autonomy due to the Hindu Gorkha invasion. They also demand this right on the basis of the accord/treaty agreed between the Gorkha Hindu King and Limbuwan in 1774. They organize their movements within Limbuwan on the basis of the boundary of a territorial domain delineated by the then rulers, that is the territory east of Arun river and west of Mechi river. Leaders of the Limbuwan movement continue to reproduce and transform these macro-logics in the present Nepal through their everyday political activities. In other words, the collective identity movement based on *itihās* and *that-thalo* is for the constitutional recognition of the Limbuwan name. Constitutional recognition of the Limbuwan name will partially fulfill the demand of Limbus on acceptance of their *pahichan* and *itihās* in what was supposed to be a New Nepal.

The Politics of Maps and the Federal States Name

Arun purba nau jilla, Limbuwan ko killa—nine districts east of Arun is the fort of Limbuwan!

The politics of naming has a correlate in the politics of mapping. Over the last ten years, the production of maps has been as crucial as other issues, particularly for the Limbu who put history and place at the core of their collective identity. They claim their historical boundaries to be one of the basis for delineating federal provinces in Nepal. For the last 240 years, different land records, royal orders and decrees issued to the Limbus, as well as historical documents show that the territory demarcated by the Arun river to the west and the Mechi river to the east has been officially accepted as Limbuwan (Acharya 2060 v.s.; Chemjong 1957; Chemjong 1952; Regmi 1978; Shrestha 2042). Kiratologist and historian I. S. Chemjong included a map of Limbuwan in his first book *Kirat Itihas*—Kirat History—published in 1948. His un-scaled map shows 17 *thums* in Limbuwan. B.B. Chemjong's (1957) booklet *Pallo kirat Limbuwan ka mag haru*—*Demands of the Limbuwan Pallo-Kirat* also published a map of Limbuwan, which seemed to be copied from Chemjong (1948). This shows that the Limbus have been presenting Limbuwan and their *that-thalo* [territory] in maps since at least the 1950s.

Although the maps drawn by the Government of Nepal ignore Limbuwan, social scientists studying the Limbus in Limbuwan have frequently mentioned the territory between the rivers Arun and Mechi as Limbuwan (Baral and Tigela-Limbu 2008; Sangraula 2067 v.s.; Upreti 1975; Shrestha 2042v.s.). In July 1962, the government of Nepal delineated the country into 75 districts and some 335 thums (Devkota 2048 v.s.:93). After the delineation of 75 districts, historical Limbuwan, the territory east to west from the Arun river to the Mechi river and north to south from the Himalaya to North India, included nine districts. In recent decades, the map of Limbuwan comprises these 9 districts and is a reference point for the Limbuwan movement everywhere. This map is found in calendars, greetings, invitation cards, sign boards, wall paintings, posters, advertisements of cultural events, political manifestos, banners, and in

documents of various Limbu organizations including student groups, Limbuwan related books, journals, newspapers, and magazines for the last ten years during the tenures of the two CAs and thereafter.

Besides the Limbus, even political parties were competing with each other to draw the best and “most scientific” map of Nepal during the tenure of the first CA. Such a competition was termed as “The War of the Maps” by a report:

The Maoists, by now the largest political party and leading the government, had in June 2010 proposed a federal structure of 12 autonomous states based on caste, language, and region... The *janajati* favored a Nepal of many provinces (11 or 14), the *Madhesi* didn't mind smaller provinces as long as the lowland region was not divided, the Nepali Congress and the UML settled for 6 provinces, and numerous smaller factions promoted their respective maps as well (Suhrke 2014:6).

Maps were not independent of individuals' mental understanding of what Nepal should look like. Yet “[t]he battle lines hardened...to focus on the boundaries of the sub-national units ... and the symbolic but emotionally charged issue of the name of the provinces” (Suhrke 2014:6). Both the boundaries of proposed federal states and their names were pitched against one another but the large parties, the dominant ones, prevailed over the marginalized groups. In this regard, social scientists and historians became key players in the debates about maps and naming. Maps drawn on paper are actually the manifestation of mental maps imagined by individuals. In the recent history of Nepal, the map in the minds of the dominant castes and classes became manifested in their reactions to the proposed federal states. Social scientists who joined these debates were steeped in the ideologies reproduced in the schooling system of a now fallen Hindu nation. They refused to restructure their own mindsets in imagining a new Nepal.

The Legacy of a Mono-cultural Polity and Scholarly Debates over Naming and Federalism

The Panchayat regime (1960-1990) imagined a mono-cultural state. Any advocacy or organization for cultural recognition or rights was silenced. The government did not recognize or officially accept the existence of different languages and cultures; they worked, in fact, to erase those languages and cultures. Through the cumulative structural “legacy” of centuries of monarchical Hindu rule culminating in the Panchayat era, political actors, mostly drawn from high castes, inherited and reproduced a particular mindset. The ideology of a homogenous mono-cultural Nepal affected many social scientists as well. Academics, like almost all professionals and bureaucrats, are drawn largely from Hindu high caste social backgrounds. The political habitus of high caste academics, like political leaders, was steeped in a mono-cultural ideology: one state/one nation, one state/one culture.

The proposed multi-cultural ethnic identity based names were vehemently opposed even by some social scientists. The authenticity of the proposed names were debated. For example the name Limbuwan was debated and questioned:

Limbuwan as a form of state never existed in history, hence Limbuwan cannot be a legitimate name for a federal state (Dhungel 2010:23).

Dhungel’s op-ed entitled “*apabyakhaya ko kheti ra ratriya barbadi* [Cultivation of Misinterpretation and National Downfall] argued that indigenous people were misinterpreting the history of Nepal, and by doing this they were also destroying Nepal as the nation, built and unified by the King PN Shah in the second half of the 18th century (Dhungel 2009). Such views only sustained the notion of a mono-cultural state with one nation, one language, one religion, and one culture built during the making of the Hindu state of Nepal.

Initially there was no provision on federalism in the Interim Constitution of 2006. The *madhesi* movement in January 2007, with the sacrifice of scores of people, compelled the

government to amend the Interim Constitution in March 2007, thereby inserting the provision of federalism in it. Suhrke writes:

The omission of the word "federalism" from the Interim Constitution—drafted by a government-appointed Commission—sparked a violent protest from the Madhesis when the document was made public. Already stung by being left out of the peace negotiations, a broad spectrum of Madhesi groups took to the streets to demand a federal constitution (Suhrke 2014:5).

While Suhrke's report cited above is based on observation of the facts, David Seddon, an academic familiar with Nepal's situation for long, held a different opinion on federalism and identity politics in Nepal. The Kathmandu Post published an interview with David Seddon:

Federalism is a Big Mistake in Nepal !

The growth of identity politics [is an issue for Nepal to tackle]. In fact that there is now an obsession, in my view, and a very dangerous one, with ethnic and caste identity. The Maoists have unleashed a tiger, that they are now riding... I think that this is extremely dangerous. Federalism is a big mistake, for Nepal. This is not necessary in fact to defend the interests of majorities or minorities, whether women, or Dalit or Janajatis—that can be done in other ways. This idea of a federation of broadly ethnic and caste based autonomous regions seems to me to be enormously problematic (Seddon 2009:6).

When Nepal's *adivasi-janajatis*, and the *madhesis* were struggling for constitutional recognition of their cultural differences, namely collective identity and federalism, such statements against identity politics and federalism were absorbed into a regressive move back towards the previous political status quo.

In 2012, Nepal was at a historical juncture to decide whether to designate provinces on the basis of *aitihasik that-thalo* and *pahichan* or economic and developmental capacity. The initial recommendation for 14 provinces was based primarily on identity. Almost immediately opposition surfaced against this, arguing that identity must not be the criterion because: i) this would create misunderstandings among different caste and ethnic groups, thus leading the country to racial war in the future; ii) the "nation-state" would break into pieces, which is both unacceptable and unthinkable. The proposed names, not the number or the geography itself,

invited and ignited intense political debate. In my assessment some people who were opposed to the proposal protested out of ignorance and some conspired against the *adivasi-janajati* recognition.



Figure 3.1 Nepal Map Showing 14 Provinces Proposed by CA's Sub-Committee in 2010

Embedded in the demands of Limbus and other indigenous communities is recognition of their right to exist. They seek to restructure a multi-national state in recognition of the fact that indigenous peoples have been producing distinct cultures, languages, and religions. This occurs at the same time as they belong to and are loyal to a state, whose foundation is bureaucratic and administrative. The terms nation and state carry different meanings and relevance. Culture may be the essence of a nation, hence the Limbus fighting for a nation means claiming for their culture congealed in the form of Limbuwan. Limbuwan is more than politics. It is their culture so long as the imagination of Limbuwan binds them together, brings all the Limbus in to one goal, and one objective of founding a Limbuwan province in east Nepal. On the other hand, bureaucratic politics and economic relations may be the essence of a state. Hence, a Limbu could

be a Nepali citizen, a civic person, a voter for civic political purposes, or could be an employee in any of the state organizations. In this sense, this person belongs to the state. For *adivasi-janajatis*, fighting for and founding a multi-cultural, multi-national state does not mean breaking a nation into pieces but the mono-cultural, unbending notions of one-culture and one-nation, which is a unitary Hindu model, did not let multi-cultural names into the constitution.

Conclusion

The Limbus quest for recognition of a unique and different identity is embedded in their ancestral history. The basis of the Limbus' collective identity is their unique *itihās* [history] and the *that-thalo* [territory], which their ancestors settled first and fought to defend. *That-thalo* is where one's heart rests. I have no knowledge of any Limbu going on pilgrimage to any parts of India or Kathmandu, where the most famous Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimages sites are. Instead I have observed the Limbus worshipping their own local deities and divinities, offering everything they consider symbolically pure and most desired: home distilled alcohol, home brewed millet beer, live chickens, pigs, goats, buffaloes, and other pleasing things. The Limbu identity is intrinsically tied to their *that-thalo*, both through the organized political movement and through ritual offerings.

The Limbus believe in a shared Nepali identity and a collective Limbu identity. Their political movements, slogans, demands, and everyday life activities never called for fragmenting the country. Their political slogans in relation to Limbuwan as a federal state's name demonstrate that Limbu and Limbuwan are both integral to and indivisible from the Nepali state. The Limbus only seek to find a space in the constitution that acknowledges that they too are part of the state of Nepal and have a stake in its future. They too want to share the ownership of the

constitution by having the federal state's name as Limbuwan. One can ask a series of questions about how Nepal went from the hope for an inclusive democracy to an exclusionary constitution. What difference does it make to the broader Nepali political scenario if there is no Limbuwan named as a federal state in the constitution? The Limbus and Limbuwan will remain excluded from the broader Nepali identity as it failed to incorporate their name Limbuwan into the constitution. As a consequence Limbus will be discriminated against and will feel excluded. Why did the CA promulgate the constitution with un-named provinces? Was this part of a political conspiracy against the *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* peoples or else? Why did the names denoting *aitihasik that-thalo* [history and territory] and *pahichan* [identity] of *adivasi-janajati* seem to be “frightening” and “divisive” to the dominant political parties? Failure to recognize *adivasi* and *madhesi* identities in the constitution will only escalate the political conflict for many more years to come.

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORY AS A RESOURCE FOR POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Critiques of the Linear Teleological Vision of History and Societal Progress

Social scientists, including anthropologists (Wilmsen 1989a; Wilmsen 1983; Wilmsen 1989b; García Linera 2007; Turner 2007; Turner 1988; Turner 1993; Turner 2004) critique that until recently many Marxists social scientists believed in a linear teleological vision of history as though there was a single line of inevitable stages, which all societies would pass through to achieve a higher and more developed stage of societal progress. Such a conventional understanding of history has been in crisis facing challenges both in theory and in political movements for the past four or five decades. Terence Turner argues that identity and rights-based movements of indigenous peoples have, since the 1970s, posed new challenges for anthropology in relation to the perspective, method and ethnographer's responsibility towards the people they study. Turner said "The historical events of the last several decades... have profoundly affected the social sciences in general and anthropology in particular, both as a theoretical discipline and an activist project" (Turner 1999:114). Indigenous peoples' movements all over the world have not only influenced anthropology, as a science of culture and humanity, but have also equally influenced the definitions and histories of societies. As a consequence of the indigenous peoples' movements for cultural equality and claiming of their rights, the perspective that human societies and cultures inevitably pass through linear stages of progress is no longer popular. In this regard Arif Dirlik et al write: "It is precisely the models earlier imported from Europe—Marxism, a belief in progress and modernity, a commitment to

revolution as forward-looking, linear, developmentalist transformation—that are now in doubt” (Dirlik, Bahl, and Gran 2000:192). Dirlik et al locate the problem within the model of “linear progress and modernity” while Terence Turner argues that modernity is conceived by indigenous peoples differently from those of the dominant groups who represent state:

Modernity is now conceived as a world of contemporaneous culturally different groups sharing national spaces, the latter comprising socially differentiated places rather than places occupied by homogeneously assimilated members of a nation. A new chronotope, which we may call "synchronic pluralism", has superseded the previously dominant modernist chronotope of progressive evolution towards assimilation into homogenous national cultures within uniform spaces delimited by state frontiers" (Turner 2004:197).

Terence Turner’s concept of “synchronic pluralism” (Turner 2004:197), compared with diachronic pluralism, is both illuminative as well as explicative for interpreting the claims of multiple histories, territories and cultures by *adivasi-janajtis* in Nepal. For example, Turner states that a society’s history, culture or identity is not at all inferior/superior, backward/advanced in comparison to others:

As the evolutionist ideology of progress, which until recently was the established frame of reference for dealing with social and cultural diversity, tends to give way to the pluralist forms of identity politics and multiculturalism, national societies increasingly tend to appear to their citizens more as a plurality of mutually differing but contemporary culturally-differentiated identities than as a culturally homogenous national community" (Turner 1999:116).

David Graeber also suggests that anthropologists should "break out of the evolutionary, Eurocentric" trap too (Graeber, 2006:63). All different cultures are contemporary to each other and co-exist in their own ‘cultural niches’ in a broad geographic territory. In his article *Ecologic Relationships of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North Pakistan*, Fredrik Barth has shown how Kohistanis, Pathans and Gujars - three different language-speaking groups - harmoniously as well as contemporaneously share the same ecologic base with no or minimum economic competition over resources. Barth concludes that “different ethnic groups with radically different

cultures co-reside in an area in symbiotic relations of variable intimacy” (Barth 1956:1079). Barth’s argument can be applied to look into the process and understanding of histories of different societies in a country like Nepal. Nepal’s *adivasi-janajatis*’ political claims of their unique histories suggest that the histories of hitherto ruled and marginalized groups are no less authentic than those of the rulers. Nowadays the growing *adivasi-janajati* movements talk about non-*aryan adivasi-janajati* history and this is as much valid as the Hindu *aryan* history in Nepal. *Adivasi-janajatis* identity movements that are founded on claiming the ownership of history and territory corroborate all the different histories in Nepal and should be considered equally valid. The state should officially recognize all the different cultures of the country as equal before the constitution and other laws.

Different Societies, Different Understandings of History

Anthropologists have also explored how indigenous peoples may have a different understanding of history from those of dominant colonial societies. In this regard, Audra Simpson, referring to Vine Deloria Jr., states:

Western imperialism and colonialism flowed from a Western epistemology that was premised on either-or logic systems based on Christian precepts. Native traditions are spatial in that they articulate to particular land bases, whereas Christianity and other traditions are temporal in that they seek converts from any land base on an eschatological framework that envisions and requires an end to history...Christian religion and the Western idea of history are inseparable and mutually self-supporting...Where did Westerners get their ideas of divine right to conquest, of manifest destiny, of themselves as the vanguard of true civilization, if not from Christianity? It therefore follows that the pathway to decolonization requires a fundamental epistemological shift away from Western theory. Indigenous epistemologies...will provide the foundation for indigenous liberation (Simpson and Smith 2014:3–4).

Vine Deloria Jr.’s statement on the source of Western epistemology seems to hold truth if critically contextualized in relation to John Locke’s (1632-1704) views towards the Indians and

American lands in his book *Two Treatises of Government* (Locke 1821). Barbara Arneil criticizes John Locke's arguments by saying "John Locke saw America as the second Garden of Eden; a new beginning for England. It should manage to defend its claims in the American continent against those of the Indians and other European powers" (Arneil 1995:1). The political fate of *adivasi-janajatis* in Nepal is not much different from that of the North American Indians as the Hindu rulers conquered the *adivasi-janajati* populations and their territories. The way that the *aryan* Hindu rulers annexed territories is now understood by the *adivasi-janajatis* and the *madhesi* politicians as a colonial expansion. Addressing the *madhesi* peoples during the *Madhes bandh*⁵² [general strike] in protest of The Constitution (described in chapter 5) in September 2015, the Chairman of the Federal Socialist Forum (FSF) party Upendra Yadav said:

Madhes is an internal colony of Kathmandu. The type of exploitation and domination the ruling elites or the rulers of Kathmandu or Singha Durbar have been doing to the Madhes is similar to the ones imposed under colonial rule. The *madhesi* peoples, for 250 years, have been facing suppression, oppression and exploitation. The struggle is against that exploitation. In fact, this is a struggle against state discrimination.⁵³

Madhesi leaders in recent years, particularly in response to regressive moves by dominant political parties in drafting the constitution (described in chapter 5), have begun to reiterate that the Madhes land and the *madhesi* peoples have been colonized ever since the establishment of the Gorkha Kingdom in the 18th century.⁵⁴ The *madhesi* political leaders and their movements speak about a shift in the understanding of the following terminology: history, colonialism, nation, identity, and territory. These are now the key terms in understanding Nepali politics and political movements today.

⁵² General strike or shutting down the city and transportation. Shops, transportations are not operated.

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbBiz2HgkGk&spfreload=5> (accessed: 3-4-2017)

⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8QU8kkhTMk> (accessed: 3-4-2017)

Terence Turner highlights the notion of production and analysis of value as fundamentally important for applying Marxian notions towards understand human activities, including indigenous peoples' movements:

Indigenous societies are different from non-indigenous or settler societies not only in relation to their cultural traits, feasts and festivals but their fundamental productive regimes and relations are different. Analysis of which would be possible from none other than Marxian theory of value and production (Turner 2008:43).

I find Turner's statements on Marxian notions of production and value useful to look into for the people-territory relationships for my study of history as an inspiration for political activism. I also find the notion of production directly linked to human activities, which reproduce social-cultural relationships and society itself.

Marxism and History as a Capacity for the Production of Social Reality and Society

Marxism has been questioned particularly for Marx's theoretical statements on the evolutionary stages of societal transformation, namely ancient communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Taking on Lewis Morgan's classification of social evolution as moving from savagery through barbarism and then to civilization (Morgan 1877), Marx and Engels argued that societies pass through such linear stages of societal transformation, from simple and less advanced to more complex and advanced stages. Because of Marxism's "preoccupation with economic exploitation and the question of economic class, [it] has been blind to problems of oppression and exploitation that have their sources outside of a narrowly conceived economic organization under capitalism" (Dirlik 1994:3-4). Marx's analysis on how human beings collectively make and remake their history themselves is profound and fundamental for understanding today's identity politics in relation to history and territory. In *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1963) define history on a social basis. Human beings must involve themselves

in the production process to fulfill their own needs. History begins as soon as humans enter into concrete relations of material production. Terrence Turner succinctly summarizes Marx's idea of production:

[Marx and Engels] described production as self transforming social praxis that consists of four main aspects ('moments'): the production of means of material subsistence, including tools and techniques; the production of needs, which give rise to new social relations; the production of human beings themselves...and the production of the different relations of social cooperation involved as 'productive force' in their own right as part of each historical mode of production (Turner, 2008:44-45).

Marx's conclusion is that history is a result of the imagination and drudgery of human beings. Furthermore, "history is rooted in a consciousness of creative agency as a property of contemporary social actors...It is not primarily defined as a form of awareness of the past but mode of consciousness of the social present" (Turner, 1988: 47). In a country like Nepal, scholars and politicians alike still seem to hold that history is a gift given to the peoples by the rulers, or by the Kings. For example, King P. N. Shah "unified" Nepal, hence he could be said to have left behind the "gift of unification" of Nepal for Nepalis. This is a history too but this is not the only history of Nepal. Different societies, peoples, and cultural groups are equally capable of making and remaking their own history through their collective imaginations and actions.

Maurice Godelier writes:

History or the multiple histories of individual societies is result of synergic combination of "the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. These three orders combine to make up human social existence, human social reality...It is first and foremost the different ways humans imagine their relationships with each other and with what we call nature that distinguishes societies and the periods during which some of them exist. But imaginary cannot transform itself into the social; it cannot manufacture "society" by existing on a purely "mental" level. It must be "materialized" in concrete relations which take on their form and content in *institutions*, and of course in the *symbols* which represent them and cause them to send messages back and forth, to communicate." (Godelier 1999:26-27).

In Nepal, *adivasi-janajatis* have practically started to debunk the understanding that history is made and given by the rulers. The colonial imagination of history, protected and disseminated by the ruling castes and dominant Nepali political parties, has been challenged by the *adivasi-janajatis* imagination and activism of their own histories in defending their *that-thalo* [territory]. Ethnographic studies on the Tamang (Tamang, 2008), Dhimal (Rai, 2013), and the Limbu's ongoing movements on identity politics for the recognition of their unique history vis-à-vis the Gorkha conquest have vigorously challenged received understandings of the history of Nepal. One can observe *adivasi-janajatis* invoking their historical as well as territorial "identities in opposition to such hegemonic construction" (Dirlik 1997:13) of mono-cultural pan Nepali identity. In present day world politics, "indigenous peoples take on their past as legacy and [as a] project for construction of cultural nationalism, ethnicity and indigenism" (Dirlik 1996:1). Marx's statements about the relationship between history, society and individual imagination is illuminating:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living (Marx 1964:15).

For indigenous people, history is not only produced by themselves but the same product, in turn, produces active and conscious subjects, aware of their collective identity based on their history and territory—*itihās ra that-thalo*.

History as a Resource in the Production of Identity Politics

Maurice Godelier says "Marxism is not a theory of production [of goods and services]. It is a theory of production of society, not a theory of production in society" (Godelier, 1984:44). For indigenous peoples, land may be both means and relations of production. This is because people not only produce goods and services from the land but it is also territory and space where

the whole of human society is sociologically made possible. To paraphrase Marx, as men and women involve themselves in productive activities to fulfill their own social and biological needs they simultaneously reproduce themselves and their society. David Graeber succinctly paraphrases what Marx says in *The German Ideology*: "Capitalism and 'economic science' might confuse us into thinking that the ultimate goal of society is simply the increase of national GDP, the production of more and more wealth, but in reality wealth has no meaning except as a medium for the growth and self-realization of human beings" (Graeber, 2006:70). For Marx, "productive activity was the basis of all human societies" (Turner, 2004). In this regard, indigenous societies may be viewed as having capacity to produce and reproduce the forms of their own social relations. Back in the 1980s, reviewing Michael Taussig's book *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, Turner wrote "Marxist anthropologists would do better to start from Marx's and Engels' programmatic 'anthropological' definition of production in *The German Ideology*, in which production is said to comprehend, not merely the production of the means of subsistence, but of human beings and families, social relations of cooperation, and new needs as well" (Turner 1986:92). Having mentioned this, suffice it to say that Marx's notion of production as a totality shall serve as a guideline for anthropologists to undertake their subject, i.e. culture as a whole. Yet, the conception of "production' must be coupled with an emphasis on the importance of reproduction... of the social forms and forces of production" (Turner, 1986:93).

Theory of Mode of Production and Indigenous Societies

The notion of mode of production (MoP) may be the most-debated Marxist theory among the Marxists themselves. One understanding of MoP is that certain modes represent a particular historical epoch, which is 'scientifically' more progressive than the past. Such an understanding

of MoP holds that all societies pass through a progressive-evolutionary path of development, such as, primitive communism- slavery-feudalism- capitalism- socialism. Such an interpretation of MoP in the past has proved to be prejudicial towards understanding indigenous societies, as they were perceived to have represented the primitive mode of production. Marxist anthropologists introduced this difficulty, mainly in the 1970s when they “artificially inserted the pre-capitalist modes of productions (indigenous societies) into the [global] capitalist system” (Forster-Carter quoted in Wilmsen, 1983:16). When Eric Wolf, Sidney Mintz, A.G. Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein began to focus on world-system theory considering the headquarters of capitalism as the center and the rest of the globe as peripheral, which depended on centers in most aspects of production relations, they also shut the window through which they could view non-commodity producing societies as a cultural whole. This challenge to anthropology posed by world-system theorists, including Marxist anthropologists, was well observed by Terence Turner "with this has gone a repudiation of the anthropological tendency to treat such [peripheral] societies as self-containing entities, and a certain impatience with traditional anthropological concerns with culture, meaning and non-economic dimensions of social organization such as kinship" (Turner, 1986:94). This genre of Marxism created a sort of crisis in the holistic conception of society. Terence Turner’s critique of world-system theory is illuminating for anthropologists as his criticism helps us to look into, for example, Limbu society in itself comprising totality, a whole, having their own history, culture and *that-thalo* [territory].

The world-system approach also considers a third-world “nation-state” as a peripheral society, which utterly overlooks the fact that “nation-states” themselves have been transformed into an owner of the means and forms of economic, cultural and social productions within a

country. This is the process that has occurred in Nepal for the past two and a half centuries, starting from the second half of the 18th century.

The consolidation of the Gorkha Hindu state, mostly during the second half of the 18th century, also meant incorporation of other means and relations of economic, cultural, social productions into the dominant Hindu caste-based relations of production. Godelier has suggested looking into the Indian caste system from the Marxian concept of mode of production.

Criticizing Louis Dumont, Godelier argued that the Indian caste system was a specific "relation of production". He writes:

"The caste system is not only what we call religious structure; it is, from the inside, the relations of production. I have offered Louis Dumont an alternative hypothesis, explaining that perhaps this is the case because the relations of production are dominant in the mind and in the social logic of Indian society" (Godelier 1984:39).

Godelier's statement above is helpful to summarize the past relationships between the Hindu Gorkha State and Limbuwan. Limbus as an autonomous and autochthonous society had their particular means and relations of production including communal land ownership, which may be termed an indigenous mode of production. The Gorkha Hindu State, having annexed Limbuwan into its domain, also transformed Limbuwan's economic mode of production so as to benefit the Hindu state. For example, Limbu communal/collective land ownership was abolished and individual land ownership was introduced. Non-*aryan*, non-Hindu, non-caste Limbus were also incorporated under the Hindu four-fold caste classification, thereby assigning them with *matawali* caste category. This is how Limbu modes and relations of productions were transformed to suit the interest of the Hindu caste relations of production. Such a comparison between the mode of production models seems valid and well explained, to some extent, but this approach does not allow us to study Limbu society as comprised of a whole or in terms of the totality of its own relations of production. Nepali politicians as well as social scientists,

particularly from a Marxist background, fashionably categorize Nepali society as a semi-feudal society, now gradually transforming into a capitalist society. It is not very sensible in anthropology to try and classify a state or 'state-nation'⁵⁵ as a single society or a single mode of production (MoP). Marxian center-periphery theorists have also failed to take into account internal colonial domination, which has been one of the main political issues of indigenous people's politics today, especially within peripheral countries. For example, internal colonial domination has been one of the most important political debates in Nepal, with the fact that Nepal as a Hindu state-nation, was formed by incorporating other indigenous modes of productions under a dominant Hindu caste-based MoP. As a concrete example, David Holmberg's ethnographic picture of the ritual production of power among the indigenous Tamangs is sketched on a background political canvas of internal colonialism (Holmberg 2000). The world-system theorists also ignore the reality of the simultaneous existence of multiple MoPs within the boundary of a state-nation, let alone consider the indigenous societies as different MoPs. In Nepal's context, sociologists and anthropologists (Seddon, Blaikie, and Cameron 1979; Blaikie, Cameron, and Seddon 1980; Mishra 1987) have undertaken similar studies following world-system theorists, specifically Wallerstein (Wallerstein 1974) and Frank (Frank 1969). These scholars studies consider different indigenous societies as 'peasants' thereby misplacing them with the peasants from dominant class/caste. Holmberg's remark upon Guha's (Guha 1983) consideration of Indian 'peasantry' is spot on in this regards: "Subject-agents are produced in different social forms by kin-based collectivities, and subject-agents in turn reproduce those collectivities; Tamang agents are irreducible to a generic mold" (Holmberg, 2000:945, n.8). Therefore, taking into account the simultaneous existence of multiple MoPs is

⁵⁵ In a common academic and political parlance it is called 'nation-state' but I prefer the term 'state-nation' (Stepan, Linz, and Yadav 2011) over 'nation-state'

necessary as only this perspective enables us to explain how the nation-state or the state-nation as the owner of means of production expropriates from and appropriates other forms of production within a country. While saying this, I am not arguing that indigenous MoPs are idealistically egalitarian modes where exploitation, expropriation and appropriation of value do not occur at all. Of course relations of exploitation and appropriation characterize even indigenous societies. As Marx says: every society possesses the seed of its own destruction and transformation. Hence, another topic of studying indigenous societies would be to look into the social forms of exploitation within such societies and their relationships to other societies, including the state.

Marxian Theory of Value and Indigenous societies

Terence Turner asserts that “[t]he production of value is an organized social activity that simultaneously produces and reproduces the social relations and institutional structures of production and the forms of social consciousness of this activity” (Turner, 2008:45). The notion of praxis is helpful to establish linkages between consciousness and action. According to Marx, human beings are cultural because they possess the capacity to imagine. They can build the imaginary of something in their thoughts before they make it through their labor. Godelier takes the side of Marx's notion of the imaginary over Levi-Strauss's idea of the primacy of symbols in defining culture. Godelier says: "imaginary cannot transform itself into the social, it can not manufacture "society" by existing on a purely "mental" level. It must be "materialized" in concrete relations which take on their form and content in institutions, and of course in the symbol...When the imaginary is "materialized" in social relationships, it becomes a part of social reality" (Godelier, 1999:27). For Terrence Turner, 'praxis' is preferable over Bourdieu's 'practice'

because in 'praxis', we can analyze the 'value that bridges the gap between socially productive activity [labor] and subjective motivation [imagination]' (Turner, 2006). This is where, according to Turner, "recent theoretical work associated with [indigenous people's] activism and rights has made original and valuable theoretical contributions" (Turner, 2006). He argues that Marxian value theory is an "alternative approach to the integration of ideas of agency, action and social consciousness with social organization to that offered by 'practice theory' and earlier forms of anthropological Marxism" (Turner, 2008:43).

David Graeber, in his book *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (Graeber 2001), describes how value is conceptualized among non-commodity producing societies. The example he uses of Dutch settlers 'buying' the Manhattan Island from local Indians for twenty-four dollars worth of beads and trinkets is meaningful in many ways. The author goes on:

The story could be considered one of the founding myths of the United States; in a nation based on commerce, the very paradigm of a really good deal. The story itself is probably untrue (the Indians probably thought they were receiving a gift of colorful exotica as a token of peaceful intentions and were in exchange granting the Dutch the right to make use of the land, not to "own" it permanently), but the fact that so many of the people European merchants and settlers did encounter around the globe were willing to accept European beads, in exchange for land or anything else, has come to stand, in our popular imagination, as one the defining features of their "primitiveness" --- a childish inability to distinguish worthless baubles from things of genuine value (Graeber 2001:91).

The anecdote above tells us how differences are realized. How in indigenous societies imagination of others or objects is fundamentally different from dominant societies. Perhaps the Dutch settlers belonged to the colonial power to prove themselves having bought the land from local Indians, while the Indian societies did not seem to be familiar with the practice of buying and selling things. Or perhaps the money - the main medium of exchange - was not yet introduced in Indian lives. Then how could the Dutch claim that they had bought the land from

the Indians? But the Indians might have been interested only in establishing a social contract with the newcomers for the purposes of peace and harmony through exchanging gifts.

Limbus: The *Khambongbas*⁵⁶ (Risen from the Earth)

Limbus call themselves *Khambongba* [*kham* (soil); *bongba* (risen)], meaning that Limbus are believed to have originated from the earth. This is why they consider themselves as indivisible to the territory of Limbuwan. Their *that-thalo* and Limbuwan's history is also recounted in similar ways to the case of the Indians "selling" Manhattan land to the Dutch. Documents and the political history of Nepal in relation to Limbuwan demonstrate that the arrival of non-Limbu populations to Limbuwan, particularly Bahuns and Chhetris, began only after the annexation of Limbuwan into the Gorkha Kingdom. Bed Prakash Upreti, himself a Kumai Bahun has presented an anecdote about the Kumai Bahun arrival in Limbuwan in the 1770s:

After Prithvi Narayan Shah's victory over Limbu chiefs (in 1774) the Limbu went to pay tribute to the king in Nepal...There the Limbu stayed with a Brahmin family ...a family of Parsai surname. The king told the Limbu chiefs to be loyal to him and asked them to invite settlers (*raiti basnu*). So, before the Limbu left Nepal they asked their host family to come to Limbuwan with them and two Parsai brothers came with them" (Upreti 1975:30).

The above case is an example of how the Limbu community was persuaded to accept new guests in their territory. However, Limbu territorial and political rights were promised by the Hindu King through a royal decree, considered by the Limbus as a treaty made between the Limbu chiefs and the Hindu King. The collective indigenous land ownership, mainly based on Limbu kinship, was called *thang sing khok sing*⁵⁷ in the Limbu language. *Thang sing khok sing*

⁵⁶ Kham (L) = soil/earth, pongba (L) = risen. Khambongba (L) = risen from the earth.

⁵⁷ *Thang sing khok sing* (L) = slash and burn the forest for cultivation.

ownership was renamed as *kipat* land ownership, probably to make it intelligible to non-Limbu language-speaking groups.

When the *kipat* collective land ownership was functional, a non-Limbu immigrant to Limbuwan had to present himself to a local Limbu headman (Subba) with a gift—supposedly a *quid pro quo*—requesting for land cultivation rights in the territory under the Subba’s jurisdiction. Such gift items included liquor, live goats, roosters, and meat. The Subba would then gift back a patch of land to the immigrant. So the non-Limbu immigrants in Limbuwan had only an usufruct right to the cultivated land while the true cultural ownership remained with the Limbus as their *purkhauli that-thalo* [ancestral territory], meaning that neither the Limbus nor the immigrants could own land as individual private property in an economic sense. However the Limbus were the “cultural owners of the land” (Myers 1986:127–158) as they believed (and still believe) that their land was owned and protected by their divinities and deities. Therefore such divinities are propitiated as the true ‘owners’ of the land. Here I argue that those Limbu local headmen who accepted the gift from immigrants and allowed the immigrants to cultivate their ancestral land had only wished to establish social contract with their guests - who represented completely different societies - by gift-giving their land in exchange with gifts from guests.

Limbus enjoyed their right to land until the state’s Land Reform Act abolished the collective *kipat* land ownership in the 1960s (Regmi 1978; Caplan 1970; Sagant 1996; Jones and Jones 1976; Jones 1973; Jones 1986; Sangraula 2067 v.s.; Shrestha 2042 v.s.). The *jagga dhani purja* [land ownership certificate] in individual cultivators’ name were issued only after the enactment of the Land Reform Act in 1963 followed by the land cadastral survey, implemented from the early 1970s through to the mid-1990s. Limbus’ *Kipat* land was gone when the land cadastral survey was completed all over Limbuwan. After the survey individual land ownership

certificates were issued to individual owners. This is the process by which Limbus lost their right to their ancestral land. After the abolition of *kipat* many former Limbu Subbas, who did not own much land in their own name, were often derided by others in stories stating things like ‘that Subba finished all of his lands in exchange for raksi [alcohol]’. But the fact was that the Limbus culturally lacked the concept of economic ownership or economic value of land. This could be the reason, among others, many Limbus became landless in an economic sense after the full implementation of land reform in Nepal. Ironically, the land givers themselves became the land beggars (Caplan 1970) at the end in consideration of land as an economic property. But for the Limbus, the definition of land in practice goes beyond the economic limit. For the Limbus, land is considered as the creator. The definition of land for the Limbus includes everything in the environment, in an ecological sense. For the Limbus, land is not merely an economic property rather land is understood as a cultural entity, a territory - *that-thalo* - and an abode for the divinities and deities of the Limbus.

Ancestral history in relation to defending territory [*that-thalo*] is central to Limbu identity politics. Hobsbawm writes: “All human being are conscious of the past... by virtue of living with people older than themselves” (Hobsbawm 1997:10). Similarly, Michel-Rolph Trouillet writes: “Human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators” (Trouillot 1995:2). In this way the Limbus are conscious of the history of their ancestors who fought the Gorkhali Hindu invaders to defend their *that-thalo*. The Limbus relationships to their own past is not a soliloquized boasting about themselves but a dialogic one involving the other invaders. Limbu identity is produced in relation to the wars that their ancestors fought to defend their territory. Godelier states “identity is always a product of a particular history” (2009: 12). He even argues that “[a]n anthropologist who knows nothing about history, or shows no interest in learning about

it, cannot fully discharge his or her professional, ethical, and political responsibilities" (2009: 37). If we look into the history of Nepal, the rulers and ruling caste groups have written an *aryan*-centric history of Nepal. In this regards, George Orwell's point is spot on: "Who controls the past...controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell 1961:56). The Limbus, in their political activities, seem to be aware of this fact as they want to control their own present with reference to the past wars that they fought before. In this regard Howard Zinn's statement is also illuminating "those people who control ... the mass media, government, educational system, the text book publishers, are determining our future unless we break away from that" (Zinn 2013).

Interrogating the History of the Domination of *Aryan* Civilization and Shah Dynasty in Nepal

Nepal's "unification", during the second half of the 18th century is no longer an unanimously agreed History of Nepal, particularly following various political movements by *adivasi-Janajati* people who have claimed that they have their own history and that their ancestors fought and gave their lives to defend their territory from the attacks of the Hindu King P. N. Shah (whom the then Limbus called by the name *pene hang*⁵⁸ [Chhetri King]). Those who try to understand the "unification" of Nepal from the *adivasi* perspective argue that the mission was accomplished by conquering other autonomous principalities. Therefore how this country of Nepal as a *Hindu giri raj* (Hindu mountain Kingdom) achieved its present size, shape and structure socially, culturally, religiously and politically, now requires empirical interrogation not only based on different peoples' understandings and imaginations of their own history but also on observable political enactments whereby indigenous imaginations of the past are now being

⁵⁸ *pene hang* (L) = Chhetri King

transformed into organized political actions today. Observations and interpretations of ethnographic evidence now confirm that diversity is the undeniable reality of Nepali societies, cultures, and politics. Gone are the days that the scholars both Nepali (such as Acharya, Panta, Gyawali, Vajracharya, and Nath) and foreigners (Stiller) alike believed in the making of Nepal as a monolithic Hindu nation-state during the 18th century as something inevitable and essential. They write that ‘unification’ of Nepal was the great desire of all Nepali societies and people. Hence the great King Prithvi Narayan Shah is said to have ‘accomplished the mission by his dint and valor’ with the assistance of Brahman pundits. History writing in Nepal was similar to the process observed in China by a scholar of seventeenth century China, who argued that “the historian and the ruler write each other into existence” (Rublack 2011:96).

Eric Hobsbawm writes “The history of social movements is generally treated in two separate divisions” (Hobsbawm 1959:1). This is what one finds when dealing with important political historical events including some rebellious movements in Nepal too. The Tamang and Limbu rebellious movements in the 1950s-60s for *prajatantra* [democracy] or *mukti* [liberation] were simply depicted as “loot” (criminal), while a similar kind of politically motivated movements undertaken by mainstream political parties are seen and analyzed as ‘rebellions against the feudal exploiters’ for the liberation of Nepalis from exploitation and domination. Numerous similar “lootings” occurred during the People’s War (1996-2006) but those were also considered to be part of political movements. My concern here is that the Limbu rebellion against the Bahuns in Limbuwan in 1951 (Upreti, 1975) and the Tamang rebellion against high castes in the then West no 1 Tamsaling (Holmberg 2006:46–48) should be seen in a broader political historical context of the ruling caste’s exploitation of the Limbus and the Tamangs, rather than seeing them simply as ‘looting’. We shall look into those Limbu and Tamang

rebellions from the perspective of *mukti* [liberation], at least focusing on what the term *mukti* meant for these movements. I argue that The Constitution of Nepal 2015 may have fulfilled the ruling caste's desire of liberation [*mukti ko chahana*] but the *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesis*' quest for liberation is underway. This is particularly after the empirical fact that the new constitution 2015 could not address the identities of *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesis* and that those communities boycotted the constitution.

None of the post-1950 Nepali historians write about the human cost of “unification”, let alone the political, socio-cultural, economic, religious and, above all, the historical cost of the ‘unification’ of Nepal. However such an understanding about PN Shah having ‘unified’ Nepal is not the eternal truth anymore. Even if he did, he carried out ‘unification’ for himself. Nowhere in the historical record can one find him speaking of planning war and attacks for the purposes of ‘unification’ and to bring together the divided states.

One of the main sources of writing history of Nepal has been the “imperfect chronicles furnishing bare dynastic lists of kings and their regnal years, intermixed with mythological, religious and legendary tales... There are two distinct sets of these chronicles - Buddhistic and Brahmanical; the former evidently composed by the Vajrcharyas, and the latter by the Brahmans” (Hasarat, 1970, p.xv). To me what seems to be missing from Hasarat's statement is yet another set of chronicles, which may be called the Kirat chronicles. They are completely different from both the Buddhistic and Brahmanical traditions and composed neither by the Buddhists nor the Brahmans. Following Hasarat's point, one can see that the motivation of writing history in post-1950 Nepal was to glorify the *Aryan* civilization's expansion across the Himalayan foothills accompanied by mutually competing Chhetriya Kingdoms which led to “unification” as the foundation of the future Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. These historians include

Baburam Acharya, Naya Raj Panta, Yogi Narahari Nath, Surya Bikram Gyawali, Dilli Raman Regmi and Dhanvajra Bajracharya. They started to write Nepali history only after the Rana regime was overthrown and the Shah monarchical dynasty was reinstated in 1951. With the exception of Imansingh Chemjong's "*Kirat itihās*" [History of Kirat], first published in 1948, the history of non-*Aryan* civilizations remained undocumented and their ruling history was eclipsed by the history of *Aryan* civilization.

During the Hindu monarchy, the Brahmans advised Kings and the Thakuri Kings ruled. When the kings thought of attacking other kingdoms, the Brahmans fulfilled multidimensional roles, sometimes as "fortune tellers" calculating the "auspicious day" to successfully attack the "enemy", at other times conspiring secret plans on how to defeat other kingdoms in one attack. The Kings only imagined while the Brahmans advised them how on to succeed. There are numerous examples of how Brahmans were supportive and instrumental in helping P. N. Shah's conquest. Kirkpatrick writes: "During the seize of Kathmandu the Brahmins of Gorkha came almost every night into the city, to engage the chiefs of the people on the part of their King; and to more effectually to impose upon poor Gainprejas, [Jay Prakash], many of the principal Brahmins went to his house, and told him to persevere with confidence, that the chiefs of the Gorkha army were attached to his cause, and that even they themselves would deliver up their king Prithwinarayan into his hands" (Kirkpatrick 1811:383). This is how one may find the Brahmans fulfilling their major advisory role in the making of the Hindu state of Nepal.

Kirat Civilization and Kirat Ruling History

Nepal has been ruled by four different dynasties, namely the Kirat, the Lichhavi, the Malla and the recently ousted Shah dynasty, which was the last in the monarchical history of

Nepal. Among those four dynasties, historians claim that the Lichhavi period was the golden period while the Kirat dynasty was an unknown period because there are no clear written documents available whatsoever. One of the reasons for the unavailability of written materials on the Kirat dynasty may be related to language. Kirats were non-*Aryan*, non-Sanskrit language speaking groups. But the Lichhavis used Sanskrit language in the available documents.

Notwithstanding the unavailability of the “historic” documents, present day *adivasi-janajati* politicians in Nepal harken back to the Kirat dynasty as their ancestral dynasty. Particularly Rai Kirati scholars and politicians both proudly associate the present day Rai Kirati population as the direct descendants of the ancient Kirat dynasty. I. S. Chemjong contributed in writing the history of non-*Aryan*⁵⁹ civilizations and their kingdoms across the Himalayan foothills that existed prior to any other ruling dynasties in Nepal. This narrative is invoked currently in *adivasi-janajati* identity politics in general and in the politics of the Kirat province in particular (Kirati 2016). Because of the domination of the Indo-*aryan* language group - namely Sanskrit and Khas-Nepali languages – which was used as the basis of writing history by the historians primarily with an *aryan* racial background, the *adivasi-janajati* non-*aryan asura* groups could only count on being mentioned briefly by the *aryan* historians. They would be happy to find their ancestor’s stories included in mainstream history, if only in passing.

Nepal observed the *jana yudhda* [people’s war] (1996-2006), an armed war fought to overthrow the Hindu monarchy, which led to the declaration of the republic of Nepal. For the Maoists, the monarchy was the only residue of feudalism, which protected feudal rule in Nepal.

⁵⁹ All genres of writings both in social science and literature disparagingly depict non-*aryan* groups as *asura* (demon) groups as opposed to the *arya* or *sura* (god) groups. Consequently the *asura* groups are interpreted to be an evil force, who had to be tamed and defeated by the *sura* (*aryan* gods) to keep the broader social harmony. Observance and boycott of the Dashain festival in Nepal is a perfect example to look into the politics in Nepal on the basis of *Arya (Sur) versus asur* (demon), which is the Hindu high caste ruling groups versus the *adivasi-janajati* ruled groups respectively.

So overthrowing the *purano satta* [old regime] and replacing it with the *nayaa satta* [new regime] was inevitable. The Maoists fought a bloody war as they were said to have controlled more than half the territory of Nepal, thereby limiting the old regime to within the *Nepal khaaldo* [Kathmandu valley]⁶⁰ and other major cities of the country. The *Jana yudhda*'s culmination was the *jana andolan* II [people's movement II]⁶¹ in 2006 that literally brought the Maoists combatants in to the Kathmandu valley, inside the Ring Road⁶² to fight and capture the *Old Nepal*, which would soon be transformed into *naya Nepal*⁶³ [New Nepal]. It took 10 years for the Nepal Communist Party-Maoist to succeed in their strategy to capture and defeat the *Nepal Khaldo*, the capital of the Hindu monarchy and the Shah dynasty (the same Shah dynasty's King P. N. Shah, the forefather of the last King Gyanendra had captured *Nepal khaldo* in 1768 from the rulers of the Malla dynasty - the ancestors of the present day Newars). The Hindu Thakuri (Kshetriya) King PN Shah from an economically poor Gorkha kingdom, with the help of his Bahun advisors, conquered the then *Nepal* (Kathmandu valley), one of the most prosperous city states in South Asia during the 18th century. After two and a half centuries elapsed, and after ten generations of the Shah dynasty's rule, the Bahun Maoist leaders from the same Gorkha and Kaski region (the descendants of the advisors to the then Shah conqueror in the 1700s) led the People's War⁶⁴ to overthrow the same Shah dynasty and the Hindu monarchy (for which the

⁶⁰ Until the 1930s only Kathmandu valley was called Nepal. In vernacular language it was called *Nepal khaldo* (Nepal valley). What we call Nepal now was called the Gorkha Kingdom. Similarly, what we call Nepali *bhasa* (language) used to be called Gorkhali *bhasa* until the 1950s.

⁶¹ Also called the April Revolution as the leftists would prefer, probably learned from the Russian revolutions named after the certain months, such as February Revolution and October Revolution.

⁶² The cities of Kathmandu and Lalitpur, the center of the state power and the center of country's finance and politics are surrounded by the Ring Road.

⁶³ One of the most hyped political rhetoric in the wake of *jana andolan* II was that the *naya Nepal* [New Nepal] was going to be created by restructuring the state through the new constitution of the new republic. For the *adivasi-janajati* including the Limbus, the founding of new provinces based on their cultural identity and unique history was the most sought after goal under the rubric of *naya Nepal*.

⁶⁴ The Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) leadership was predominantly composed of Bahuns. One of the top leaders originally from Gorkha said during his visit to the Gorkha Palace that his ancestor also played an instrumental role in the King P. N. Shah's conquest campaign.

Brahmans fulfilled essential and indivisible advisory roles for the rulers for more than six hundred years⁶⁵).

Ancestral Heroics and War Accounts as the Resource for Political Organization and Social Movements

The *aryan* Hindu kingdom of Nepal succeeded and thrived on conquest and colonial exploitation of non-*aryan adivasi* peoples. Conquest and colonization of the Tamang, (Holmberg 2006; Tamang 2008), Kirat Rais and Limbus (English 1982; Pradhan 1991; Chemjong 1952; Chemjong 2055 v.s.; Baral 2012; Nembang 1987) are some examples documented by various scholars. These scholars have documented how Tamangs, Kirat Rais, and the Limbus resisted the conquerors with bravery to defend their society and territory [*that-thalo*]. A new trend in Nepali politics in general and particularly in identity politics is emerging. Recently *adivasi-janajati* politicians have started invoking their ancestral history in order to politically motivate and organize their own people. Gopal Kirati, one of the apex leaders of Communist Party Maoist Center, argues that “historical and collective community identity should be the basis of the formation of the Kirat state through which the federality can be extended as a political strategy”. He states that five historically epochal events occurred in the history of Kirati people as glorious events, which shall inspire Kirati people forever:

“First, *hang* [king] Yalambar was the founder of the country of Nepal. His dynasty ruled over the Nepal valley for 32 generations. Second, the Gorkha-Kirati Resistance War, in which the Kirati ancestors bravely fought the resistance war. The Gorkhali kidnapped the sovereignty of Kirati peoples but the Kirati people did not surrender. Third, the rebellion of prince Atal Singh Khambu, the last prince of the Hatuwa⁶⁶ state of Kirat. Fourth, the people’s leader Ram Prasad Rai’s armed rebellion, who had operated a revolutionary

⁶⁵ During the Malla dynasty, King Jayasthiti Malla had brought in Brahmans from south India to help introduce the four-fold varna and caste system in the then Nepal, consequently issuing codes in line with the caste system in ca.1379. There are many instances of protection of cow and Brahman in this code (Nepal Law Commission n.d.).

⁶⁶ Hatuwa, now in Bhojpur district, west of Arun river.

people's government to the east of Banepa for six months. [Rai was] Captured from Bhojpur via Okhaldhunga to Singha Darwar (during the revolution against the Ranas). Fifth, the armed movement under the leadership of Gopal Kirati, who proclaimed and staged an organized rebellion for the Kirat state and continued by unifying it with the Maoist movement and operated the Kirat autonomous people's government. This is the very glorious history, which will not let the new generation live quietly. History inspires, excites and agitates the new generation. As a consequence, the youths of the Republic Generation will ponder about how to build the Kirat state (Kirati, 2016, [my translation]).

One can see a difference in understanding and claiming history between *aryan* and non-*aryan* scholars and politicians alike as it may be understood from the “ five glorious historical epochs” as depicted by Gopal Kirati in his pamphlet. Gopal Kirati, an *adivasi* Maoist, seems to have understood Kirati ancestral history both from the ruling as well as resistance perspective. In addition, his influential invoking of the Kirati resistance to the Gorkha conquest further inspires present day Kirati youths to fight for their rights to guarantee the Kirat state in the constitution of Nepal. Gopal Kirati's take on Kirati history as a political resource for mobilizing the Kirati youth is a testimony to speak about how Nepal's *adivasi-janajati* are in the process of organizing themselves politically in reference to their ancestral history.

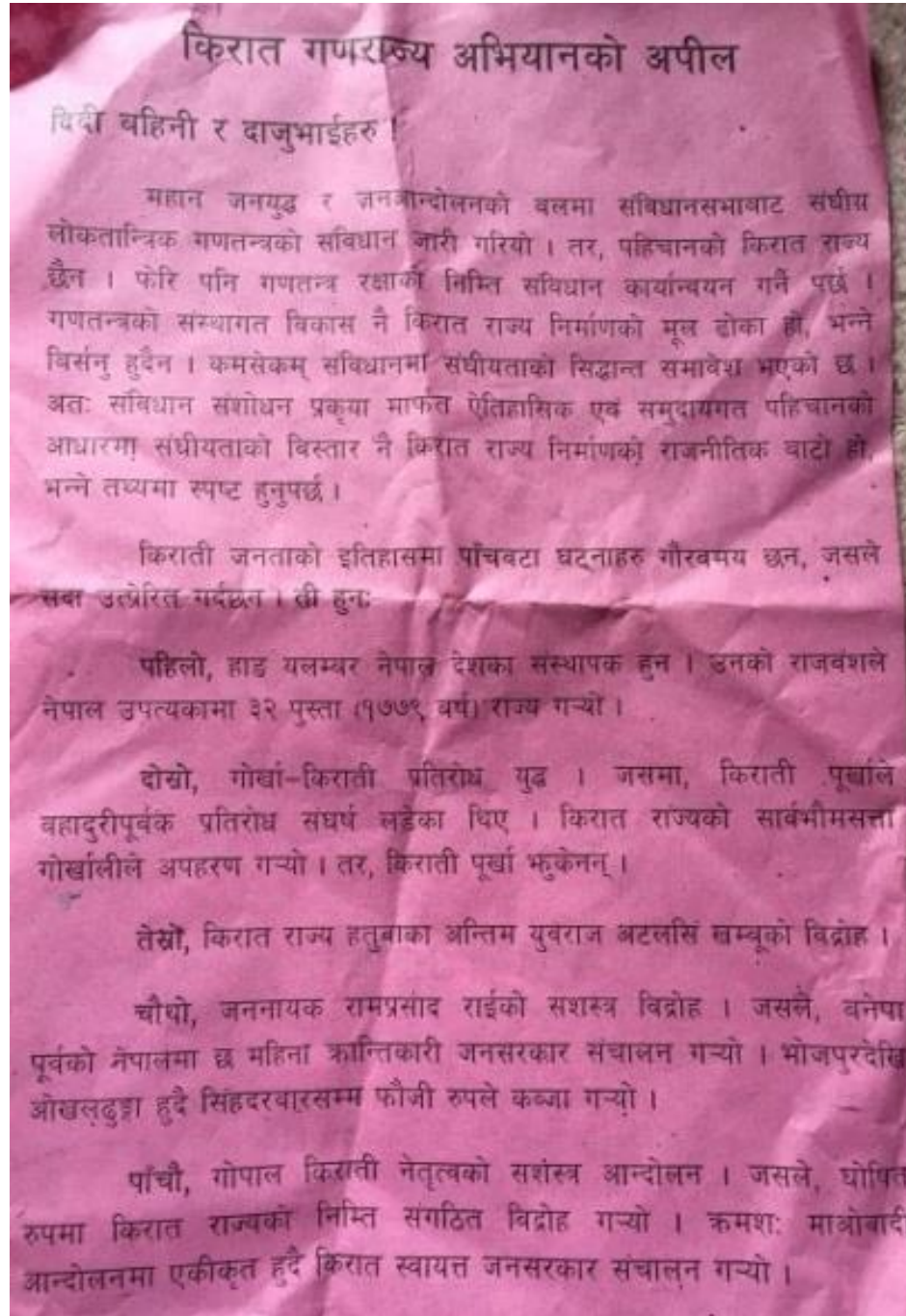


Figure 4.1 A Pamphlet Issued by Gopal Kirati

Account of the Gorkha versus Limbuwan War

Brian H. Hodgson, a British colonial administrator stationed in Nepal for more than two decades (1823-1845), first as an assistant resident representative and later as the British Empire's resident representative to Nepal. Hodgson wrote widely on different topics during his stay in Nepal, and later on in Darjeeling after retirement. A great amount of information he collected was never published and those manuscript collections are at the India Office Library in the British Library in London. Hodgson's manuscript on the Limbu-Gorkha war (1770s), written in Limbu language and script by Jovan Singh Fago, is now accessible to interested scholars. But it was R K Sprigg, a British linguist primarily interested in the Lepcha language, who met with the Kirat historian I. S. Chemjong in the 1950s and handed him the copies of those manuscripts and other books written in Limbu language and script during the mid-nineteenth century (Subba 1999, foreword by R.K. Sprigg). Bairagi Kaila, an acclaimed Nepali litterateur and Limbu scholar visited the India Office Library, London in 2005 to read different volumes including the description of the Gorkha-Limbuwan War. He brought back to Nepal the photocopies of those manuscripts written by Jovan Singh Fago and handed them to Kirat Yakthung Chumlung thereby making the copies of such an important historical document available in Nepal too. In this regard, Jovan Singh Fago is considered to be the first Limbu historian who described the Gorkha-Limbuwan war and handed in his description to Hodgson in the 19th century. Now two books have been published with a translation of the war description from Limbu into Nepali (Tigela-Limbu, Tunghang, and Angla 2013; Mabuhang and Tunghang 2070 v.s.). The war described by Jovan Singh Fago, collected by Hodgson, and now the text transcribed in *deva nagari* script, also translated into Nepali begins as follows:

[I wrote] whence the *pene hang* (Chhetri king) was sighted. Came from the west. Destroyed Newar king in Nepal. Thereafter came to Tamakoshi. Balinghang, Ulihang lived in Khambuwan. [They] fought against the Gorkha. Fought seven years. Gorkhas killed many peoples. Putlung (Yakha) and Yathang *yakthumba* (Limbu) lived here-side of the Arun. [They] did not help, although help was sought by Balinghang. Gorkhas finished Khambuwan in seven years...Then the Gorkha soldiers, having finished the Khambuwan, appeared in Arun. They came to Arun with thoughts of taking over the *yakthung laji* (*yakthung* state) but the *yakthumbas* rose and went to Sabha confluence⁶⁷ and fought the war. The [*yakthumba*] fighters were Sangbotre, Tesakpa, Kangkare, Kangsore, Sipa, Fakte... [The] Gorkhas could not win here side of Arun. *yakthumbas* chased them away. After three years of war, they were chased away to the distance of eight walking days. They were chased away up to Dumja⁶⁸ (Tigela-Limbu, Tunghang, and Angla 2013:19).

The war description has presented a war hero, the bravest of the braves, Kangsore, as the commander who was killed by the Gorkha force by deception on the battlefield later.

How the Gorkha Force Deceived the Limbu force

Kirat Historian I.S. Chemjong describes how the Limbu commander Kangsore was killed by the Gorkha soldiers through cheating:

Raghu Rana, the commander of the Gurkha force asked the commander of the Limbu force to fix a day for a combat only between the commanders themselves. He proposed that all fighting soldiers should keep their weapons at home and attend the duel of their two commanders, as spectators only. And the officer who would win the combat would have the power of command over both armies. If the Limbu officer should win, the whole army of the Gurkha officers would be under him. If the Gurkha officer should win, the whole army of the Limbu officers would be under him...So in the morning of the first of May 1774 A.D. all the soldiers of both sides stood on the upper and lower sides of the fighting ground situated to the southern side of Chainpur town; and the combat between the Limbu officer, Kangsore and the Gurkha officer, Raghu Rana started. The soldiers stood by watching. The two commanders fought on from morning till afternoon. In the afternoon, Kangso Rey finally smote Raghu Rana in such a way that he died. Seeing the defeat of their officer, the Gurkha soldiers drew out their hidden arms and suddenly attacked Kangsore and his soldiers. The latter, nevertheless surrounded their enemies on the way to Tambar and closing the way towards the river killed them all together. After that, the Limbus picked up the corpses of those two heroes and buried them. They buried the corpses of Raghu Rana and Kangsore on the upper and lower sides of the fighting ground and erected stone monuments over their graves in their honor. The Limbus then returned to their respective villages (Chemjong, 1967:151).

⁶⁷ The confluence location of Arun and Sabha rivers is called Sabha Dovan.

⁶⁸ Dumja lies in Sindhuli district now.

History is conventionally understood to be the interpretation of the recorded past and written records. But history is also enlivened by the memories, tales, and, most importantly, is produced and reproduced by peoples' spectacular movements and activities. Historically documented events or even the memories and myths are enacted and resurrected; people are organized and motivated for concrete movements and actions, thereby further reproducing political values and relationships.



Figure 4.2 Sketch of Kangso Re, Limbu Commander and Raghu Rana, Gorkhali Commander. This Sketch has been Widely Used in Different Publications by the Limbus. Sketch: Tek Bir Mukhiya

Paying Homage to the Warrior Kangsore: Resurrection of a War Hero

In April 2010, the Federal Limbuwan State Council's (FLSC) leaders and cadres paid homage to a warrior at the battlefield site of the Gorkha-Limbuwan war on the banks of the Arun river in present day Sankhuwa Sabha district in eastern Nepal. The visit was part of the party expansion mission targeted for Dhankuta and Sankhuwa Sabha districts (Mission DS). However, I will focus on the invocation of the great hero, the warrior ancestor who gave his life for defending Limbuwan. In this homage the chief guest was the Chair of the Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC). In such events, the chief guest is the chief conversant of the topic. As the homage program took place, a small drama-like situation developed at the scene. The crew's photographer and videographer were directing participants as to how they should line-up for the best photographs at the edge of river.

Lined-up in an arc-shape, some participants held Limbuwan party flags high. All the leaders and cadres were paying tribute to their warrior hero, perhaps for the first time in 237 years, ever since the warrior gave his life in the battle. The tribute ceremony began with a poem composed by a retired (Limbu) British Gurkha Officer followed by the chief guest's tribute to the hero. The chief guest and the chair of the party, in an emotional pose, called for two slogans about Limbuwan and the warrior Kangsore:

Arun Purba Limbuwan: Limbuwan, Limbuwan [East of Arun: Limbuwan, Limbuwan]
Mahan Limbuwani Yoddha Kangsore: jindabad [Victory to the great Limbuwani warrior].

The leader of the FLSC said:

For his own land, in defense of Limbuwan land, on one of the days in the month of Saun, 1831 BS; the great warrior Kangso Re raised his sword to fight the enemy giving his own life to martyrdom in this very place, to whom I would like to pay the most sincere tribute on behalf of all the leaders, the cadres, the Limbuwan Volunteers, the students, the women, teachers and all and above all, the Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parishad [FLSC] from all nine districts of Limbuwan as well as on behalf of all, from all over Nepal. I bow

my head in his memory with the deepest respect and want to say *Jaya Limbuwan* [victory to Limbuwan].

The leader highlighted internal Limbu political and ideological confusion in the past:

How it took so long for Limbuwan politicians to arrive at this sacred place: “We could arrive in this place only after about 250 years. O, great Kangsore, we could not recognize you, we remained stranded as Kangres [Nepali Congress] for some time, we remained stranded as Emale [CPN-UML] at other times, we remained stranded and confused by being *poojibadi* [capitalist], or *samajbadi* [communist]. But we failed to realize for 250 years the solemn causes you fought for and we also failed to recognize the path you carved for us until now.” He begged for apology for not being able to follow Kangsore’s footsteps for such a long time. Having arrived at this sacred place, he proclaimed: “we are saying that we awoke from the long sleep today and we are saying that we recognized you, and we are wondering what objectives and philosophies of Limbuwan did inspire you to fight? And we are proud to say that you fought to build Limbuwan, one of the most beautiful states in the world.” Then the leader announced that “thousands of cadres and leaders of FLSC should be following the path Kangsore paved for Limbuwan.” He asked the crowd: “Friends, are we not in his path? Are we or not?”. “Yes, we are”. All responded loud and clear as it seemed like an oath taking ceremony in the name of Limbuwan. He went on to say briefly: “Today we are fighting for the nine districts east of Arun to declare Limbuwan Autonomous Province on the basis of ethnic historicity [*jatiya aitihāsikata*] under the Federal Republic of Nepal. And we hope that this fight will be peaceful, and we hope this fight shall be powerful.” During his speech, he also made some remarks on how different *adivasi-janajati* shall forge a common front to fight for the *adivasi-janajati* right to autonomy based on unique historicity, i.e. similar experiences of domination by the Hindu State and violent resistance against conquest. As he said: “Yesterday, we made mistakes, when Kathmandu was attacked, Tamsaling happened to be simply onlookers, attack fell upon the Tamsaling and Khambuwan happened to be onlooker and Limbuwan was an onlooker when Khambuwan was attacked. Those were the mistakes on our behalf. We shall promise that such mistakes shall not be repeated.” He also said: “We promise before the witness of Arun’s water that if Limbuwan province under the federal republic of Nepal will not happen in the constitution, we will not sleep and we will never ever let the [rulers] have peaceful sleep either. I want to proclaim this on behalf of all.

Then he moved on towards his plan and vision about how Kangsore’s name, fame and bravery would be made integral to scholarly and academic aspects in Limbuwan. He said:

After the establishment of Limbuwan, as we have already promised, we still have a plan to establish **Limbuwan Kangsore University**, in which our Limbuwan Volunteers (LVs) will have opportunity to learn every kind of technical and tactical skills so that we can have highly skilled and trained human resource in Limbuwan.

Finally, so as to honor the bravery of Kangsore and continue with his legacy, he said:

After the establishment of Limbuwan, a medal for bravery and gallantry the **Kangsore Highest Medal** will be conferred on behalf of the Limbuwan State Government to those who fought for the Limbuwan before, and are fighting for the same cause now.” Furthermore, the chair of the party and the chief guest of the ceremony expressed that “we all should be happy and proud that we finally arrived today exactly at the place which has been the most important historical place in the history of Limbuwan. At this historic moment, I would like to express my commitment to conserve this place in memory and honor of Kangsore, and this place shall be developed as the Kangsore War Memorial when we have the Limbuwan state government.



Figure 4.3 FLSC Leaders and Cadres Paying Homage to the Warrior Kangsore at the Confluence of the Arun and Sabha Rivers. Photo: D.B. Angbung

Dhan Hang Limbu, a retired British Gurkha officer, now in his late 70s, read a poem that he had composed for Kangsore’s honor and dedication. Dhan Hang described how the Gorkhali soldiers deceived the Limbu warriors. For doing this the poet impersonated himself as the warrior Kangsore with the announcement for his audience before he started reading the poem: “ I [Dhan Hang] am reading this poem but imagine that this is Kangsore’s soul speaking through my words”.

A Never Defeated Territory
-Dhan Hang Limbu

Show me, how did I lose?
This is history;
Whoever wins in one on one fight between the two commanders,
the winner's army will have the victory.
Declared was this, and condition was this.
My force had left the arms back home.
As soon as I killed Raghu Rana,
The Gorkhali force struck me with the arms they had hidden beneath the earth.
This was Gorkhali army's well-planned conspiracy, a deception.
Is this your bravery?
No! Acting like this is cowardice.
A warrior may face off with indomitable courage.
Will sustain the strikes of arrows and the bullets with the bare chest as shield.
But will not fight with deception.
Kangsore, I am! I am Kangsore!
Show me, How did I lose?
How did I lose. [my translation].

The poem above depicts basically what Jovan Singh Limbu described in his writing discovered in the Hodgson manuscript collections. Similarly, Kumar Lingden, the chair of the FLSC has also composed a poem in honor of and dedication to Kangsore:

No *palam*⁶⁹ was composed in Kangsore's name,
No *kelang*⁷⁰ played and danced, no *Chumlung*⁷¹ held in Kangsore's name.
Not even a single *khukuri*⁷² brandished,
Not even a stick and a sword rose,
In our own country, in our own Limbuwan,
Like a story long forgotten,
Kangsore, continued to be forgotten...forgotten.
[my translation].

Similarly, another song played at different events as a backdrop song that described Limbuwan as dear and adorable to everyone. The following song also invoked the great warrior Kangsore's bravery and pledges to follow in the footsteps of Kangsore in order to establish Limbu identity.

**Our Limbuwan is
Dear to us
-Raj Kumar Dikpal**

Raising soil-clenched fist, we dedicate our lives,
Our Limbuwan is adorable to us.
With our Chest filled with pride and brave history,
Prepared for oblation, we the archers,
Our pride is high like Faktanglung,
We have been fighting and fighting, we will again fight,
Following the footsteps of Kangsore, we march ahead.
Founding our own Identity [my translation].

The FLSC's leader's speech, the poems, songs, the war description, the invoking of the warrior Kangsore through different mediums, the slogans chanted in rallies, and the photographs presented in this chapter are testimonies of how the social relationships in relation to the Limbuwan's history and the Limbus' collective identity are being produced through organized activities and movements. Limbus have invoked the bravery and warrior character possessed by their ancestral hero, Kangsore. For the Limbuwan politicians, cadres and the LVs, Kangsore is

⁶⁹ Limbu courtship song.

⁷⁰ Limbu dance with music from a large drum. *ke* (L)= Limbu musical instrument drum, *lang* (L) = dance

⁷¹ Assembly.

⁷² Type of knife, often translated into English as a Gurkha knife.

synonymous with Limbu *itihās* [history], *that-thalo* [territory], and *pahichan* [identity].

Kangosre earned martyrdom trying to defend the *that-thalo* of the Limbus. I take on the line from the poem “Show me, how did I lose?” to look further into trajectories around the claim of not having lost the war. With the treaty with *pene hang*⁷³ the Limbu seemed to have lost their sovereignty, territory and cultural autonomy. With this, they lost their chiefdom’s history, built from the time immemorial. The Hindu state conquered Limbuwan and also the Limbu chiefdoms, albeit through a conciliatory treaty in 1774. On the one hand, the Limbus might interpret that this was a ‘nation to nation treaty’ between the Hindu Gorkha kingdom and the Limbuwan. Hence the Limbuwan were not “defeated” but an agreement on a nation to nation basis was made so as to establish social contract (Graeber 2001) between two different societies, or nations. While the Gorkha kingdom might have conspired, as they did with other kingdoms earlier. As an old Nepali saying goes: *halo bhayera pasnu phali bhayera niskanu*—enter like a needle and succeed [exit] like a ploughshare. The Gorkha Kingdom entered into Limbuwan territory like a needle through a conciliatory agreement with not much bloody war, and with some flattering words in addressing the Limbus:

“You are different from the 900,000. Rais [of Majhkirat], because [their] chieftains are to be displaced, but not you...In case we confiscate your land, may our ancestral gods destroy our kingdom. We hereby inscribe this pledge on copper plate and also issue this royal order and hand it over to our Limbu brethren” (Regmi 1978:626).

The Limbu chiefs seemed to believe in this and they seem to believe even today as their political slogans in the placards during demonstrations, and their leaders’ speeches repeatedly highlight: “Limbuwan is never a defeated land”. One may ask further if Limbuwan was never a defeated land, then what is this fight for? What inspires them to fight to “bring back” Limbuwan or their ‘land’ if they never lost it? I have heard Limbuwan leaders time and again saying:

⁷³ Limbus called the Shah king *pene hang* (Chhetri King)

“Limbus are prepared to fight for one thousand years for Limbuwan”. Why? Is it possible to bring the old Limbuwan chiefdom back in present day society and democratic state? Are the LVs and the cadres fighting to establish back the ancient Limbuwan ruled by the Limbu chiefs ? I assume not. The struggle is not for bringing back the ‘ancien regime’. In fact it is for the constitutional recognition of Limbuwan and the Limbu culture on a par with others. It is for the establishment of broader Nepali society made up of a mosaic of culturally “synchronic co-existence” (Turner 2004:197) in which all different cultures are constitutionally recognized and treated as equal as suggested by Terence Turner in the concept of synchronic pluralism:

Cultural and ethnic difference has become a basic principle of contemporary social and political life. This new meaning of cultural difference is distinct from the liberal doctrine of individual equality as it applies to the rights of citizens in modern states. Cultural or ethnic difference is a collective rather than an individual feature, and it serves as a rubric under which individuals of disadvantaged groups can claim individual rights by virtue of the need to correct or compensate for the historic inequality of state policy towards their group (Turner 2004:197).

In fact this is their history, through these actions they are producing the social relationships that Limbu society is historically a different society and that their history is in no way inferior or superior than that of the rulers history. Therefore, one can see them through their political activities, believing in the difference and their demands that ‘difference’ must be constitutionally recognized as having an equal share, at a cultural level, in broader Nepalese politics.



Figure 4.4 FLSC leaders and cadres in a rally in Kathmandu. The Slogan on the Banner Reads: Lets Establish Autonomous States on the Basis of Ethnic Historical Backgrounds.

Kangore as the Inspiration for Party Organization and Mobilization

The Federal Limbuwan State Council developed a training manual, Kangore Commanding Course, for the Limbuwan Volunteers (LV) in 2009. The training manual's main slogan reads thus: *Limbuwanko mukti, rakshya ra sammridhhi ko lagi* [For the Liberation, Defense & Prosperity of Limbuwan] in the opening page of the manual. In addition, the cover page instructs the LVs thus: "LVs, Lead the Limbuwan" (*L Vharu, Limbuwanlai netritwa gara*). This manual is for instructing LVs about Teamwork, Leadership and Communication (TLC). The Kangore Commanding Course seems a well-designed training syllabus for a political party desiring to have its own volunteer force. One could believe that there were 1500-2000 standing LVs in Limbuwan organized under the FLSC party. The 16 page long manual is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on different skills required for a volunteer, while the second part

focuses on the imparting knowledge about the party's organizational structure, ideology and policies. In the first part, the instruction manual includes standing orders for Limbuwan volunteers in which 19 standing orders are listed. Similarly, the manual lists out 17 characteristics, which an LV must possess. The LV leaders must have the following qualities: i) Accountable, ii) Aggressive, iii) Candid, iv) Competent, v) Confident, vi) Courageous, vii) Decisive, viii) Dependable, ix) Disciplined, x) Honest, xi) Motivating, xii) Passionate, xiii) Resilient, xiv) Selfless, xv) Tenacious, xvi) Vigilant, xvii) Planner.

Kangore Commanding Course also includes eleven principles of leadership development:

- i. Know yourself and seek self-improvement;
- ii. Be technically and tactically proficient;
- iii. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions;
- iv. Make sound and timely decisions;
- v. Set the example;
- vi. Know your team and look out for their welfare;
- vii. Keep your team informed;
- viii. Develop a sense of responsibility in your team;
- ix. Ensure the task is understood, supervised and accomplished;
- x. Train your members as a team;
- xi. Employ your team in accordance with its capabilities.

This course presents **SALUTE** as a formula for identifying the enemy force. SALUTE stands for Size, Activity, Location, Uniform, Time, and Equipment. What may be the number or size of the enemy? What activities are the enemy carrying out? How and in which location is the enemy positioned? How are they dressed up? What time did you notice the enemy? How are they equipped?

The points above are some of the important topics included in the first part of the Kangore Commanding Course. The second part of the course includes some policy guidelines and detail on the party's organizational structure. As for the party's basic approach, the course states that the FLSC is tired of seeing the top-down type politics in Nepal. Hence the FLSC

wants to establish bottom-up model politics in Nepal. The bottom-up model is explained as having the federal level co-coordinating political institutions under which there shall be Limbuwan, Khambuwan, Tamsaling, Newa, Magarat, Tamuwan, and Tharuhat councils. All these councils shall remain autonomous. As for its political line, the Kangsore Commanding Course states that *ganatantra* [Republic], *sanghiyata* [Federality], *loktantra* [Democracy], *dharma nirapakshyata* [Secularism] and *jatiya aitihasikata ko adharna prantahru* [provinces on the basis of ethnic historicity] are the main political agendas of the FLSC. The FLSC's main philosophy is federality and co-existence. Kangsore Commanding Course does not say anything about the warrior Kangsore as such. But suffice it to say that the course itself has been named after him, which is intended as an inspiration for the new recruitment of Limbuwan Volunteers.

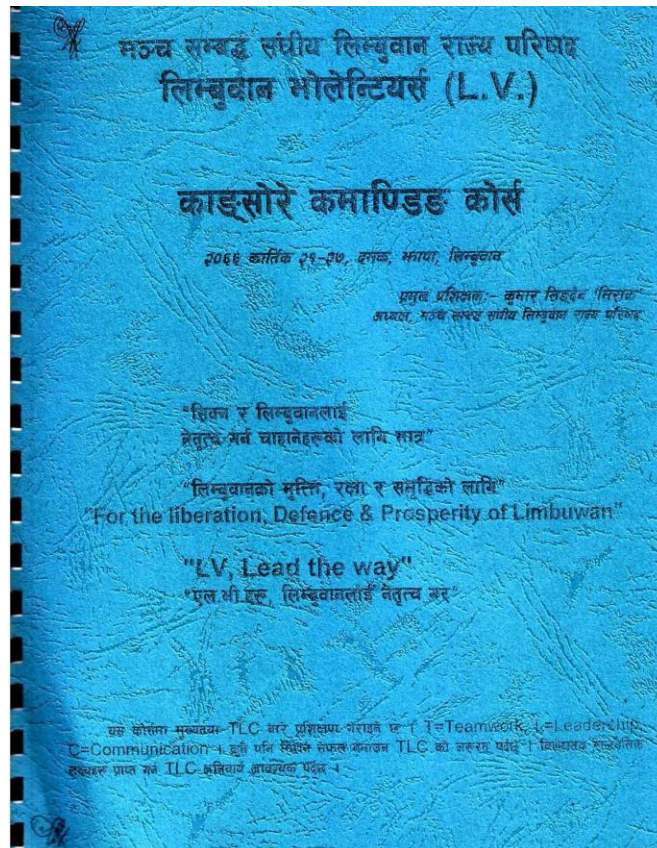


Figure 4.5 Cover Page of the Training Manual: Kangsore Commanding Course

Transformation of Greetings and the Invention of the Kangsore Salute

One of the fascinating and clearly observable transformations in Nepali societies and cultures has been in how Nepali people greet each other upon causal encounters. The common greeting of “namaste” has now been diversified so much in contemporary Nepal across cultural and linguistic differences. The *adivasi-janajati* groups with their own language, other than Nepali, have begun greeting each other in their own languages. This is a testimony to the growing consciousness towards one’s own ethnic identity in Nepal. Similar transformations can be observed in Nepali political life as well. Anyone familiar with Nepali politics for the past three or four decades must have observed changes in the way politically conscious people address each other, be it in causal encounters or formal political meetings or in the field of movements and protests. Gone are the days of the Panchayat regime when the Panchayati politicians would conclude their address to a crowd or a formal program with ‘*jay des jay nares*’ [victory to country, victory to king] as a sign of supporting the monarchy and a partyless, mono-cultural polity. *Jay Nepal* [victory to Nepal] is the term that Nepali Congress party followers, leaders and cadres alike use to greet each other and also while concluding their speeches. During election campaigns in the 1990s Nepali Congress party candidates used a major election slogan *jay Nepal ko narale, sukha paye sarale* [saying the slogan of jay Nepal brought happiness to all]. Similarly the leftist, communist party followers, also called progressives, imported communist Lenin’s red salute [*lal salam*] via Indian communist parties.

Neither of the above greetings fit into the political and social logic of the Limbus. Saying *sewaro* is a common greeting between the Limbus. Similarly, *jay Limbuwan* [victory to Limbuwan] is popular for the politically conscious Limbus and those well-wishers of Limbuwan. Limbuwan political party leaders and cadres alike use this greeting while addressing crowds or

political programs. *Jay Limbuwan* is neither imported from abroad nor borrowed from other political parties within Nepal. Similarly Limbuwan Volunteers perform the Kangsore salutation when greeting each other. This is a formal salutation performed only at the formal ceremonies such as the Volunteer's oath taking ceremonies after completion of certain courses or trainings. This salutation is performed by placing the fist of the right hand on the left chest or heart. Many aspects of Limbuwan politics are uniquely different from other groups given that Limbus history and historical resources are different.

Reading Dead History versus Observing Live History

To me as a student of anthropology, reading the history of Nepal made by Kings and Rana rulers is like reading bed time stories. On the other hand, observing the enactments of the past through social movements and political organizations is authentic and fascinating. Nepali historians writing the history of *aryan* civilization and Hindu rule in Nepal mention the Kirat ruling dynasty as being in the age of "darkness" because no written documents or scriptures whatsoever are available to shed light on the Kirat dynasty. However the Kirat dynasty is documented to have ruled over Nepal for 32 generations. The point is that the non-*aryan* Kirat dynasty did not remain in darkness in the eyes and minds of the Kirat *adivasi-janajatis*. It may be true that the Sanskrit language might not have entered into Nepal valley until the Lichhavi dynasty displaced the Kirats. Kirats were non-*aryan*, non-Hindu, non-Sanskrit lingual groups. This may be the reason that they did not leave traces of written documents showing their rule in Nepal.

Although the Kirat dynasty may not have left behind written traces of their rule, present day Kirat Rai and Limbus are constructing absolutely spectacular visual images of their

ancestors. One can find the first Kirat King Yalambar's statue in different places in Limbuwan and Kirat areas. One can see such images printed in journals, calendars, invitation cards, and essays commemorating Yalambar as the first king of the first ruling dynasty of Nepal. On this basis, it is further claimed by the Kirat Rais that the Kirat province be declared on the basis of this historical fact. Furthermore, Kirat Rai and Limbu have also started *yele tangbe* [yele era] calendar, which is named after King Yalambar's name and reign. The Yele era's new year falls on Magh 1st (the 10th month of the Nepali calendar, in the late second or early third week of January of CE calendar), which is widely celebrated among the Rais, Limbus, Yakhas and Dhimals, the four groups considering themselves as being part of the ancient Kirat confederacy in Nepal.

This is how the past is resurrected and enlivened in the everyday political lives of Limbuwan. The Kirat dynasty, which is otherwise said to have remained in "darkness" in the eyes of dominant historians, is alive and vibrant through the *adivasi-janajati* imagination of their ancestral past and in concrete, observable activities. This demonstrate that the understanding and imagination of history has shifted from textbook readings towards productive actions and performances, which might be called claims for equal recognition of every society's collective identity before the constitution. History is a source from which identity politics also emanates.



Figure 4.6 Yalamber's statue. <http://photopatrakarita.com/culture/reverence-king> (accessed: 2-8-2017).

The Photo Caption reads: A Worshipper, Baliraj Rai, paying respect to the first Kiranti King Hang Yalamber by worshipping his statue during the celebration of *ubhauri* festival in Mudhe Shanishchara, Sankhuwasava, Nepal. Photo: Lakpasange Sherpa.

Conclusions

In “The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1959, 318-49; original, 1852), Marx writes:

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language... The awakening of the dead in those revolutions therefore served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given tasks in imagination, not of taking flight from their solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not of making its ghost walk again (Marx 1959, 320).

The rulers and writers wrote the history of Nepal. On the other hand the *adivasi-janajatis* could only speak their own truth – as the saying goes: *lekheko rahanchha, boleko hawale udai lanchha* [what is written remains but the spoken goes with the wind]. The history of *aryan* Hindu rulers was “authentically” written, primarily by authors whose ancestral language was Sanskrit or Pali. But the non-*aryan* ancestors of the present day Kirats, the Limbus, did not leave behind written testimonies required to qualify as “history” as desired by conventional history. This was also because Sanskrit was not their language. However, as a Nepali proverb goes: *jaha ichchhya tyaha upaya* [where there is will there is way]. However, curious minds and eyes may observe the Limbus and the Rais as being more creative in producing history through their own imagination of their dead ancestors compared to other historians who only rewrite stories of the dead.

The way the Limbus are organizing different movements in relation to their ancestral past shows that the past, present and future are not separate but, instead, are parts of the same continuum. Carole McGranahan writes:

Historical truths are always also social truths. The making of history is a social and political process, not a neutral rendering of what happened in the past. To make history is

to historicize, to socially and politically legitimate a particular happening or version of what happened as true...history is as much about organizing the present and working to secure certain futures as it is about the past" (McGranahan 2010:3).

Observations of Limbuwan politics that are based on Limbu politicians' imagination of their ancestral pasts demonstrate that the basis of political organization and mobilization is not solely derived from the existence of economic inequality in society. Unlike the mainstream dominant political parties, *adivasi* Limbus have invoked heroes from past wars. Additionally archaic documents are re-read, re-written, and re-interpreted so as to mobilize the people. In this regard, the past heroes have become the political affidavits of the present. In a sentence, ancestral history is the foundation of Limbuwan politics. History is one of the foundations of identity-based political organizations in Nepal.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE NEW REPUBLIC OF NEPAL, THE CONSTITUTENT ASSEMBLY, AND THE POLITICS OF LIMBUWAN

Purano satta bye bye naya satta hi hi [bye bye to the ancient regime, welcome to the new regime] –Slogan chanted at the Republic’s victory rally in May 2006

An End to the Ancien Regime, Welcome to the New Regime

In the late evening of the 28th of May 2008, the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly (CA) of Nepal declared the country a republic, thereby abolishing the 240-year old Shah dynastic monarchy. Of the total 564 elected CA⁷⁴ members, 560 said ‘Yes’ to Republic and four voted against. With this action the people of Nepal officially abolished the monarchy and Nepal was no longer a Hindu Kingdom. This was the first time in Nepal’s history that a popular revolution overthrew a hitherto all-powerful monarchy. Earlier changes to regimes had taken place including the Shah dynasty overthrowing the Malla dynasty in the 1760s, the Malla dynasty dethroning the Lichchhavi dynasty around the 14th century and the Lichchhavis displacing the Kirats, the first rulers of Nepal, at some point during the 1st millennium. In these changes one

⁷⁴ The Constituent Assembly consisted of a total of 601 members in an Assembly tasked with drafting and promulgating the constitution of the republic of Nepal. The CA election was held on April 10, 2008. The CA was formed—with the total of 601 members—through a mixed electoral system: i) 240 members elected by first-past-the-post (FPTP), ii) 335 members elected by proportional representation, and iii) 26 members nominated by political parties. For the FPTP seats the country was delineated into 240 electoral constituencies. The proportional seats were based on broader population groups, namely i) Women (50%), ii) *adivasi-janajati* (37%), iii) *Madhesi* (31%), iv) Dalit (13%), v) Remote regions (4%), and vi) *anya* meaning ‘others’ (31%). The category *anya* (others) denoted the high caste Bahuns, Chhetris and Dasnami/Sanyasis. Political parties nominated the remaining 26 members after the government was formed. The first meeting was held with only 564 members as the 26 members were not yet nominated and 10 members had won from two constituencies.

The ruling caste groups or the state-makers themselves were classified as “others” for the purpose of the CA’s proportional electoral basis. This created confusion and crisis among the ruling political parties’ Bahun and Chhetri leaders about their own identity. How could the ruling castes (Bahuns 12%, and Chhetris 18% of the total population), the descendants of the Hindu state makers, be classified as “others” (Lohani 2011). This was one of the reasons why the Bahuns and Chhetris had to classify themselves as *arya* and *khas* respectively in the constitution later.

ruling dynasty typically fought against another ruling dynasty. The latest Shah monarch and dynasty, however, were overthrown by a people's revolt.



Figure 5.1 King Gyanendra's Effigy in Display Just Before it was Burned in Gongabu, Kathmandu During the April Revolution 2006

The same Shah dynasty often touted itself publicly as having led the revolution against the earlier Rana regime and aided the establishment of *prajatantra* [democracy] in 1950-51. That same Shah regime came to an end after a people's revolution for *lokatantra* [democracy]. In other words, the declaration of the Republic of Nepal in 2008 was the official formalization of the political mandates supported by the three week long revolution in April 2006. This was organized jointly by an alliance of the seven major political parties including the Communist

Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist), who were still at war with the government. This agitation for transformation took place in Kathmandu and all major cities in Nepal during April 2006. The 19-days revolution, in which 23 people died and achieved martyrdom for the sake of *loktantra* brought the Shah monarch—also understood as a residue of feudalism—to his knees. This historic revolution, also known as the Peoples’ Movement II or April Revolution 2006, was preceded by a decade-long violent *jana yudhda* or People’s War (1996-2006), between the CPN-Maoist and the government that swept over Nepal. This conflict discredited the old structure, which had systematically discriminated against women, Dalits, *adivasi-janajatis* and other marginalized groups in so many respects. Suffice to say that women, Dalits, *adivasi-janajatis* and *madhesis* (from the southern plains) alike were an integral part of the Maoist *jana mukti sena* [People’s Liberation Army] during the conflict. Among the common Nepalese people, who would have thought before the People’s War (1996-2006) that the centuries old almighty monarchy would be toppled in one fell swoop by people’s power? But the Maoist-led *jana yudhda*, as it involved and also politically empowered hitherto marginalized and excluded Dalits, women, *adivasi-janajatis*, and *madhesis* from mainstream politics, transformed the understanding and imagination of the state and politics in Nepal. As the April Revolution 2006 succeeded in forcing the King to hunker down and step down from the throne, the long institutionalized feudal Hindu monarchy—considered by the Maoists as the source of all structural problems—came to a relatively peaceful end. “His Majesty’s Government of Nepal” was replaced by the “Government of Nepal.” Signboards, letterheads, or objects whose names began with ‘His Majesty’s’ were promptly replaced or erased throughout the country.



Figure 5.2 *Ganatantra Chok* [Republic Intersection]: A Newly Named Intersection in Gongabu During April Revolution.

The only national flag carrier airline called Royal Nepal Airlines was renamed Nepal Airlines. Organizations which were founded under the patronage of the King or the Queen changed their names to follow the new polity. For example, the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation changed its name to the National Trust of Nature Conservation. The statues of former monarchs erected in different places over the country were toppled and such spaces as corners, intersections, and public squares were renamed as *ganatantra chowks* [republic intersection]. Newly inscribed names for spaces, places, and offices followed the shift to *loktantra* [democracy]. This level of political transformation did not happen or was not possible when a similar revolution ousted the Rana regime to establish *prajatantra*⁷⁵ [democracy] in 1950-

⁷⁵ Although both Nepali words *loktantra* and *prajatantra* may be translated into English as ‘democracy’, the term *prajatantra* denotes ‘subjects’ rule while the word *loktantra* denotes ‘peoples’ rule’. Hence by the term *prajatantra*, one could understand the type of democracy under the auspices of monarchy as it lasted for more than a half century (1951-2006) in which ‘subjects’ were loyal to the king. However, the word *loktantra* (*lok*=people,

51. After the success of the April 2006 revolution, the reinstated parliament of Nepal formed an interim constitution drafting committee. Subsequently the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 was authenticated by the interim House of Representatives on January 15, 2007. The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 declared Nepal to be a secular state and stipulated for a Constituent Assembly (CA) to be elected through a general election. The CA would promulgate the new constitution of the Republic of Nepal. Subsequently the election of the CA was held on April 10, 2008—which later turned out to be the first and failed CA in Nepal’s political history—exactly two years after the April Revolution, which had started on April 5, 2006.

The Constituent Assembly (2008 - 2012) and Limbu Representation

The decade long Maoist *jana yudhda* helped to debunk the old political mindset of many sections of Nepali society. *Prajatantra* was conceptually transformed into *loktantra*, which also loosely meant inclusive democracy. *Adivasi-janajati*, *madhesi*, Dalit, and women who were structurally⁷⁶ excluded by the previous Hindu monarchic state wanted to be constitutionally included in making of a *naya Nepal* [new Nepal] on an equitable basis. The Hindu kingdom of Nepal changed into the Republic of Nepal, the Federal Republic of Nepal, or the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal based on different peoples’ different political tastes. New vocabularies hitherto unheard of now carve spaces in everyday Nepali political conversations. For example, *naya Nepal* [New Nepal], *sanghiyata* [federality], *rajya puna:sangrachana* [state restructuring], *pahichan* [identity], *that-thalo* [territory] began to be heard often amidst the transformation of broader Nepali political tropes. *Adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* voices were the main voices who were heard loud and clear in terms of *sanghiyata* [federality] and *pahichan*

tantra=rule) prevailed in Nepalese politics after the April 2006 revolution as this word matched attitudes after the republic of Nepal was established.

⁷⁶ Excluded by the state through the law and by Hindu caste domination in different walks of life.

[identity], both being the elementary bases for political organization, party formation and movements in new Nepal. In short, the declaration of Nepal as a Republic by the CA was the final outcome of: i) the *jana yudhda* (1996-2006); ii) the April Revolution 2006; and iii) the formation of the CA through the general election held on April 10, 2008.

In early 2007 the government agreed to amend the Interim Constitution with the addition of Article 63(3) following an agreement with the *Madhes* movement:

The Constituent Assembly shall be composed of the following number of members who are elected on the basis of the equality of population, geographical congeniality and specificity, and on the basis of the percentage the population of *Madhes*, in accordance with the mixed electoral system, as provided in the law: (a) **Two hundred and forty** members elected on the basis of first-past-the-post electoral system; (b) **Three hundred and thirty five** members to be elected on the basis of the proportional electoral system where voters vote for parties, while treating the whole country as a single election constituency; (c) **Twenty six** members to be nominated by the Council of Ministers, on the basis of understanding, from amongst the prominent persons who have rendered outstanding contributions to national life, and the indigenous peoples which could not be represented through FPTP and Proportional system" (The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007).

Of the 601 members, 240 were elected through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral process, for which the country was divided into 240 single-member electoral constituencies by the Electoral Constituency Delineation Commission (ECDC)⁷⁷ in May-July 2007. Similarly 335 members were elected through proportional electoral system, which took into consideration the diversities in social-cultural composition of the population,⁷⁸ namely status as *adivasi janajati*, *madhesi*, Dalit, Others (Bahun and Chhetri), and those from Backward or isolated regions. Each of these categories had to include 50% women. In this regard, adopting this proportional or

⁷⁷ I was privileged to be a member among the five members Commission.

⁷⁸The proportional representation system included the following percentages:*Madhesi* (31.2%), Adivasi Janajati (37.8%), Dalit (13%), Backward region(Humla, Mugu, Jumla, Kalikot, Dolpa, Bajhang, Bajura, Achham districts) (4 %), Others (Bahun and Chhetri) (30.2 %). Each of these categories guaranteed 50 percent to be included for women. The CA 2008 rather hurriedly categorized the Bahun and Chhetri as Others (*anya*) that prompted dissatisfactions among Bahun and Chhetri activists. The 'Others' category was changed into *Arya-Khas* category in The Constitution of Nepal 2015.

representative method as an integral element in the electoral system benefitted formerly excluded groups in many respects.

Of the total 601 members in the CA, the CPN-Maoist was elected as the largest party with 220 seats; the Nepali Congress (NC) came second with 115; and the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) gained 109 seats. A newly formed party – the Madhesi People’s Rights Forum (Nepal) - secured 54 seats and the Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party secured 21 seats. 20 other parties secured from one to nine seats of which six different political parties secured only 1 seat each. A total of 25 political parties comprised 599 members while 2 members were elected as independent candidates. Limbuwan’s own party, the Federal Democratic National Forum (FDNF) (described in chapter 1) secured two seats (one male Limbu and one female Tharu) in the proportional group. With its two CA members, the FDNF⁷⁹ came 15th position amongst the 25 political parties in the CA. The example of Limbuwan’s own party electing a non-Limbu Tharu *adivasi-janajati* woman demonstrated the inclusionary political characteristic of Limbuwan politics. Although the FDNF secured only two seats, the Limbu community was over represented in the CA compared to the size of their population in Nepal. There were 14 (6.3%) Limbu⁸⁰ CA members elected from five different political parties, which is a larger proportion compared to their population size (1.5 % of the total population) in the country. The three major political parties - the CPN-Maoist, the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML - elected four Limbu members each while two other parties, namely the Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-Nepal) and the Federal Democratic National Front (FDNF), elected one Limbu member each. Furthermore, by ethnic background, the Chair of the CA was a Limbu too,

⁷⁹The FDNF lost both of its CA members as Rukmini Choudhary (Tharu, female) split the party by forming a different party called the *Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch -Tharuhath* (FDNF-Tharuhath). The only remaining FDNF CA member Rajkumar Nalbo (Limbu, male) also formed a different party and quit the FDNF. Therefore, towards the end of the first CA’s tenure, the FDNF had no representation in the CA.

⁸⁰a) CPN Maoist (4), b) Nepali Congress (4), c) CPN-UML (4), d) FDNF (1), and e) RPP-Nepal (1)

elected from the CPN-UML party. Despite the fact that Limbus were well represented and the CA itself was chaired by a fellow Limbu, the Limbu CA members individually could not do much to ensure a Limbuwan province in the *naya Nepal* [New Nepal] as their political loyalty seemed to be directed more towards their own parties than ensuring a Limbuwan province in the constitution. These Limbu CA members simply followed the directives of their respective parties.

The CA of 2008 was dismissed on May 28, 2012, exactly four years after it had declared Nepal a republic. The first CA failed to promulgate a constitution let alone a constitution instantiating ethnicity based federal states. In the following sections I will describe the efforts rendered by Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (henceforth Chumlung or KYC), an *adivasi-janajati* Limbu social organization, to mobilize both the Limbu CA members as well as the people to put pressure on the CA and the dominant political parties to inscribe Limbuwan in the constitution. I will describe in detail how Chumlung exerted enormous efforts to bring together Limbu members of the CA and generally the *adivasi-janajati* members of the CA for the cause of both Limbuwan and for identity based names of future federal provinces in Nepal.

Kirat Yakthung Chumlung: Brief Profile

Kirat Yakthung Chumlung was established in September 1989 as a “collective and representative” organization of Limbu *adivasi-janajati*. Chumlung was established during the autocratic Panchayat regime when Nepalis were barred from establishing organizations that had any political motivations. Chumlung’s objectives were as follows:

- i. To undertake various activities for the upliftment of the Limbus, their language including the *kirat-sirijonga* script, literature, religion and culture.
- ii. To conduct research on subjects related to Limbus and promote awareness among them.
- iii. To organize various activities of economic development in Limbuwan to improve the living standard of local people.

- iv. To make the Limbus, as well as other ethnic groups of Limbuwan, aware of the constitution of Nepal, their constitutional rights and the prevalent laws of Nepal.
- v. To conduct effective programs to curb the destruction of the environment and ecosystems.
- vi. To undertake activities for the achievement of Limbuwan autonomy under the federal system, to ensure the country's national integrity and sovereignty as well as sustainable development by promoting communal harmony among different ethnic groups and communities.
- vii. To conduct awareness programs against drug abuse and provide treatment and rehabilitation facilities for drug addicts.
- viii. To plan and carry out appropriate programs in order to wipe out superstition and ignorance of people about health problems in rural areas. Also, to encourage people to make the best use of available and possible means and measures in the field of primary health care.
- ix. To increase mass awareness among the people to stay away from AIDS and other fatal diseases. Also, to make them aware of safety measures and precautions against such diseases.
- x. To work for human rights, indigenous rights and women rights and child rights.
- xi. To carry out campaigns to improve the educational status of the Limbus (Kirat *Yakthung Chumlung* 1989).⁸¹

Chumlung's then General Secretary, Lila Singak, in her 2015 report entitled: "*Kirat Yakthung Chumlung Sthapanaka 25 barsha*" (25 Years Since the Establishment of Kirat Yakthung Chumlung) states the following:

[KYC]....was founded by Limbu students and young professionals in Kathmandu on the 2nd September 1989. Limbu students and professionals living in Kathmandu far from their original *that-thalo* (territory) felt the need to have a common social platform for ethnic solidarity and cooperation among the Limbus. They held a meeting at the Law Campus, Kathmandu on September 2, 1989 and formed an ad hoc committee chaired by Nanda Kandangwa to find a proper name, develop concrete objectives and legislation for a formal Limbu organization. That ad hoc committee organized the first convention held on January 6, 1990 in the auditorium hall at Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur. The convention founded the organization and named it Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (Lila Singak 2015) [my translation].

Since its foundation, Chumlung has expanded with 13 branches established across nine districts in Limbuwan as well as branches in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, and Chitwan districts. Lalitpur Chumlung has built a three-floor *chumlung him*⁸² in Lalitpur with a seminar

⁸¹<http://www.chumlung.org.np/page.php?page=1>

⁸²*Chumlung (L)*= meeting/assembly. *him (L)*= house/building

hall with 450 seating capacity. Kirat Yakthung Chumlung celebrated its silver jubilee with different programs and events for the whole year in 2014. By the end of 2015, Kirat Yakthung Chumlung had held nine conventions and dozens of Council meetings including the year-long Silver Jubilee celebration in 2015 with many different events. The constitution of Chumlung has been amended five times so far. Similarly, Chumlung has program-oriented divisions under the central body. The departmental divisions under the central committee include the Limbu Cultural Council, KYC Rehabilitation Center, the Yakthung Help Trust, the Limbu Language and Literature Academy, and the Limbuwan Study Center.

There are Kirat Yakthung Chumlung organizations established in at least 15 countries⁸³ around the world. Some of them are directly affiliated to Chumlung Nepal as branches while many of them are independently established organizations. The constitution, the organizational operation, and internal structure of these organizations is similar to Chumlung in Nepal. Irrespective of their affiliation to Nepal Chumlung, Chumlungs all over the world contribute financially to Nepal's movement for Limbuwan when requested by the Nepal Chumlung. Apart from financial contributions for the Limbuwan movement, Chumlungs abroad also establish and contribute to trusts and funds for various awards, research scholarships, and student scholarships in Nepal. In addition, individual Limbus permanently or temporarily based abroad substantially help fund Limbuwan and Limbu related activities in Nepal. For example, a Limbu family now living in Canada recently donated 3.5 million Nepali rupees (35,000 USD) to the Limbuwan Study Center, the research and academic division of Chumlung. There are life-sized golden statues of three Limbu national heroes recently erected at the front-yard of *Chumlung Him*

⁸³ i) Hong Kong ii) United Kingdom iii) Qatar iv) Singapore v) Dubai vi) Bahrain vii) Israel viii) Japan ix) South Korea x) Kuwait xi) Malaysia xii) Australia xiii) Canada xiv) USA xv) Portugal.

Central Office in Lalitpur. These statues were built with a donation of approximately 3 million Nepali rupees (30,000 USD) from a Singapore-based Chumlung.

In addition, Chumlungs in Nepal and abroad feel their most important responsibilities come after natural disasters and calamities in Nepal. In summer 2014, scores of houses were swept away by landslides in Taplejung district, part of Limbuwan, with dozens of human casualties. Chumlungs in Nepal and abroad mobilized their members in their respective countries to make donations to the victims of the landslide. About 7 hundred thousand Nepali rupees (7,000 USD) was collected for this purpose. The Nepal Chumlung coordinated the distribution of this relief fund to the victims of the Taplejung landslide.

After the deadly earthquake of April 2015, Chumlung Nepal did its best to help rescue victims in Kathmandu and later to distribute relief materials to the Pahari and Tamang communities in Lalitpur district. Chumlung Nepal was able to raise about 950,000 Nepali rupees (9,500 USD) in donations from Chumlungs abroad and from the Limbu community in Nepal. The Chumlung of Hong Kong separately donated money to rebuild 14 houses damaged by the earthquake in Sindhuli district.

Chumlung's Convention: Festivity Rather Than Organizational Activity

To non-Limbu or *non-adivasi* outsiders, the conventions staged by Chumlung look more like Limbu social or cultural events than official organizational proceedings. These conventions include festive displays of Limbu social and cultural practices. Anyone observing the conventions or any formal program—be it an academic workshop/seminar or a social event—with “innocent eyes and open mind” (Barth 1993) will witness a gamut of cultural, social, economic, political, and historical aspects of Limbu society. Barth suggests that anthropologists

pick an event to explore the aggregate meaning or total consequences of the event. By this method one can explore broader politico-historical aspects of a society by observing any event in minute detail. Furthermore a politically attentive observation and analysis of such an event helps us see the relationships between a society and the state, in this case the relationship between Limbu society and the state of Nepal. In other words, micro events and macro historical, and political processes are brought into relationship. As Geertz (1973) has demonstrated, detailed descriptions of public events, festivals, conventions, or ceremonies, for example a “cockfight” allow one to “interpret the resonances of the event outward in space and backward in time” (Barth 1993). In my understanding the phrase “outward in space” means the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects within a society as well as its relations to other societies. Similarly “backward in time” means the history of a society itself and in its historical relationships with the state. Public ceremonies, conventions, and any festivals celebrated under the management of Chumlung speak to the essence of Limbu society and history in its totality. If one carefully observes a convention of the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung from beginning to end, with an unprejudiced eye, an observer will know who the Limbu are in relation to their primordial identity, an identity that they cannot escape. They will also learn what Limbu people want politically in the process of making a new Nepal, restructuring the state, and creating a multi-cultural federal republic. Chumlung conventions may be divided into mainly three interrelated parts: i) the inauguration, ii) the main program, and iii) the closing ceremony.

The Inauguration Session

Inauguration sessions are preceded by a festive procession through urban streets in which Limbu art, musical instruments, costumes, and jewelry are publicly on display. Participants, especially women, wear beautiful Limbu attire and adorn themselves with customary jewelry.

Photographers, often outsiders, find these events especially photogenic and national and local newspapers often print pictures of these displays. A group known as *ke lang*⁸⁴ is a main attraction too. Even Limbu shamans participate in these parades in their full regalia. In addition to such performances in the procession, participants unfurl the Chumlung flag with the symbol of *silam sakma*⁸⁵ and carry banners and placards with various slogans, messages, and demands. With these banners, the marchers communicate to the state of Nepal and the dominant political parties their key demands: *Aitihāsik that-thalo ra pahichanko adharma Limbuwan swayattataghoshana gara* [declare Limbuwan on the basis of territorial history and identity]; *Nepal lai dharma nirapekshya rajya ghoshana gara* [declare Nepal a secular state]; “*Chumlung ko chahana, swayatta Limbuwan rajyako sthapana*” [the wish of Chumlung is the establishment of an autonomous province of Limbuwan]. These slogans and messages are also chanted out loud as the procession proceeds around the city and finally come together at the program stage. Such a procession of festive celebration resembles a political demonstration too.

The stage built for the convention is beautifully decorated with banners and Chumlung flags raised high facing upstage. The stage further includes chairs, desks, and a podium for the guests, dignitaries, and the speakers at the program. At the very front of the stage is a low table that serves as an altar on which are placed the photos of the three Limbu heroes: i) the Limbu script inventor, Sirijanga, ii) the social reformer, Phalgunanda, and iii) the Kirat-Limbu historian, Imansingh Chemjong. These three heroes may be considered as the key symbols of Limbu nationalism.⁸⁶ Not a single Chumlung public event is complete without honoring those three

⁸⁴*Ke (L)*= large drum made of a hollow wood with goatskin tied to both sides of hollow wood. *Lang (L)*= dance. *Ke lang* is a group dance performed during weddings, housewarming, and similar auspicious events.

⁸⁵*Si(L)*= death, *lam (L.)*=path, *sakma(L)*= to block. *Silam sakma* means to block death, to avoid death or evils. In Limbu *mundhum* *Silam Sakma* is described as a symbol to protect culture, custom, and human life. Chumlung uses the image of *silam sakma* as its logo and Chumlung’s flag.

⁸⁶ Adorning photos of the respectful heroes in programs is compulsory practice, almost an essential ritual, among Nepalese political parties and social organizations. For example, the Nepali Congress political party, in its

Limbu national heroes. This act of honoring their own national heroes at such events sets the Chumlung activities apart from other *adivasi* organizations and even Limbuwan-based political parties. As the procession and the tableau of cultural displays arrive near the stage, amusical overture reverberates out creating a pleasant ambiance for the participants:

*Yakthung laje Limbuwan, Asakma re kuma sam!
hing e sang si e sang, A lung ma o Limbuwan!!*⁸⁷

Limbuwan, the motherland of Limbu, my breath and my soul!
In life or death, forever Limbuwan in my heart (Singak 2015)

While the procession is entering the venue, the master of ceremony calls upon the dignitaries and the guests to take their seats on the stage, including the chief guest and the chair of the event. When the seating arrangement is completed, badges and *silam sakma* insignia are distributed to the chief guest and the guests as a *sanskritik chino* [cultural emblem]. One can see the chief guest, other guests, and almost all participants with Chumlung's logo, *silam sakma*, worn on the collars of their jackets.

The gifting of *silam sakma* emblems to the guests including the chief guest, who is often drawn from the high level of the administration of the state, may be viewed as cultural and political communication by Limbus to the state. In recent years, *adivasi janajati* people have started presenting their cultural or social symbols to the chief guest and other guests at formal events, conventions, and festivals. For example, the Kirat Rai, in their formal programs, present a white turban to the chief guest. Similarly, the Tamang may offer a Tamang hat to the chief guest. High level administrators can be seen adorned in different cultural costumes depending on which cultural group has invited them to be the chief guest. Such an *adivasi* cultural way of offering

programs, adorns the photos of the troika of leaders B.P. Koirala, Ganeshman Singh, and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the founders of the party. Communist parties adorn the photos of Marx, Lenin, Mao. In this regards Chumlung's revered heroes in reference to Limbu history, identity, and politics are different from that of dominant parties.

⁸⁷ Song: *Yakthung laje Limbuwan*, Lyrics: Amar Tummyahang, Vocal: Sita Kumari Singak.

symbolic items to representatives of the state may be interpreted as a claim of cultural difference by *adivasi* people. They are saying that “we are a different culture within this state of Nepal, recognize us as a different group”. But the invitees, especially the chief guest, may not internalize or be conscious of the message that *adivasi* people want to impart through these symbolic gifts.

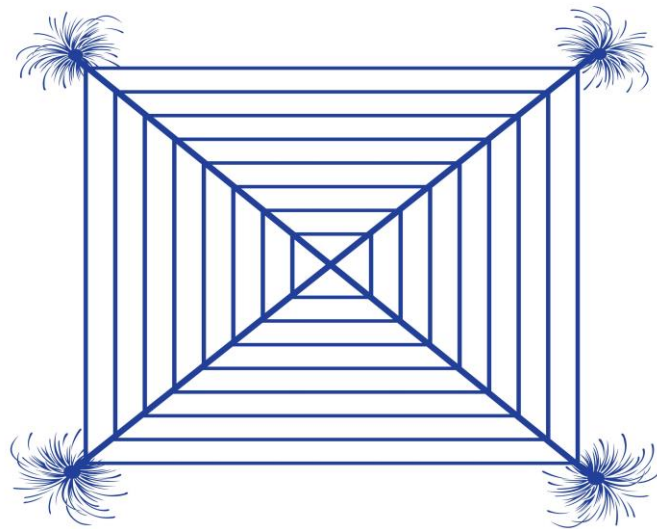


Figure 5.3 Silam sakma

Every formal program of the Chumlung begins with a *ke lang*⁸⁸ dance, considered as the auspicious beginning of any event. The chief guest then inaugurates the program by garlanding the photos of the three Limbu heroes: Sirijanga, Falgunanda, and Imansingh. Inauguration sessions, unlike the main business sessions, are open events. Attendees include a long list of people: general invitees, *pramukh atithi* [chief guest], *atithi* [guest], various dignitaries, founders of the Chumlung, past officials and members, foreign delegates, and representatives from different branches of the Chumlung, representatives from similar organizations of the Rai,

⁸⁸ *Ke lang*...

Yakha, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Newar and other ethnic groups, officials of political parties including the dominant parties, officials from other Limbuwan-based parties and organizations such as the Limbu Students Forum, and Limbuwan parties. This session is more like a festival collectively celebrated with non-Limbu guests whereby the organizers welcome the participants and guests. Similarly the program schedule details for the inaugural session are presented. On behalf of the program organizers and greetings for the success of the convention are extended by guests. The inauguration session has more of a symbolic than practical or official value. As the name suggests, the inauguration is for wishing the best success of the convention and for sending out a message to non-Limbu others.

Main Program

The main program is solely for officials of the Chumlung and the representatives from different district branches. Reviews and reports on administrative, financial and activity-wise progress from past years are presented before the representatives. Legislation and policies are reviewed and necessary amendments are made. The main program is not different from the political party's general convention in its procedures, policy reviews, and planning strategies for the future. The old governing committee is dissolved and a new committee is elected following a process similar to that of electing a committee inside a political party. The main program as a whole orients the future course of the Chumlung.

Closing

At the closing ceremony the new committee governing the Chumlung until the next convention is announced. Congratulations and well wishes are extended to the new committee

members. The closing ceremony, rather the whole convention, also ends with some fanfare. I have attended Chumlung's various programs' closing ceremonies accompanied by feasting in numerous occasions over two decades. Mainly the hosts—with an exception of some guests too—of the convention throw a party. Copious amount of *tongba*⁸⁹ [millet beer], and *raksi* [home-distilled liquor] drinks, pork and other snacks are consumed. The closing party seems literally a feasting. Limbu traditional dance *yalang* and *kelang* are performed. Some nice-hearted financially capable Limbus also sponsor different items, such as pork or pig, *raksi* and *tongba*.

In this way, the general convention, comprised of an inauguration, the main program and a closing ceremony, transforms the social, organizational, and political orientation of the Chumlung. As Victor Turner suggests about the three phases in any ritual processes: separation, liminality, and incorporation (Turner 1977), Chumlung's convention can also be viewed as a ritual during which the status of the Chumlung is suspended temporarily before it is transformed into a new one, that is with new political agendas and renewed status as an *adivasi* organization.

The Transformation of Chumlung from a Development-Centered NGO to a Politics-Centered Organization Advocating for Limbuwan

Ms. Lila Singak, former General Secretary and now Vice-Chair of Chumlung divides Chumlung's overall activities and programs advocating for Limbuwan into two phases: i) Socio-cultural and developmental phase; and ii) *Adivasi-janajati* right based phase (Lila Singak 2015).

⁸⁹ *Tongba* is a beer container or jar made of wood carved inside that looks like a bamboo culm. Fermented millet grain solid beer is put in the *tongba* and the millet grain beer soaked with warm water. After the solid millet grain beer soaks well in warm water in the wooden jar, it is seeped with a straw made of bamboo, called *pichhing* in Limbu language.

Organizational Extension and Community Development Phase

Kirat Yakthung Chumlung was established during the autocratic Panchayat regime when the monarchy outlawed political organizations. This situation may be a reason that Chumlung's objectives were limited to "promotion and preservation of Limbu culture, customs, religion, language."⁹⁰Chumlung's officials and members, however, were politically conscious individuals mainly with the leftist political backgrounds and some of them were involved in the then underground leftist parties fighting to overthrow the Panchayati regime. Six months after the founding of Kirat Yakthung Chumlung (September 1989), Nepali Congress and the Left-Front [*bam morcha*] launched the first People's Movement on the 7th of Fagun 2046 BS (February 18, 1990).⁹¹Chumlung did not officially participate in the People's Movement I but its officials and members individually took part in the movement that overthrew the 30 years old autocratic Panchayat regime. The People's Movement I brought the return of political parties that had been banned by King Mahendra in 1960 at the start of the Panchayat regime.

During this first phase, Chumlung mainly focused on introducing itself among the Limbu people by expanding its organizations at district as well as village levels. For this, Chumlung developed and implemented a decade long strategic plan for research, documentation, and publication of the history of Limbu culture, religion, language, and the history of Limbuwan.

They carried out research and development programs and activities such as:

- i) The identification of Limbu costumes and festivals⁹²
- ii) the development of a non-formal literacy program in Limbu language and script in Limbu villages and primary schools in Limbuwan
- iii) the construction of *chumlung him* [community halls] in different districts
- iv) introducing savings and credit programs for Limbu women

⁹⁰http://www.chumlung.org.np/news_detail.php?id=153

⁹¹Fagun 7 used to be celebrated as Democracy Day in Nepal since 1951. This was the day that the then King Tribhuvan had declared democracy in Nepal in 1951 after the revolution overthrew the 104 years old Rana regime.

⁹² Boycotting the Hindu festival Dashain and collective celebration of *chasok tangnam* during the late 1990s may be an example of this.

- v) programs to build institutional capacity
- vi) a program in legal literacy
- vii) a study of *kipat* land
- viii) a rehabilitation program for drug abusers in Dharan city (since 1996)
- ix) a study of Limbu indigenous knowledge of herbs and medicinal plants;
- x) a study of Limbu traditional healing and treatment systems
- xi) Community Radio programs in the Limbu language
- xii) the foundation of various awards and trusts in the names of the three Limbu National Heroes
- xiii) publication of I. S. Chemjong's books on Kirat history, Limbu language, and Limbuwan history
- xiv) cooperation and networking with local development bodies and national and international non-governmental organizations
- xv) the strengthening of the central body and the branches
- xvi) identification of a development agenda for *adivasi* Limbu

***Adivasi-janajati* Rights Based Phase**

The 5th general convention of Chumlung held in Dharan, Sunsari district in February 2003 marked a turning point in terms of the political stance of the Kirat Yakthung Chumlung as a representative platform for Limbu *adivasi* peoples. As an *adivasi* social organization, Chumlung's focus in previous conventions was on Limbu social, economic, educational, linguistic, and cultural promotion and development. But the 5th convention discussed "the development related agenda of *adivasi-janajati* Limbu" (KYC 2004) in detail and declared that "collective human rights, *adivasi* rights, and rights to self-determination and inclusive democracy" (KYC 2004:25) were also crucial aspects of KYC's agenda. Chumlung's document states the following:

- i) "Given that human rights related international laws are limited to individual rights, the definition of human rights must embrace collective community rights for ensuring the cultural rights of indigenous nationalities.
- ii) On indigenous peoples 'right to self-determination and inclusive democracy' it says: In a multicultural and multi-lingual country like Nepal, there should be inclusive democracy based on pluralism. We [Limbu people] firmly believe that only an inclusive democracy will ensure equal status of different languages, ethnicities, religions, genders, and cultures.

- iii) By recognizing the Limbu's right to self-rule on the basis of their history and *that-thalo* [territory], the state shall guarantee the ethnic autonomy for Limbuwan and the province should be named as 'Far Kirat Limbuwan Autonomous Province'.
- iv) Nepal's constitution shall guarantee to devolve all rights in relation to culture, religion, education, communication, health, housing social welfare, transportation, employment, taxation, land and resource management, and environmental management to autonomous provinces leaving currency, foreign affairs, and national defense to the national government.
- v) The provincial government should have all three pillars of the government: executive, judiciary, and legislature based on separations of power.
- vi) The indigenous populations inhabiting Limbuwan province shall be provided with the 'right to semi-autonomy within autonomy'.
- vii) The groups whose history and *that-thalo* are unclear shall be provided with special minority rights.
- viii) We Limbu should have representation in the central government on the basis of ethnic proportional electoral system.
- ix) The Limbuwan provincial state should create such a social environment conducive to create mutual cooperation, recognition, and equality among all castes, ethnic groups, genders, languages, and cultures." (KYC 2004:25–26) [my translation].

In short, the fifth convention embraced autonomy for Limbuwan as integral to its developmental agenda. From this convention, Chumlung also realized the limitations of the conventional understanding of human rights, development, and even democracy. The report "Agenda for the Development of the Limbu *adivasi-janajati*" (2004) was published after undertaking participatory meetings, discussions and analyses in all districts of Limbuwan. Chumlung now realized that politics guides the course of development and that the political empowerment of the Limbu and Limbuwan's collective identity were integral to Limbus' social, cultural, and economic development. Such a change in Chumlung's perspective transformed its understanding of development from a narrow view to a more holistic perspective. Such an affirmative understanding of politics guided Chumlung to focus directly on collective cultural rights for indigenous peoples as well as rights to self-determination and inclusive democracy. When Chumlung was in such a transformative process to involve itself in politics in 2003, the dominant political parties such as NC and CPN-UML were sidelined by the absolute monarchy. King Gyanendra had taken over the dictatorial control of the country while most of rural Nepal

was swept up in the Maoist-led *jana yudhda*. In such an adverse political situation, Chumlung's bold decision to advocate for Limbuwan was an inspiration for common Limbu people to move towards identity politics and the politics of Limbuwan even though the organization was formally a "non-political, non-partisan organization".

From Developing the Limbu movement to the Establishment of Limbuwan

Chumlung held its 6th convention on June 8-11, 2006 in Damak city of Jhapa district. The convention presented a spectacular tableau of performances in front of the Chief guests and other guests who came from different political parties and represented different branch offices from different districts and villages. The 6th convention was also special in terms of participation of the CPN-Maoist party-affiliated cadres and leaders as the 2006 April Revolution was concluded barely two months before and the CPN-Maoist party was no longer underground. This convention also amended the basic status of Chumlung in its constitution from a 'social, apolitical organization' to an '*adivasi* organization' meaning that Chumlung changed its status from Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to an Indigenous People's Organization (IPO). From this convention, Chumlung decided to adopt slogans related to Limbu's *muktiko chahana* [desire for liberation] and the Limbuwan *ko kalpana* [imagination of Limbuwan]. Similarly, Chumlung also decided to put all its strengths and efforts towards establishing Limbuwan autonomous state under the federal democratic republic of Nepal. The convention formulated a slogan that highlighted the province's name Limbuwan and the province's autonomy: *hamro chahana Limbuwan jatiya swayattatako sthapana* [our wish is to establish Limbuwan ethnic autonomy]. Chumlung openly declared its desire to re-establish Limbuwan through the Damak convention. This slogan alone would not fulfill Chumlung's desire for Limbuwan. Therefore the

7th convention held in Meyanglung town of Terathum district decided to directly involve Chumlung itself in the movement for Limbuwan. The seventh convention concluded with the solemn commitment and promise for Limbuwan: *Limbuwan Jatiya Swayattata Hamro Pratibadhdhata* [Limbuwan ethnic autonomy is our pledge and promise]. This shift in slogans suggests that the declaration of the Damak convention was not enough and hence the following 7th convention pledged and promised to transform the ‘desire’ into a movement.

Felicitation of the CA members from Limbuwan (June 2008)

Chumlung organized a felicitation program for CA members from Limbuwan, which in their reckoning, like other Limbuwan based parties, included all the districts between the Arun and Mechi rivers in eastern Nepal. Both Limbu and non-Limbu CA members were present at the event in which Chumlung—in addition to congratulating the CA members on their success—put forward the essentiality of Limbuwan in creating a new Nepal.

With the program of felicitation, Chumlung wanted to “kill two birds with one stone” as it would honor and congratulate the newly elected CA members, on the one hand, and the new CA members would be informed of Chumlung’s message about Limbuwan on the other. The banner hung over the wall said: *We want to establish an ethnic autonomous Limbuwan*. This was written in the Limbu language in Limbu script and in the Nepali language.



Figure 5.4 Newly Elected CA Members from Limbuwan Being Felicitated by Chumlung. 2008

As always, there were three photos of the Limbu heroes placed on a low table just in front of the guests and the hosts. With the displays of the banner and the photos of the three Limbu national heroes, Chumlung was sending a message to the new CA members that Limbus were a culturally and nationally different and distinct community. I attended the felicitation program and listened to the addresses of guests and hosts according to the program. Most of those who spoke were hopeful and quite confident that a Limbuwan province would be inscribed in the constitution. In contrast, one CA member present at the meeting, Chandra Parkash Mainali (CPN-ML), a Kumai Brahmin by caste background, clearly expressed his reluctance to delineate provinces on the basis of identity. His view, together with ruling parties and ruling castes,

ultimately prevailed against *adivasi janajati* and *madhesi* identity based names of the federal states.

The Formation of The *Sanyukta Limbuwan Morcha* (Joint Limbuwan Front-JLF)- July 2008

Chumlung made a successful effort towards uniting Limbu politicians across political party lines with a goal to inscribe Limbuwan in the constitution. There were 13 Limbu CA members⁹³ elected from different political parties during the first CA. There were also about half a dozen Limbuwan based political parties unable to win a seat in the Constituent Assembly. In fact, some of them, for example, the *Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parishad* (Federal Limbuwan State Council-FLSC) led by Sanjuhang Palungwa boycotted the CA election 2008. I attended and observed five meetings held at the Chumlung's central office facilitated by Chumlung. During the open discussions, the representatives from different parties did not address each other as though they belonged to a different culture or society. Irrespective of their party based ideological differences, they addressed each other by kinship terms. For example, I overheard a Maoist CA member refer to a Nepali Congress CA member as *kaka* [father's brother], which was based on how they were related to each other through the Limbu kinship network. In fact kinship networks incorporate every individual Limbu, irrespective of their educational, economic, and political differences. For example, if two Limbu students run into each other in Kathmandu, it is desirable that they ask each other's clan and what part of Limbuwan they are from so as to figure out how they are related according to Limbu kinship. Kinship and *that-thalo* are integrally related among Limbus. This may be a reason that the Limbu participants during the meetings addressed each other in kinship terms rather than calling each other by titles or first or last

⁹³ a) CPN Maoist (4); b) Nepali Congress (4); c)CPN-UML (4); d)FDNF (1); and e) RPP-Nepal (1).

names. The following table shows a list of the main political parties and their respective Limbu-based wings:

Table: 5.1 Showing different political parties and their *adivasi* janajati wings and number of Limbu CA members

S N	Political Party	Limbu wing associated with Limbuwan	Limbu CA Members
1	Nepal Communist Party Maoist - Unified	Limbuwan Rastriya Mukti Morcha (Limbuwan National Liberation Front)	4
2	Nepali Congress	Nepal Limbu Sangh (Nepal Limbu Association)	4
3	Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist	Nepal Loktantrik Kirat Limbu Sangh (Nepal Democratic Kirat Limbu Association)	4
4	Nepal Communist Party-United	Nepal Limbuwan Swasasit Sangh (Nepal Limbuwan Autonomous Association)	-
5	Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch (FDNF)	Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parishad (FLSC)	1
6	Rastriya Janamukti Party (NPLP)	Limbuwan Prantiya Parishad (Limbuwan Provincial Council)	-
7	Limbuwan Mukti Morcha (Limbuwan Liberation Front (est. 1987))		-
			13

Source: Field Research, 2008-2012.

After three or four weeks of discussions, the Samyukta Limbuwan Morcha (Joint Limbuwan Front-JLF) was declared on July 26, 2008 through a press meet in Kathmandu. The Limbu politicians joining the front individually belonged to eight different political parties. They included Kumar Lingden (Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parishad-FLSC), Bir Nembang (Limbuwan Mukti Morcha-LLM), Dambar Sambahamfe (CPN-UML, CA Member), Purna Kumar Sherma (NC, CA Member), K. P. Palungwa (Jana Mukti Party-PLP), K.B. Fudong (Jana Morcha-PF), Uttam Thangden (Chumlung, Vice-Chair), and Dhruba Angdembe (CPN- Maoist, CA Member). These Limbu leaders, although divided by their political parties, also were related

to each other by kinship. Some of them also grew up together speaking the Limbu language and observing their own customary festivals and feasts. Perhaps such a cultural context of being Limbu may have motivated these Limbu leaders and party cadres to come together to form the JLF under the facilitation of Chumlung. No Limbu would question the loyalty and responsibility of Chumlung to the cause of Limbuwan. By observing the way the participants had conversations, one could predict that they would fight together for Limbuwan irrespective of their loyalty to their respective parties.

Nevertheless, Limbus without affiliation to a specific political party were not convinced that, in the end, Limbu party members would not be controlled by their respective parties. If their parties decided not to delineate identity based federal states, then these Limbus would follow their party lines. And who controlled the parties? All dominant ruling parties were controlled by the ruling castes. All ruling parties, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary alike, were in the grip of high caste leaders. Individual participants loyalty to their original parties were explicitly expressed when some individuals put forward their opinions:

“Only our party would get us Limbuwan. Other parties are simply faking it by having Limbuwan wings and they are only deceiving the genuine Limbuwan”. The JLF focused on the following activities:

- i) The JLF forwarded a letter of memorandum in support of Limbuwan to the dominant parties: the CPN-Maoist, NC, and CPN-UML.
- ii) The JLF organized joint programs and campaigns for Limbuwan to be held at the district headquarters of all nine districts in Limbuwan.
- iii) The JLF leaders called on the top leaders of Nepali Congress in June 2011 to hand them the letter of memorandum on behalf of Limbuwan.
- iv) The JLF held an evaluation meeting in Birtamod Jhapa on December 11, 2011.

The JLF did not turn out to be as successful as it had originally hoped to be in terms of creating a synergetic movement and joint participation by all co-signers of the Front. Those co-signers belonging to large parties contributed only nominally to the movement while the

Limbuwan based parties, such as the FLSC, involved themselves fully in the Front. The joint activities did not seem to be “joint” in a real sense. The JLF, however, did inspire other *adivasi* organizations to produce joint efforts. Furthermore, Chumlung played a leading role in bringing eight *adivasi* organizations together to form a kind of alliance for the cause of Limbuwan and other identity based federal units.



Figure 5.5 JLF's Prosession in Limbuwan. The Banner Slogan Reads: Guarantee the Limbuwan Autonomous State with Right to Self-Determination – JLF (Photo courtesy: Chumlung)

Adivasi janajati Joint Front, March 2012

Chumlung was actively involved in establishing the *adivasi-janajati* Joint Front (AJJF). Limbu, Rai, Sherpa, Tamang, Newa, Tharu, Gurung, and Magar ethnic organizations⁹⁴ decided to launch various programs in support of and advocating for a federal system with 14 provinces and 23 autonomous areas, despite opposition from the ruling parties' leaders against this federal model. The *adivasi-janajati* Joint Front (AJJF) organized sit-in protest programs at the offices of the main political parties, namely NC, CPN-UML, CPN-Maoist, and the Madhesi Joint Front (MJF). On March 15, 2012, the Front released a joint press statement in protest at the insidious move by these parties against identity based provinces. The Front also called on the President, the Chair of the CA, and the Chair of Constitutional Committee and handed a letter of memorandum to them. Similarly, the front organized a motorcycle rally in symbolic support of the proposed 14 provinces and 23 autonomous areas on March 23, 2012.

Sanghiyata karyanbayan Limbuwan struggle samiti (Federality Implementation Limbuwan Struggle Committee, FILSC), March 2012

As the first Constituent Assembly was persistently squandering the time for writing the constitution, *adivasi-janajati* organizations like Chumlung were despondently waiting for a constitution. Chumlung had no option but to pressure the ruling parties and the CA as much as it could. For this, Chumlung facilitated the formation of the *sanghiyata karyanbayan Limbuwan sangharsha samiti* (Federality Implementation Limbuwan Struggle Committee-FILSC) on March 31, 2012. This struggle committee was formed due to the JLF's inactivity and also to enhance the

⁹⁴i) Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, ii) Kirat Rai Yayokha, iii) Nepal Sherpa Sangh, iv) Nepal Tamang Ghedung, v) Newa Dye Dabu, vi) Tharu Kalyankari Sabha, vii) Tamu Hyol Choj Dhi, viii) Nepal Magar Sangh.

involvement of a broader array of Limbuwan related organizations and circles. The main purpose was to put pressure on the government and the ruling parties to promulgate a constitution based on a federal structure with 14 identity based provinces and 23 autonomous areas. The committee was formed under the Chair and General Secretary of Bijay Subba (CPN-UML) and Dharma Chandra Lawoti (CPN-Maoist) respectively and was comprised of leaders from different political parties, CA members from Limbuwan, former government ministers, national figures, intellectuals of Limbuwan, artists and journalists, students, representatives of Limbuwan based women's organizations, and lawyers. The committee organized programs both in Limbuwan and Kathmandu valley and Chumlung functioned as the secretariat.

FILSC called on the top leaders of the three main political parties (CPN-Maoist, NC and CPN-UML) to hand them a letter of memorandum that described the history, territory, and past relationship of Limbuwan with the Gorkha State. The memorandum also described the possible consequences of failing to promulgate the constitution without incorporating the identity of *adivasi- janajati* peoples in relation to peace and political stability in Nepal.

I accompanied the FILSC delegates on two occasions calling on Prachanda—former Prime Minister and the Chair of CPN-Maoist, and Jhala Nath Khanal—former Prime Minister and the Chair of CPN-UML, to hand in the memorandum in late April 2012. Both the party leaders responded to the FILSC delegates positively. The CPN-Maoist Chair Prachanda said:

I would like to extend thanks to your delegation on behalf of myself and the party for handing in the memorandum in support of federality with identity, Limbuwan and in support of the 14 states model for restructuring the state of Nepal. Our party CPN-Maoist is committed in support of 14 provinces based on identity. I personally think that the Maoist party itself will be extinguished if we give up identity-based federalism. I have been fighting for identity-based federalism at the expense of our party's other important issues. We gave up so much in adjustment of our combatants to the army for the sake of identity-based federalism. It will be injustice on your behalf to equate us with other parties on identity-based federalism.

Anyone listening to Prachanda saying all the above would not have thought, even for a second, that his party would join with the NC and CPN-UML parties in the regressive “consensus” of not promulgating the constitution on the basis of identity and capability let alone without declaring Limbuwan. Similarly, the Chair of CPN-UML Jhala Nath Khanal said:

There are more than 103 caste/ethnic groups in Nepal and more than 90 languages spoken here. There is enormous diversity and all these diverse groups have to have equal opportunity in developing this country. There should be no doubt on this. The upcoming constitution will ensure more rights than those ensured by the interim constitution. But it is difficult to say how we all will have consensus in the upcoming constitution. We all have our own perspectives and it is difficult to find a common perspective out of these different perspectives. However, we all have already agreed in the CA to carve out the federal units on the bases of five criteria on identity and four criteria on capability. We will delineate the federal units on the very basis which we have agreed upon.

Compared with Prachanda’s response, Mr. Khanal was ambiguous about specifically committing to the point about Limbuwan and 14 provinces. He rather digressed and tactfully dodged the topic by highlighting the enormous diversity in Nepal, which he thought could not be “managed” without the three main parties coming to a consensus, highlighting the need for consensus.

Unfortunately, I could not accompany the FILSC delegation when they called on Sushil Koirala, the President of the NC party. Later I had conversation with a member in the delegation to learn the response of the final leader of the main trio. My respondent said:

Sushil Koirala did not even seem to know the Nepali word *pahichan* [identity] as he said the word *parichaya* [introduction] instead of *pahichan* while responding to us. Similarly, he also did not seem to know the word *samarthya* [capability] as he said *sambhabbyata* [potentiality] instead. Is it possible to persuade a political party to restructure federal states on the basis of identity and capability [*pahichan ra samarthya*] when that party’s President himself is completely unaware of the words let alone the concepts of *pahichan* and *samarthya*?

It was both humorous and frustrating to know that the President of the Nepali Congress did not understand the Nepali words for identity and capability. What could Chumlung and

FILSC expect from a leader with that level of capacity in understanding the politics of identity in Nepal? Nothing.

Having heard all three *sirshastha neta*'s [main leaders] understanding of identity and capability during their brief and off the cuff responses to the Limbu delegations, I thought Prachanda was facing constraints in implementing what his party had originally imagined about creating a *Naya Nepal* after overthrowing the monarchy. Overthrowing the monarchy and the founding of a republic might have been the end goal of the *jana yudhda*, however, one cannot deny that the Maoists were the vanguards of Nepal's ongoing political transformation. Only their imagination of *ganatantra Nepal* [Republic of Nepal], the *sambidhan sabha* [Constituent Assembly] and the actions thereafter had made this possible. The CPN-UML's leader neither protested nor supported identity-based federalism in his response to the FILSC delegates. He preferred to remain in the grey zone rather than taking a side, mainly for his and his party's benefit. It was beyond one's understanding that the leader of the NC did not even know the words *pahichan* and *samarthya*, which were the basis of federalism tabled in the Constituent Assembly two and a half years earlier (January 2010), creating enormous debates for and against thereafter. Perhaps the top leadership of the Nepali Congress had just ignored the issue of identity.

One could say that the Nepali Congress party, on the whole, did not seem to be updating itself with the political changes happening from the bottom of social scale in Nepal. In fact the Nepali Congress prospered as a 'democratic party' by reaping the benefits of the seeds sowed by a previous generation who overthrew the Rana regime in the revolution of 1950-51. Why is this true? What factors motivated many Limbu leaders [*neta*], cadres [*karyakarta*], followers [*pachhaute*], lackeys [*chamche*], and hopefuls [*ase*] to have confidence in the Nepali Congress

party? Their own party leader did not even know the word *pahichan* and their party's top leadership were against the establishment of Limbuwan. Each and every Limbu loyal to the Nepali Congress with whom I met expressed their support for Limbuwan. Was it impossible for Limbu people to say "no" to Limbuwan? During a discussion of Chumlung's future strategies for the Limbuwan movement held in July 2015, a Limbu scholar, Yehang Lawoti, offered an excellent observation: the Limbus are "automatic Congress (*kangres*)". He was curious as to why Limbus remained loyal to the Nepali Congress given that the Nepali Congress did not support the push for Limbuwan. When asked, he was told by *kangres* Limbus that they were "automatic *kangres*." He went on to ask, "What do you mean by being an automatic *kangres*?" "Can there be an automatic *kangres*, like an automatic rifle?" The *kangres* party member replied, "No, you did not get my answer. My grandfather fought in the *sat sal ko kranti* [revolution of 1950-51], he was a *jana mukti sena* [peoples' liberation soldier]. My father was a *kangres*. So am I a *kangres* too."

The three main political leaders differed drastically in their policies on Limbuwan when representing their party lines. It was obvious that they could not join together in terms of their party policies. But they did reach a consensus not to promulgate the constitution (described below) only a month after the FILSC called on them.

The Collapse of the First Constituent Assembly

On May 12, 2012, just two weeks before the first CA died its unnatural death, the FILSC organized a mass rally and demonstration in the city of Damak, Jhapa district in Eastern Nepal. The FILSC expressed its solidarity and support for an *all Nepal bandh* [shutdown of Nepal] on May 20 to May 22, 2012 called for by all the major *adivasi janajati* organizations. The FILSC participated in that *bandh*. Chumlung and the FILSC also participated in the *gherau*

[encirclement] of the CA building in Kathmandu to put pressure on the CA members to promulgate a constitution with identity based federal states.

As the first CA ended its term without promulgating the constitution, Chumlung held an emergency meeting and planned strategies for further movements, which they made public on May 31, 2012. Chumlung and the FILSC held a meeting in Dharan on June 23-24 and decided to hold a National Political Conference on Limbuwan. As a consequence, an International Conference on Limbuwan was held in April 2014. Chumlung also concluded that the CA had failed to promulgate the constitution with identity-based federalism for the following reasons:

- i) The high caste supremacist egotism attitude of the NC and CPN-UML leaders.
- ii) The CPN-Maoist's wishy-washy attitude towards identity and federalism towards the end of the CA's tenure.

Chumlung's Declaration of Limbuwan and the CPN-Maoist's Dilemma

Chumlung's Damak declaration about Limbuwan created a wave of support among Limbus and attracted the attention of leaders of the CPN-Maoist party. The CPN-Maoists had "disbanded [the] previously existing *krantikari limbuwan morcha* (Revolutionary Limbuwan Front-RLF) of Bhakta Raj Kandangwa to assimilate with the *Kirat ratriya mukti morcha* (Kirat National Liberation Front-KNLF) during the *jana yudhda*" (Baral 2012) and the Maoists had declared the entire hill and mountain area of the Mechi, Koshi and Sagarmatha regions as under the operation of the KNLF. Thus Chumlung's declaration of Limbuwan was not a welcome message to the CPN-Maoists who did not include Limbuwan as part of their future political agenda. The Maoists considered themselves as the vanguard of the political transformation to create a New Nepal. The Maoists vehemently opposed Chumlung for declaring Limbuwan in the face of the CPN-Maoist's KNLF. A senior Maoist leader even charged Chumlung, with "having gotten INGO's 'dollar' for bringing up the Limbuwan issue in order to challenge the Maoist's

Kirat jana sarkar rajya parishad (Kirat Peoples Government State Council-KPGSC)".⁹⁵ In this regard, Gopal Kirati, then a Central Committee member of the CPN-Maoist [arty expressed his dissatisfaction in response to a question about Chumlung's declaration of Limbuwan:

“Initially, the Revolutionary Limbuwan Front was under the leadership of Bhaktaraj Kandangwa [Limbu], and the Khumbuwan Liberation Front was under our [Rai] leadership. The Kirati National Liberation Front was formed by uniting those two fronts. The *Kirat jana sarkar* [Kirat peoples government] was declared as per the goal and objectives of the Kirati National Liberation Front. In one sense, this guaranteed the basis of unity among the Kirati Peoples, which means to create the *theadhar ilaka* [base area] for the Nepali *jana yudhda* in the eastern Command of the Eastern Nepal.”

Kirati also hurled serious charges at Kirat *Yakthung* Chumlung:

I heard that Chumlung's convention was held in Damak and was trying to endorse Limbuwan... In one sense, [Chumlung] has been an organization for the *sahariya budhdijibi* [urban intellectuals]. The true directors of this organization are [some] Generals of the Royal Nepal Army. These Generals are conspiring to divide Kirat into two or three pieces...upon the people's rebellion tomorrow, would Chumlung be courageous enough to come out to the street to bear the bullets of the old regime? Thousands have to be ready to sacrifice their lives. If Chumlung's friends would play that role to create a new Nepal, they will undoubtedly get that [Limbuwan]. But, if so called Limbuwan is sought after without fulfilling that role, without shedding a drop of sweat for *jana yudhda*, then that is the line of the Generals of the Royal Nepal Army. We will use all our forces to defeat that line [of politics]"(Kirati 2008) [my translation].

Immediately after they came out of hiding following the April Revolution 2006, the CPN-Maoists opposed the proposal for Limbuwan in terms like those above. Chumlung did not “react to such a vitriolic comment by the Maoist leaders” but quietly continued advocating for Limbuwan.⁹⁶

The CPN-Maoist, despite their outright opposition to Limbuwan, were compelled to form the *Limbuwan ratriya mukti morcha* (Limbuwan National Liberation Front-LNLF) well before the first Constituent Assembly [*sambidhan sabha*] election. Why did they feel compelled to form the Limbuwan National Liberation Front (LNLF) after the end of the *jana yudhda*? Two examples help answer this question. First, the then Chair of Chumlung related to me the

⁹⁵Personal communication with Kirat *Yakthung* Chumlung's then Chair Arjun Limbu.

⁹⁶Personal communication with a Chumlung official.

following anecdote concerning Limbu Maoists leaders and the social pressure that led them to form the LNLF:

When the Limbu Maoist leaders came out of hiding after the April Revolution 2006, their common Limbu brethren received these leaders with acknowledgements. The Maoists were known to have been prepared to lay down their lives for liberating the country, therefore those common Limbu brethren also thought that the Maoists would also liberate Limbuwan or at least bring in Limbuwan to *naya Nepal*. Wherever the leaders went and whichever Limbu with whom they met, they were greeted by the same happiness and confidence that they would bring back Limbuwan. The local Limbus eagerly wanted to treat the Maoist leaders with *khaja-pani* [snacks and drinks] to honor them and their sacrifice for Limbuwan. But the Maoists, as they were well-trained and eloquent orators, responded that there was no Limbuwan but only the Kirat National Liberation Front proposed and founded by their party. Upon knowing the fact that the Maoists did not have Limbuwan in their agenda, those common Limbu brethren gradually turned their back on those Maoist leaders and were no longer interested to meet with the Maoists. The Limbu Maoists also realized the fact that they were not well accepted politically in their own society for not having Limbuwan as part of their agenda. After all, they were going to take part in the Constituent Assembly election, to be held shortly afterwards. This social pressure compelled the Maoists to form the LNLF.

During the CA election in 2008, the CPN-Maoists deployed a unique election strategy compared to other parties. They displayed a map of Nepal showing the proposed provinces based on ethnic identities including Limbuwan. During the election campaign, voters in local constituencies could see this provincial map in the Maoist party's election materials. Maoist candidates effectively enhanced their election campaigns by showing those maps and convincing voters that they supported Limbuwan.

The second example relates as to how party symbols rather than texts came into play when persuading common constituents to cast votes for particular parties. In June 2008, I visited a village in Limbuwan and had many conversations with local leaders and teachers about the CA election held just three months before. That particular electoral constituency, a Limbu dominant area by population, was known to be a CPN-UML stronghold. Local leaders, namely the former Village Development Committee (VDC) Chair, the Vice-Chair, and a local high school principal

all belonged to the CPN-UML party. The school principal told me that they decided to travel from house to house in the entire village to meet with the voters individually and persuade them to cast their vote for the sun, which was the election symbol of the CPN-UML party. Although they believed that most of the voters would vote for the CPN-UML candidate, they thought it would be good to visit villagers and meet with the voters out of courtesy. When they met with a Limbu voter who they assumed would surely vote for UML, they were surprised to hear his view on which party he wanted to vote for. The CPN-Maoist ballot symbol was a hammer and sickle. One of the three leaders told me thus: The villager showed them the sample ballot paper posted on the wall and, pointing at the sign of the crossed hammer and sickle, said in the Limbu language: *anga ga ambha kang o thepchi kok pirung ba-ro. kalle rok Limbuwan taru mel-reba khepsung* [I will thwack my vote on this [hammer and sickle], I am told that only they can bring us Limbuwan]. The three leaders were flabbergasted to hear their villager (and also a kin relative belonging the same clan group) saying this. This villager who made his living by mostly working for others, did not even know to read and write, and seemingly had nothing to do with politics, wanted to vote for the Maoists, meaning for Limbuwan. These three local leaders could not understand his interest in voting for a Maoist candidate who, in the villager's view, would make Limbuwan a reality. These three Limbu leaders were the highest educated, richest, most powerful, and socially most prestigious trio of their locality but they remained oblivious as to how a "poor," "apolitical," and "illiterate" Limbu could make Limbuwan a deciding factor in how he voted.

The examples above speak to issues of identity. Limbuwan is a key factor in the production of a sense of self and identity. Identity is different from economic, educational, political, or social statuses. Those Limbus who barely communicate with non-Limbu others

through the Nepali language might be the ones in need of a Limbuwan to form a sense of themselves. The essence of identity lies in one's existence or being. The Limbu constituent in the second example above was an underprivileged, "under achiever" in all aspects of life. He probably understood that elections would not give him any "development" benefits. He may have realized the fact that the government had been promising him development benefits during every election but had always failed to uphold their promises. The past elections have not helped him dispel his own *dukha* [hardships of life] or socio-economic struggles. He might have decided to vote for a party that promised to recognize his existence by designating his Limbuwan homeland on a map of Nepal. I can conclude that to prosper in one's life socio-economically and to be recognized oneself as at a par with others identities are different dimensions of our lives. Socio-economic prosperity alone will not fulfill one's desire for identity.

Political Transformation from the Bottom Up: Movements Reform the Theories

Different parties, indigenous peoples' organizations, and other activist organizations all wanted to give a new name to *naya Nepal* [New Nepal]. The 'Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal' includes the terms 'federal,' 'democratic,' and 'republic' and reflects a "paradigm shift" (Kuhn 1970) in how people thought of the Nepali state. For example there was no mention of the word 'federal' [*sanghiya*] in The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 (authenticated on January 15, 2007). Only after the *madhesi* uprising against the interim constitution during January – February 2007 was progress made in guaranteeing the rights of marginalized people. The *madhes* uprising forced the government to make the first amendment to the interim constitution. Through this the word *sanghiya* [federal] was added to the constitution barely two months after its promulgation. Furthermore Article 138 added, "There shall be made progressive restructuring of the State with an inclusive, democratic federal system of governance" (The Interim Constitution

of Nepal (2063 v.s.) 2007:Article 138). Thus the *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* groups were ahead of the dominant parties in formulating a vision for *naya Nepal*, a re-structured Nepal, a federal Nepal, and an inclusive democratic [*sambasi loktantrik*] Nepal.

As time went by, however, the then dominant parties, NC and CPN-UML, seemed to be backtracking on their promises to implement the mandates of *jana yudhda* and the April Revolution. They also seemed to be reluctant to recognize the contribution of *madhesi and adivasi-janajati* groups in the process of Nepal's political transformation. *Madhesi and adivasi-janajatis* were thus forced to resume their agitation to pressure the government and the dominant parties. As a consequence, the fifth amendment was made to the interim constitution in July 2008. Article 138 (Progressive restructuring of the State) (1a) then came to read: "Recognizing the desire of the indigenous peoples and of the people of backward and other areas including *madhesi* people towards autonomous provinces, Nepal shall be a federal democratic republican state. Provinces shall be autonomous and vested with full authority. The boundaries, number, names and structures, as well as full details of the lists, of autonomous provinces and the center and allocation of means, resources and powers shall be determined by the Constituent Assembly" (The Interim Constitution of Nepal (2063 v.s.) 2007).

In the above paragraphs, I presented an example showing that not everything in relation to the rights of *adivasi janajati* and *madhesi* groups were included in the package called The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007. *Madhesi* and *adivasi* pressure from below through social movements compelled the parties and the State at the top to incorporate changes that marginalized peoples sought.

Malleable Constituent Assembly 2008

The main leaders of the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML were defeated by CPN-Maoist candidates in the first CA election. For example, K.P. Oli and Madhav Kumar Nepal,⁹⁷ top leaders of the CPN-UML, were defeated by unheard of CPN-Maoist candidates in Jhapa and Kathmandu electoral constituencies respectively. Although the main leaders were left out of the CA for not having been elected they continued to keep indirect control over the CA through their party's chain of command. In this regard, the CA could not function independently of the political parties. Despite not being members of the CA, the leaders of dominant parties remained in control over the CA. For the whole four years of its tenure, the CA remained unpredictable and malleable as it voted for bills related to the constitution. Top leaders from the NC, CPN-UML and CPN-Maoist leaders failed to come to 'consensus' [*sahamati*] on the names, number and models for a federal structure. Among the dominant parties, the NC openly expressed its reluctance to accept a model of 14 provinces and 23 autonomous areas (described in chapter 2) after the Committee for Restructuring of the State and Distribution of State Power tabled that proposal in January 2010. Gradually, the CPN-UML joined the NC in opposing that model, and finally the CPN-Maoist joined the other two in not accepting that proposal. The clause of "consensus" (Article 70) in the interim constitution proved to be an excuse for not supporting the 14 provinces model, which, upon promulgation of the constitution, would have constitutionally recognized ethnicity based cultural differences in Nepal.

⁹⁷ CPN-UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal was later nominated under the proportional system in a seat vacated through resignation of a member, Mr. Sushil Chandra Amaytya, from the same party. Later, Mr. Nepal became the Prime Minister of Nepal (May 2009-February 2011).

The Final Scene of the Constituent Assembly Drama

The main leaders of the three major parties, NC, CPN-UML and CPN-Maoist continued holding meetings every other week to reach ‘consensus’ on the names and number of the provinces until the CA finally legally dissolved on May 28th, 2012.

During the very last days of the first CA, Baneshwor chowk in Kathmandu, next to the premises of the International Convention Center (where the CA meetings were held), was the center stage for *adivasi-janajati* organizations and identity based political parties to protest. I observed their demonstrations which looked more like the programs of festivities, and included spectacular performances of *adivasi-janajati* concert and songs highlighting *pahichan, itihās, that-thalo ra yudhda* [identity, history, territory and war] in *adivasi* costumes and *adivasi* style. Music played amidst the speeches. One Kirat song was as follows:

Yo bhumi chumne pahilo hami haun mulbasi !

Yo shrishti jasto purano hami haun kirati !!

We are the first settlers of this earth. As old as the creation, we are the Kirati.

The whole world of Knowledge, the civilization of mundhum is ours,

Our jewelry and costumes are as pristine beauty as nature.

Shifting cultivators and the sedentary settlements combined,

Exemplary living with differently destined,

As old as the creation, we are the Kirati.

In front of witnessing us is our unwritten history,

Awaiting to be highlighted is ancestors’ legacy,

Trove of skills are the basis of our Culture,

Born on this earth [and] will be dissolved on this earth,

We are the first settlers of this earth.

As old as the creation, we are the Kirati”

- by Bhupal Rai [my translation].

This kind of song could be heard during intervals between speeches of leaders exhorting the audience to support demands for identity based federal provinces. I observed a demonstration on the day of dismissal of the CA late in the evening at the Baneshwor intersection. Gossip was circulating that the CPN-Maoists were able to garner the consent of more than 200 *adivasi-janajati*, *madhesi*, and Dalit CA members from NC, CPN-UML and other parties in support of the 14 provinces model. Rumors were that the main leaders of the CPN-Maoist had secured a private letter signed by 418 CA members willing to vote for the 14 provinces by “crossing the floor” (disobeying the party whip) to cast their votes. I could see the demonstrators’ faces shine when the whispers about 418 signatures supporting 14 provinces wafted across the crowds of demonstrators. In this regard, the demonstrators only wished that the CA Chair call for the CA meeting and proceed to voting. Then more gossip drifted across the crowd that the CA Chair, Mr. Nembang was holding meetings with major party leaders for ‘consensus’ instead of calling the CA to a vote. I could clearly see the wave of frustration sweep across the crowd, causing despair and hopelessness. Also a rumor went around that some women CA members from the CPN-Maoist personally tried to call upon the CA Chair to call for the CA vote only to be told that he would not do so unless there was “consensus” among the three *sirsha netritwa* [main leaders] of the three ruling parties. Later I heard from my colleagues that some women CA members from the CPN-Maoist even burst into tears out of despair and anger as their pleas for CA voting fell on deaf ears. At the same event, I asked the FLSC’s leader if his organization had any plan for a movement in case the CA promulgated the constitution with no Limbuwan or in case of no constitution at all. He had no answer to my question but I could witness the streaks of despair and frustration in his face. My hunch was that if the CA failed to inscribe Limbuwan in the constitution, the FLSC would start the Limbuwan movement afresh but, in fact, there were no

important events held by the FLSC immediately after the dismissal of the first Constituent Assembly.



Figure 5.6 Limbuwan Cadres in the Sit-In Program in front of the CA Hall. The Banner Message Reads: Declare Limbuwan Autonomy- FILSC

The three main party leaders, despite meeting for “consensus” hundreds of times, failed to agree upon the CA’s own proposal for the names and numbers of the 14 provinces. Rather the leaders remained vocally against the proposed provinces arguing, with no evidence, that “delineating the provinces on the basis of identity will break the country apart” [*jatiya sanghiyata le desh tukryauchha*]. In this manner, the provision of ‘consensus’ stipulated by the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 proved to be an excuse that the leaders of the dominant parties denied the *adivasi-janajati* peoples their right to cultural difference.

Why did the CA Chair not call for meeting to proceed to voting? Why did the three major parties use their control over the CA to overbear the identity of *adivasi-janajati* people? Why did they decide to go against the fundamental procedure adopted in modern democracy, namely the voting process?

Acclaimed writer Manjushree Thapa’s answer to above questions resonates with the interpretation of *adivasi-janajati* leaders:

What do you do if you’re the [hill] high-caste leader of a democratic party faced with a vote that will end your caste’s supremacy? You avoid voting at all costs... The leaders had betrayed the very principle of democracy. And they had done so for the lowest possible reason: they wanted to preserve Nepal’s high-caste monopoly. With democrats like these, who needs autocrats? (Thapa 2012).

Similarly Pramod Mishra’s criticism of the top leaders comes to a similar conclusion:

There was a time not long ago when the ruler was the state and his word was law—*hukumi sasan*. Then until 1990, the king gifted the constitution to his subjects. And now the top leaders of the three political parties have proposed to gift the constitution to the marginalized, sidestepping all the processes of the Constituent Assembly committees and commissions. I mean what are they thinking? Are Tharus, Madhesis, and Janjatis still fools and cowards? (Pramod Mishra in *The Kathmandu Post*, May 17, 2012).

With this conclusion, the ruling caste groups, through the ruling parties, could continue their long standing domination over others and monopolize state power in a way that was even stronger and more secure than the banished monarchy. Either consciously or unconsciously the

trio of main leaders happened to be Bahuns—the caste group which has been in the privileged position in all aspects of life opportunities in Nepal for centuries. Now in the CA politics, the ruling castes seemed to be united to deny cultural rights to the *adivasi janajati*, despite their significant differences in party lines and ideological stands. The *adivasi-janajatis* and marginalized people's hopes of being constitutionally recognized as culturally different groups were shattered. To them, the Constituent Assembly proved to be like the Nepali saying goes: *hatti ayo hatti ayo fussa*—elephant coming, elephant coming but nothing.

Chumlung and Other *adivasi* Organizations' Role in Building New Parties

As soon as the first CA was dismissed, Chumlung held emergency meetings along with the FILSC, both in Kathmandu and Dharan, to develop strategies for further efforts in support of identity based federalism in Nepal and inscribing Limbuwan in the constitution. To fulfill this purpose, Chumlung mainly decided that the process of writing the constitution must be completed by the CA, not by a parliament. Chumlung attributed the failure of the first CA to promulgate the constitution to the leaders of the three main parties. In this context, Chumlung also made a decision to facilitate and render its support towards forming a new political party that included recognition of *adivasi-janajati* identity as the main political agenda.

On May 29, 2012, Chumlung held a meeting in Lalitpur to discuss the possibilities and basic requirements of beginning a new political party for *naya* Nepal based on identity and federalism. Among the 16 attendees at the meeting were members of the dominant political parties, intellectuals, and the Chair and other officials of the Chumlung.

On June 7, 2012, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Students Central Coordination Committee and the Kirat Rai Students Organization organized a discussion workshop in Kathmandu on the topics: i) Building federal states on the basis of *adivasi* history and identity, b)

Campaigning for an inclusive, federal education system based on identity, ii) Establishing the basic reasons behind the dismissal of the CA and ways forward for sympathizers of identity based federalism. The CPN-UML's Ashok Rai, Rakam Chemjong, Rajendra Shrestha, CPN-Maoist's Barshaman Pun, the acclaimed writer and scholar, Khagendra Sangraula, and Dr. Sundar Mani Dixit addressed the workshop.

On June 16, 2012, the Chumlung organized an interaction program on the topic, "National and Limbuwan Politics after the Dismissal of the CA." The focus of the interaction was to seek avenues for establishing a new national party and for consolidating Limbuwan based parties otherwise divided into smaller factions. On October 4, 2012, a defining move, in terms of a new political party formation, was observed in Kathmandu. Half a dozen central level leaders of the CPN-UML from the *adivasi-janajati* and minority communities, including the vice-chair, Ashok Rai, announced, amidst hundreds of party cadres and other guests, that they would be 'abandoning the UML' [*emale parityag*]. The message printed on the banner said: "Abandoning UML for Building a Forerunner Political Power" [*agragami shakti nirmanaka lagi emale parityag karyakram*]. Also printed on the banner was: "Organized by Forerunner Thought Group, Central Coordination Committee" [*agragami bichar samuha, kendriya samanbay samiti*].



Figure 5.7 CPN-UML's Leaders Mainly From *adivasi-janajati* Background Announcing their Abandonment of the CPN-UML. 2012.

Now former UML leaders who had spent three-four decades of their lives to build a ‘communist party,’ abandoned it. They were not any ‘late-comers’ to the party. They were, rather, among the ‘builders’ of the then Communist Party of Nepal- Marxist Leninist, founded during the early 1970s, when they were an underground party during the partyless, non-partisan [*nirdaliya*] and autocratic Panchayat regime. These UML renouncers, who were once prepared to lay down their lives for the sake of their dear party toward the goal of ‘liberating’ [*mukti ka lagi*] people from the shackles of tyranny, injustice, and all kinds of exploitation, relinquished their political ‘home’. What kind of *mukti* and whose *mukti* these *adivasi* leaders might have imagined for when they became ‘communists’ in the past. But this time, it was obvious that they abandoned the CPN-UML because the UML went against the proposed 14 provinces model of

‘identity based federal states’ even if they were to be established as identity-based if only in name.

Founding of New Parties amidst Identity Crisis

On November 22, 2012, these dissidents and others formed a new party called *Sanghiya Samajbadi Party Nepal* (Federal Socialist Party Nepal- FSP) under the chairmanship of Ashok Rai. Surprisingly enough, though interesting for further reflection, the word *pahichan* [identity] was not in its name. Rather they chose the word *samajbadi* [socialist]. They seemed, however, to have realized that the dream or imaginary of *adivasi janajati mukti* [liberation of *adivasi janajati*] could not happen under the communist parties in the multi-cultural Nepal. This message was reflected on FSP’s slogan:

“*Sadhai ladyou aruko lagi .
Aba ladaun afnai lagi.*”
[You] always fought for others.
Now you fight for yourself. (Rai 2012) [my translation].

This slogan certainly suggested that *adivasi-janajati* groups should engage in further fighting for the liberation of their people. Three to four months into a party expansion campaign, the FSP had created district and village committees in more than 65 districts in Nepal. The FSP took part in the second Constituent Assembly election held on November 19, 2013. For the FSP’s election campaign, new slogans were generated and new songs were composed in dedication to *adivasi* identities:

*मेटन सक्दैनाँ तिमिले हाम्रो पहिचान -Metna sakdainau timle hamro pahichan,
ढल्न दिदैनाँ हामी हाम्रो स्वाभिमान- Dhalna didainau hami hamro swabhivman,
मूलबासी हौं हामी, यो देशको शान- Mulbasi haun hami yo desako san.*

You cannot erase our identity,
We will not let our self-respect down,
We are the first settlers, we are this country’s dignity [my translation].

हाम्रै काँधमा बन्दुक राखी सारा युध्द जित्यौ- Hamrai kandhma banduk rakhi sara yudhda jityou

शासन सत्ता हात पारी उल्टै हामीलाई लुट्यौ- Sashan satta hat pari ultai hamilai lutyau

रगतका आँशु पिउँदै सहेका छौँ अपमान- Ragatka ansu piudai saheka chhaun apaman

दिने परे दिन्छौँ अब आफ्नै लागि ज्यान- Dinai pare dinchhaun hami afnai lagi jyan

मेट्न सक्दैनौ तिमिले हाम्रो पहिचान- Metna sakdainau timile hamro pahichan.

You won the wars shooting guns from our shoulders;
Having taken over the rule, you looted us in return;
We have handled the insults by swallowing tears of blood;
We are ready to lay our lives for ourselves, in need.
(Rai 2012) [my translation].

Identity Based Parties are not Underachievers: Seeing Sociologically

Although the FSP leaders and cadres expected to garner 13 to 14 seats, they only secured five seats in the second CA election. The fledgling party was only one year old in terms of ideology, party organization, and action. A political party requires time to grow and expand among the people. It might even take a few generations for a political party to be fully incorporated into the hearts and minds of people. Their affiliation, loyalty, or affection to a particular party is not merely a political issue in the villages of Nepal. Long-lasting affiliation and trust to a party is like individuals and families accumulating social and symbolic capital. Party loyalty is interconnected with social, economic as well as kinship relations. Switching to a different party might impact an individual in terms of his other social, economic, and kinship relations. Therefore, political loyalty to a party should be viewed in a holistic way.

Furthermore, why does a particular candidate lose an election? How shall we approach to look into the election process in Nepal? David Holmberg, having observed the first CA election in Nuwakot district, north-west of Kathmandu, writes: "[E]lections rests on three separate principles: i) locality is important; ii) elections are best approached as a form of social

production; and iii) they are complex (Holmberg 2009:11). In the rural villages of Nepal, voters may have different motivations for casting their votes for certain candidates. Elections are not much different from what one might call a ‘festival.’ An election day is a festive occasion for villagers, not simply a political action. Local people celebrate at the same time that they cast their votes. Such leisure gatherings are rare as villagers’ lives are dominated by labor in their fields. Women, in particular, dress in their nicest or newest clothes reserved for festive occasions and take along some pocket money for purchasing treats at the shops. They walk to the voting areas with their kith and kin. On the way, they are less likely to ask, “who are you going to vote for?” than, “Who is likely to win”? The latter is the decisive question, particularly during national level elections if not the local elections. They may comment, “I have known such and such a candidate for many years but I hear that s/he is not likely to win, so I am going to cast my vote for another.” The implication here is that the voter does not want to waste her vote on this festive occasion. This voting behavior is perfectly rational in village cultural logic for wasting your vote on such an auspicious day is an “inauspicious act”. One would not want to waste one’s auspicious vote and one wants to celebrate with the winners. This happens during the national level elections.

The FSP could not win as many seats as expected by its leaders in the CA 2013. That was understandable because of the sociological and cultural reasons described above. What is important is that the founding of the FSP and *Samajik Loktantrik Party* (Social Democratic Party-SDP)⁹⁸ is a harbinger for the future of Nepali politics as it enters a new epoch.

The Constituent Assembly 2013

⁹⁸ SDP was established in 2012 under the Chairmanship of Dr. Chaitanya Subba, a Limbu scholar and expert on federalism in Nepalese context. A former CA member, and Chair of NEFIN, Pasang Sherpa,—who also abandoned the CPN-UML—was the general secretary of the SDP. The SDP boycotted the Second CA election.

The CA election of 2013 was held on November 19, 2013. A total of 122 parties took part in this election compared with 54 parties in 2008. A total of 30 parties were able to gain seat/s to the assembly compared with only 25 in 2008. Out of the 30 parties, 10 parties garnered only one seat each through the proportional electoral system. Similarly four parties secured two seats each and other four parties garnered three seats each. The Bhaktapur-based Nepal Peasants and Worker's party garnered four seats while another two parties, the CPN-ML (distinct from CPN-UML) and recently formed FSP, secured five seats each. *madhesi* identity based parties, namely the Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum Nepal, the Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party, and the Sadbhavana Party won 10, 11 and six seats respectively. Similarly, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and the Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum-Loktantrik secured 13 and 14 seats respectively. The Nepali Congress party, and the CPN-UML were able to secure the largest and second largest positions with 196 and 175 seats respectively. The CPN-Maoist, now hard-hit by a party split and ideological issues, only procured 80 seats, dropping from 220 in the first CA and becoming the third largest bloc. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (National Democracy Party-RPP Nepal), a staunch advocate for a Hindu state and return to monarchy, secured the fourth position with 24 seats through the proportional electoral system (meaning they won no seats in the first-past-the post contests), expanding their influence from four seats in the first CA. How was it possible for the RPP-Nepal to garner that many seats through proportional system while not winning even a single seat through first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system? In Kathmandu district, the RPP-Nepal gained more votes than the Nepali Congress party in the proportional electoral system

After the RPP-Nepal's electoral success, one interpretation of their success was their election slogan: *ek bhot dai lai ek bhot gai lai*⁹⁹ [one vote for brother, one vote for cow]. "Brother" referred to the Nepal Congress and "Cow" referred to RPP. An alternate explanation was that their success was a function of a backlash by high castes, a Hindu Bahunlash, against the identity agenda of *adivasi janajati* political activists. RPP Nepal's great comeback in the second CA election was a parallel phenomenon of the sabotage of the first CA by the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML parties denying *adivasi janajati* aspirations. The Federal Limbuwan State Council (Palungwa Group), which had boycotted the first CA, now took part in the election but could not secure a single seat. Another party, the Federal Limbuwan State Council (Lingden Group), affiliated with the FDNF, which had secured two seats in the first CA, boycotted the election this time around.

Buoyed by their success beyond expectations, the Nepali Congress, the CPN UML, and high caste scholars along with the major news media interpreted the election result as a defeat of identity politics. The victors could be seen on TV and in the newspapers gloating over the 'defeat' of the parties who were said to have had 'identity' as their political agenda. The CPN-Maoist were among the 'losers'.

The Constituent Assembly was created to devise a long-term solution to the problems of social exclusion and discrimination initiated by the State, including the question of liberating *adivasi janajati* groups from the centuries old Hindu *aryan* domination. One of the main slogans of the April Revolution was: "*sambidhan sabha hamro nikas bindu ho*" [constituent assembly is the target point for solution]. Within two years after its election in November 2013, the CA

⁹⁹*Dai (N)* = brother. Sushil Koirala, the president of Nepali Congress, was called Sushil *dai*. In this, 'one vote for *dai*' meant a vote for Nepali Congress. Similarly *gai(N)*= cow, was the election symbol for RPP Nepal. For CA election, the voters cast votes on two different ballots: one for the FPTP candidate, and another for the proportional electoral system.

finally promulgated The Constitution of Nepal 2015 detailing only seven unnamed provinces. This constitution did not provide rights to *adivasi janajati* or *madhesi* groups provoking uprisings among the *madhesis* (that cost more than forty human lives) and among *adivasi janajatis* groups including Limbus.



Figure 5.8 Joint Victory Rally in Tundikhel, Kathmandu. 2006

In July and August of 2015, just two months before the promulgation of the constitution, the Limbuwan Study Center, a division of Chumlung, organized two interaction programs at Chumlung's central office in Kathmandu. These programs focused on creating an overview and way forward for the Limbuwan's movement in the face of a defiant three-party syndicate governing Nepal. Past movements were assessed and strategies were questioned: Was peaceful and open social movement an appropriate strategy for achieving Limbuwan or should a more vigorous strategy be developed to achieve Limbuwan? Chumlung then formed yet another front called *Limbuwan Sangharsha Samiti* [the Limbuwan Struggle Committee] charged with starting

afresh the movement against a 'regressive' constitution that did not address issues of identity and federalism.

The constituent assembly fulfilled the expectations of only half the population of Nepal by completely failing to incorporate the expectations of *adivasi janajati* and *madhesi* populations whose liberation [*mukti*] was long overdue. The history of the two constituent assemblies in Nepal proved to be what Karl Marx, drawing on Hegel, characterized in this way:

[A]ll facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He [Hegel] forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce (Marx 1964:15).

Nepal's constituent assembly occurred twice, first as the tragedy of failure to recognize *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* peoples and second as a farce in a return to a variant of the old order of high caste domination. Limbu and Limbuwan were part of this encompassing process. Now their agitation against a regressive constitution and an exclusionary state continues in new forms.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONSTITUTION OF NEPAL 2015: TRIUMPHANT ARYAN IDENTITY VERSUS RESILIENT ADIVASI IDENTITY

The second Constituent Assembly (2013-2015) made the draft constitution public in July 2015. The draft included neither the Limbuwan state nor the number of federal states that the Limbus had demanded. Rather, the draft included seven unnamed federal states and there was also a possibility that the term “secular” would be replaced by “religious freedom” in the constitution. Such an extreme deviation from the proposals of a “secular state” and identity based models in the first CA to the unnamed provinces created confusion as well as frustration among Limbuwan activists, scholars, lawyers, and Kirat Yakthung Chumlung’s (KYC) officials alike. In this regard, the Limbuwan Study Center (LSC) organized a workshop entitled: *masyouda sambidhan ra Limbuwan ko andolan kata tira?* [Draft constitution and where is the Limbuwan movement heading?] on July 18, 2015. Among the participants of the workshop were Limbus coming from different professions: Limbu CA members, teachers, students, Limbuwan activists, government job retirees, the KYC as well as LSC officials and also non-Limbu sympathizers. I also participated in the workshop as a member of the workshop organizing team as well as a research student. In the workshop, the secretary of the Lawyers Association for Human Rights for Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP), a staunch advocate for indigenous peoples’ rights and a lawyer, Shankar Limbu, criticized the ruling political parties, which were dominant and decisive, for the “regressive” draft from the vantage point of the collective identities and cultural rights of *adivasi-janajatis* in Nepal. Shankar Limbu further said that the dominant parties might have made public such a regressive draft based on regressive theories of constitution in their mind so that the dominant parties could continue to control and rule over *adivasi-janajatis*. Limbu said

that three approaches, namely a [Hindu] colonial legacy, [aryan] racial supremacy, and the criminalization of *adivasi-janajatis*, could be in the dominant party leader's mind when they came up with the draft, which seemed regressive compared to the Interim Constitution 2007. Shankar Limbu described the three approaches: a) the ruling parties might have thought to maintain a colonial legacy through the new constitution, as the Hindu state of Nepal survived and thrived while exploiting and marginalizing *adivasi-janajati* economies, cultures and politics under the reign of the Hindu monarchical state, which is characterized by internal colonialism [*gharelu upanibes* (N)] within the country; b) the ruling groups might have taken on racial supremacist theory as the basis of the constitution. Insertion of the terms *arya* and *sanatan* in the constitution to denote the Bahuns and Hindu religion respectively, and the cow as the national animal could be seen as the ruling groups wanting to promulgate a constitution based on *arya* Hindu supremacy in Nepal; c) there were many provisions in various articles in the proposed constitution draft that seemed to have characterized *adivasi-janajatis* as “criminal” groups. In this regard, Shankar Limbu presented an example from the British Indian rule that the then colonial government had classified some tribal groups as “criminal” groups.

Another point discussed at the meeting was about the term “religious freedom” [*dharmik swatantrata* (N)] alternatively proposed in the draft in place of the term “secular” [state]. During the first CA's tenure, it was well understood among Nepalis, let alone among *adivasi-janajatis*, that the country would be declared a secular state, as in the Interim Constitution 2007. The CA's first meeting in 2008 had already declared it to be so. The rumor was that the dominant leaders wanted to accommodate demands from the pro-Hindu, pro-monarchical part, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-Nepal). Shankar Limbu and many other participants in the

workshop said that the dominant parties floated the idea to replace “secular” with “religious freedom” as part of a conspiracy to reverse the proposal of a secular state.

The Limbuwan Study Centre organized another workshop entitled: *Limbuwan hiyo aja a bholi: Limbuwan prapti ko jukti* [Limbuwan yesterday, today and tomorrow: the strategies for achieving Limbuwan] on August 8, 2015 as a continuation of the program of July 18. The LSC decided to hear from non-Limbu scholars about the draft constitution, with the main invitees being Khagendra Sangraula (a writer), Yug Pathak (an author) and Anubhav Ajit (a civil society activist). Khagendra Sangraula said:

The rights of the women, Dalits, *madhesi*, *adivasi-janajati*, and marginalized groups, guaranteed by the interim constitution have been slashed in the draft constitution... The only way to protect the rights of these various marginalized groups is through uniting the dispersed strengths and straggled groups. Those groups oppressed by the state must unite for the common causes... We cannot fight alone.

Sangraula reiterated that an alliance between the groups marginalized by the state is a historical necessity. Similarly, Yug Pathak said:

Inside the CA is being staged a drama of drafting constitution. Having seen the drama so far, the drama is slowly moving towards tragedy... In history, there have been efforts to make a monolithic mono-cultural Nepal through imposition of various national symbols such as cow, Nepali as the only official language as well as the only medium of education, and Hindu domination. The rulers chose specific symbols in the name of Nepali *rastrabad* (nationalism) in association with the King and his religion, lineage, and agnates... if we really want to build *rastrabad* in a real sense, then all different cultural groups' rights must be equally institutionalized by the constitution.

Another speaker, Anubhav Ajit, a *madhesi* scholar and activist, said;

While talking about Limbuwan and federalism in Nepal, it is not about someone giving Limbuwan and the Limbus receiving Limbuwan from others. Limbuwan should be more of a claim than a demand or begging. It should be built by the Limbu themselves rather than to be received from others. We will build Madhes and you will build Limbuwan, within Nepal as of now.

The three speakers' views above clearly indicated that Limbuwan was not going to happen in the constitution. The speakers also suggested that the Limbus themselves needed to be united and have alliances with other marginalized groups in order to stage further movements in the future.

Locating Problems in the Constitution

Despite protests against the draft constitution all across Nepal mainly by the *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajatis*, the new Constitution of Nepal was promulgated on September 3 2015. Although boastfully touted and trumpeted by the ruling parties as “the best constitution in Asia”, it provoked enormous protests and disobedience by agitating groups. The day on which the constitution was promulgated is celebrated as Constitution Day, a national festival for the ruling parties and those who welcomed and embraced the Constitution. The same day is considered as a Black Day by *adivasi* and *madhesi* groups: with a slogan: *asoj tin kalo din* (Asoj 3/September 17 is the black day). The protests against the constitution occurred even abroad. For example, Limbus burned the constitution in London, Hong Kong, and in the Gulf Countries too.

My focus in this chapter will be to interrogate the inclusion of three symbolic markers of the Hindus in the constitution from an anthropological vantage point: a) the inclusion of the term *sanatan*¹⁰⁰ with reference to declaring Nepal a secular state; b) the declaration of the cow¹⁰¹ as the national animal; and c) the use of the term *arya*¹⁰² referring to the Bahun caste. I will seek to answer the question as to why collective identity is such an important and integral part of society and why symbolic signifiers of collective identity are inalienable from a population group.

¹⁰⁰ As mentioned in Article 4.

¹⁰¹ As mentioned in Article 9.

¹⁰² As mentioned in Article 84.

The three symbolic signifiers are enshrined in the constitution as follows:

Article 4. State of Nepal: (1) Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive, democratic, socialism-oriented, federal democratic republic state.

Explanation: For the purposes of this article, "secular" means religious, cultural freedoms, including protection of religion, culture handed down from the time immemorial.¹⁰³

Article 9. National Anthem... (3) ...[t]he Cow shall be the national animal...

Article 84. Composition of House of Representatives: ... (2) The Federal law shall provide that, in fielding candidacy by political parties for the election to the House of Representatives under the proportional electoral system, representation shall be ensured on the basis of a closed list also from women, *Dalit*, indigenous peoples, *Khas Arya*, *Madhesi*, *Tharu*, Muslims and backward regions, on the basis of population.

Explanation: For the purpose of this clause, "*khas Arya*" means *Kshetri*, *Brahmin*, *Thakuri*, *Sanyasi (Dasnami)* community.¹⁰⁴

The terms *sanatan dharma*, *aryans*, and cow collectively embody the essence of Hindu collective identity. The laws that ban cow slaughter and beef consumption — violations of which are subject to 12 years of imprisonment—were consolidated during the early 19th century. But these laws remain effective even today. Hindu King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the conqueror of Nepal in the 18th century, had instructed that Nepal should be an *asali Hindusthan* [pure Hindu land], arguably in contrast with the then Hindustan (India) of the south being polluted by the Muslims and the European *mlechchhas* [foreigners]. In this regard, I argue that Nepal's new constitution fulfills P. N. Shah's imagination to build Nepal as an *asali Hindustan* and further denies the *adivasi janajati* [indigenous nationalities] peoples of their collective cultural identity. James Dingley's conclusion of the review of the relationships between religion and national identity exactly fits into the situation of Nepal. Dingley says "...religion has not gone away and in many ways is just as prevalent today in influencing national identity as in the past, despite the

¹⁰³ यस धाराको प्रयोजनको लागि "धर्मनिरपेक्ष" भन्नाले सनातनदेखि चलिआएको धर्म संस्कृतिको संरक्षण लगायत धार्मिक, सांस्कृतिक, स्वतन्त्रता सम्झनु पर्छ ।

¹⁰⁴ स्पष्टीकरण: यस उपधाराको प्रयोजनको लागि "खस आर्य" भन्नाले क्षेत्री, ब्राह्मण, ठकुरी, सन्यासी (दशनामी) समुदाय सम्झनु पर्छ ।

popularity of the secularization thesis, although religion's overt presence, role and form may have changed" (Dingley 2011:389). This situation is exactly what one can find in Nepal's constitution, if it is observed carefully. Juxtaposing between cow and pig as unique sacred animals to the *aryan*- Hindu Bahun and to the Limbu non-*aryan adivasi janajati*, respectively, I will showcase some cases of fundamental cultural differences between Hindu castes and the non-Hindu *adivasi-janajati* cultures. I will also show the *adivasi* Limbu's cultural capacity of resilience and resistance to the Hindu state's intervention upon their culture. Drawing on ethnographic examples about the cow and pig in relation to how these animals are considered differently sacred by Hindu Bahuns and the *adivasi* Limbus respectively, I will argue that the new constitution of Nepal is exclusionary as it only enshrines the cow as sacred, thereby failing to duly recognize the cultural diversity and differences of the country. Furthermore, the constitution is also discriminatory—a result of which has been vehement protests and agitations against it since its promulgation. If Nepal's constitution is to be respected as a common “sacred document” for all citizens, it has to embody the collective identities of all the different cultures and communities inside Nepal.

The Secular State Qualified by *Sanatan dharma*

The term *sanatan* denotes nothing other than the Hindu religion. “Nepali Brihat Sabdakos” [Nepali Advanced Dictionary] defines the word *sanatan* as: “i) eternal, ii) from the time immemorial, iii) the name used to denote Bramha, Vishnu, Shiva, Laxmi, Durga, and Saraswati. *sanatan dharma* means i) the religion prevalent among *aryans* from ancient times, ii) current day Hindu religion as endorsed by *veda, purana, tantra* and idolatry” (Nepal Academy 2040 BS:1296). This word is included in the constitution for the first time in the country's

constitutional history. In other words, in the history of making of Nepal's constitutions, the word 'Hindu' is replaced by the word '*sanatan*' now. Although the literal meaning of *sanatan* is 'eternal' or 'traditional' the suggestive or substantive meaning of *sanatan* is Hindu religion as in the meaning given by the Advanced Nepali Dictionary (2040 v.s.). Historian Baburam Acharya prefers using *sanatan* over Hindu when comparing between the Hindu and Buddhist religions (Bhandari 2031a v.s.:158). Other scholars define *sanatan* as a "more amorphous signifier of Hinduism as a religion, distinct from other religions" (Zavos 2001:109). So symbolically as well as semantically, Nepal is a 'secular' state with the constitutional recognition and protection of the *sanatan dharma*, namely Hinduism. Looking at it the other way around, Nepal's constitution—in its symbolic kernel—is a Hindu constitution veiled in a secular garb. In its form, the constitution looks to be secular but it is Hindu in its meaningful content.

Secularism: Multiple Understandings

In India "[s]ecularism emerged in the context of a secular colonial state that is professedly neutral toward religious divisions in society. The British in India were deeply concerned with projecting an image of transcendent neutrality. They were at least partially successful in doing this, since Indians today often see *dharma-nirapeksata*, the indigenous term indicating the neutrality of the state as a distinctive character of Indian civilization, rather than a colonial invention. Sometimes for example, by Gandhi, this neutrality is more positively interpreted as [*sarba*] *dharma sambhava*, the equal flourishing of all religions under the state's neutrality" (Van der Veer 2011:278–79). Gandhi's interpretation of secularism seems to be applicable in Nepal's context too.

There are two understandings of *dharma nirapekshya* in Nepal in common parlance: *dharma nirapekshya rajya* [secular state] is understood as ‘indifferent to religion’. In this regard, *dharma nirapekshya rajya* means firstly, the state shall remain indifferent to religion. During the workshops and seminars I attended on this topic in Kathmandu organized by the LSC some Limbu scholars activists argued that ‘a state has no religion’ or that ‘there is no relationship between state and religion’ therefore ‘the constitution must be silent about religion whatsoever’. But those scholars and activists would resort to a ‘secular state’ as a practical solution to the Hindu’s exploitation imposed upon Limbus when Nepal had been a Hindu state for more than two centuries. Secondly, understanding of *dharma nirapekshya rajya* is there shall not be any religion that prevails over other religions, meaning that all religions are equal. For the *adivasi-janajati* Limbu, the latter part of the statement seems to be true considering their experiences of Hindu domination. Limbuwan politician’s demand for a secular state may be viewed in the context that the Hindu religion prospered in Nepal under the auspices of the state exploiting other non-Hindu populations including the Limbus. So it is understandable that the Limbuwan demand for a secular state in Nepal is intended to shake off the yoke of Hindu domination on the one hand and also to bring to an end the country’s broader identity as a Hindu country on the other. Social scientist Peter Berger says “secularization is the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” (Berger 1967:107). In contrast to Peter Berger’s statement, Nepal’s new constitution enshrines Hindu religious symbols and identity as the dominant symbols to broadly identify Nepal as a Hindu-dominated country.

Similarly, Vanaik states: “Further secularization means the further decline of religious identity. This is both possible and desirable. Religion should become more privatized and

religious affiliation more of an optional choice.” But Nepal’s new constitution has offered no option for the *adivasi-janajati* Limbu apropos the prohibitions on cow/calf/ox slaughter and eating beef. Given the fact that many individuals from *adivasi-janajati*, Muslims, Christians, and Hindu Dalits are still facing court cases against cow/ox slaughter, Nepal has been declared a secular state only in nominal form, with detrimental consequences on the day-to-day lives of people. In this regard, Nepal cannot be anthropologically considered a secular state considering the conflicting relationships between the state, ‘sacred cow’, and *adivasi-janajati* communities, including the Limbu.

Michi Knecht and Jorg Feuchter write “Religion is back. At the turn of the new millennium, swan songs of religious decline have given way to the rhetoric of religious returns” (Knecht and Feuchter 2008:9). Nepal’s Tamang, Magar, and Gurung representative social organizations lobbied and campaigned during the 2001 census for their respective peoples to report to the census that their religion was Buddha *dharma*. Similarly, Limbus’ KYC, Rais’ Kirat Rai Yayokkha (KRY) also printed leaflets, held many programs for campaigning among Limbus, Rais, Sunuwars, and Yakhas in order to encourage their people to report their religion as ‘Kirat’ during the 2001 census. “Generally, the Rai organization Kirat Rai Yayokkha and the Limbu organization Yakthung Chumlung have a strong normative power to propagate the particular vision of their leaders” (Gaenszle 2016:332). Here an obvious question arises, how shall we consider the notion of a secular state and demands to be formally recognized as belonging to a different religion other than the Hindu, as logical given that such an understanding of secularism is to remain indifferent from religion? On one hand, Nepal’s *adivasi-janajati* were demanding for an inclusive democracy with their inclusion in a secular state while they were also campaigning to classify their groups as belonging to a religion, different from that of the Hindu

too. How do the Nepali *adivasi-janajati* movement for a secular state and their campaign for a different religion help us redefine the concept of secular or secularism on the basis of local understanding and practice? In this regard, Gellner and Letizia state: “Secularism...is a political doctrine that implies the religious neutrality of the state, its protection of the religious freedom of its citizens, and the equality of religions in the public sphere” (Gellner and Letizia 2016:13). However, my problem here is not about discussing secularism and the characteristics of a secular state in detail. Rather my question is to why were the dominant parties interested in inserting *sanatan dharma* as the qualifier of the secular state of Nepal?

Aryans, the most Ancients in the Constitution

Aryans probably originated in Europe and entered the Gangetic plain before the 3rd millennium BC (Acharya 2060 v.s.). The *aryans* roamed around Europe and Asia long before the four fold Hindu varna system originated in India. Introducing the *aryans*, Pemble writes:

“The word ‘*aryan*’ was formerly used to designate the Sanskrit-speaking tribe or tribes who, originating probably in eastern Europe, invaded India at the dawn of the recorded history. It was devised by the distinguished orientalist Max Muller, from the Sanskrit word *arya*, meaning ‘noble’, which the authors of the early Sanskrit epics used to distinguish their own people from the darker indigenous inhabitants of north India. The term never was universally accepted as an ethnological label, and since the Nazis propagated the notion that the ‘*aryans*’ were a fair-haired, blue-eyed ‘master-race’ (it is more likely that they were, in fact, Mediterranean or ‘Brown’ people) it has been generally dropped. It is retained only to describe the group of languages (Iranian, Sanskrit, and the descendants of Sanskrit, all forming a branch of the larger Indo-European family) associated with the people in question” (Pemble 1971:4).

The Constitution has adopted the term ‘*arya*’¹⁰⁵ denoting Bahun caste groups. For example, under the Right to Social Justice (article 42), it says “...and indigent *khas aarya* shall

¹⁰⁵ Historian Baburam Acharya has described the *aryans* as a race. He has stated that the people of the *arya* race (*nasla*) roamed between the Ganga and Volga rivers around the 3rd millennium BC. As one of the offshoots from the then *aryan* race advanced to the Gangetic plain, they enslaved other non-*aryans*

have the right to participate in the State bodies on the basis of an inclusive principle... For the purpose of this clause, *khas aarya* means Kshetri, Brahman, Thakuri, Sanyasi communities.” This is how the Bahuns, anthropologically an ethnic category [*jatiya*], have been escalated to a constitutional status. Prior to this constitution, only the King was said to be “a descendant of the Great King Prithivi Naryan Shah and adherent of *aryan* Culture and Hindu religion” (The Constitution of Nepal 1962). By this definition and constitutional arrangement, the Bahun *jati* are constitutionally recognized as *aryans*, the most civilized and most ancient peoples of all. Despite *adivasi-janajatis* strong movements for a secular state, why would dominant political parties so dexterously write the constitution, which is obliquely seen as nothing less than a Hindu constitution?

State Protection of Cows and Brahmans

Both in India and Nepal, Legal documents and scholarly writings show that the protection of cows and Brahmans began to fulfill political purposes, particularly to propagate a primordial Hindu identity, rather than to maintain religious sanctity. DN Jha writes:

The Sikh Kuka/Namdhari Movement in late 19th century used cows as a symbol for mobilizing Hindus and Sikhs against the British who had allowed cow slaughter in the Punjab. In 1882, Dayanand Saraswati founded the Cow Rakshini Sabha [Cow Protection Society] and was successful in mobilizing a wide variety of people under this symbol, which was mainly directed against the Muslims. From then onwards, the cow has become an important factor in India’s communal politics...So cow killing, associated with many Vedic sacrifices, tended to lose its importance over time. In the post-Mauryan and Gupta periods and subsequent centuries, the Brahminical injunctions clearly discourage and disapprove of cow slaughter. In the medieval period, we see it emerging as an emotive symbol and, in the 19th century, it became a mark of Hindu identity. The aggressive projection of Hindu identity has significantly influenced politics in India during the 20th

long before they created the fourfold varna system comprised of Brahman, Kshetriya, Viashya and Shudra (Bhandari 2031b v.s.:198–199). Acharya’s description denotes the *aryans* as among the most ancient as well as civilized humans.

century. With its increased belligerence now, it is playing a vicious role in contemporary politics¹⁰⁶ (Jha 2015).

Jha's statements above show how the Hindus have gradually transformed cows from a sacrificial animal to a symbolically charged political animal that signifies the Hindus' collective identity. This occurred first when used as the Hindus' unifying symbol against the British, and later when used against Muslims in Indian politics. Both cows and Brahmans were, by the same token, protected as well as directed against the non-*aryan* and inferior caste populations in Nepal.

Such a notion and practice of placing Brahman, Cow and King at the center of the social cultural universe of a society started in Nepal ever since the four-fold *varna* system was introduced during the reign of Jayasthiti Malla, who was said to have invited Brahmans from South India to implement the caste system in the then Nepal in the late 14th century. His *NYAYAVIKASINI (MANAVANYAYASHASTRA)*, the volume of codes and legal injunctions states:

The king and Brahman are infinite for the human beings. The king is illustrious. The Brahmans are sacred. As long as they do not deviate from their path it is not necessary to provide directions to them, they should not be condemned because the king is illustrious and the Brahmans is sacred (Nepal Law Commission n.d.:79).

In addition to placing the King and Brahman at the center of the socio-religious cosmology, Jayasthiti Malla's legal injunctions protected Brahmans at the expense of non-Brahman lives:

If a Kshetriya insults a Brahman by verbal abuse such a Kshatriya shall be liable to a fine of One Hundred pana. If a Vaishya insults a Brahman in such a way he shall be liable to a fine of one hundred fifty or Two Hundred Pana. If a Sudra insults a Brahman in such a way, he shall receive the death penalty (Nepal Law Commission n.d.:74).

Jayasthiti Malla's legal codes also favored and protected Brahmans economically:

One who finds any wealth buried [*gaddhan*] by somebody else; it should be deposited to the state fund because all of the buried property and property from the mine goes to the state treasury except the property of a Brahman (Nepal Law Commission n.d.:35).

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/dadri-murder-beef-ban-cow-slaughter-hinduism-islam-muslims-brahmans-british-rule-mauryan-empire/story/1/6665.html> (accessed: 10-26-2017)

As the saying goes: *nyaya napaye Gorkha janu vidya napaye Kashi janu* [go to Gorkha for justice, and go to Kashi (Banaras) for knowledge]. The Gorkha kingdom during Ram Shah's (ca.1608-1636) reign was said to be the land of justice. But ironically of the total of 26 codes that Ram Shah issued, code 12 was for protecting cows and Brahmins: "If cows and Brahmins can not get enough to eat, it would be sinful to the king"¹⁰⁷ (Nepal Law Commission n.d.). One can observe that both the cow and Brahmins were continuously favored by the state throughout the Hindu state making process in Nepal. David Holmberg describes how the state protects both Brahmins and cows while undermining Tamang identity. He states that "injunctions against killing cows... had profound effects in the socio-economic practices of the dominant and subordinated alike" (Holmberg 2006:31). Referring to the "87 cases of cow slaughter cases registered from 1999 to 2003" he states that "this high number of cases demonstrates the important place cows continue to play in the symbolic life of the law" (Holmberg 2006:41). While the constitution of Nepal declared Nepal a secular state, one could count scores of arrests against cow slaughter across the country as reported by local news sources in a span of eight to nine months. Ironically such arrests were made while the CPN-Maoist (Center) was among the ruling parties. CPN-Maoist cadres and militia butchered cow or ox during the *jana yudhda* (1996- 2006) for feasting as well as in defiance of the *purano satta* [old regime] of the Hindu state of Nepal. David Holmberg further writes "Maoist revolutionaries (Bahun no less) slaughtered cows in an anti-Dashain spectacle and feasted on cow flesh in as emotively charged a challenge to the old order that one could imagine" (Holmberg 2006:59). The question arises,

¹⁰⁷ गौचर राषनु भन्या हुकुम भयो गौ ब्राह्मणलाई षाना कन दुःख हुन्छ र राजालाई प्रत्यवायलागछ भना निमित्त गाउगाउमा निकास पैसारको चल्दो मिल्दो पारी गौचर राषनु भन्या थिति बाधि वक्सनु भयो (www.lawcommissoin.gov.np)

why did the Maoists, when in state power, vote for the cow as the national animal whereas they butchered this animal during the *jana yudhda*?

It is not a mere coincidence that the cow, the *aryans*, and the *sanatan dharma* have been enshrined in the constitution. By enshrining these three signifiers of the primordial Hindu identity in the new constitution, the state of Nepal has fulfilled the dream of the King PN Shah to build Nepal as an *asali Hindusthan* [true Hindu Land]. King Shah had instructed to his followers during his final days in 1775, after capturing ‘the three cities of Nepal [*tin sahar Nepal*] the *Hindupati Raja* (the Sen dynasty), the Kirata and the Limbu chiefdoms in the east.’

[i]f everyone is alert, this will be a true Hindustan of the four *jats*, greater or lesser, with the thirty-six classes. Do not leave your ancient religion (Stiller 1968:44).

This is how he imagined as well as instructed his followers and descendants on how to build *asali Hindustan* across the Himalayan foothills. After his death, it did not take too long before his descendants issued royal orders to protect cows and injunctions against the consumption of beef:

Limbu, Bhote, Lapche, Yakha, Lohar, Athpahar[e], Khamire and Khambu households in the Chanipur region east of the Arun river and west of the Tista river, who took the flesh of dead cattle as food, were each ordered to supply one piece of hide for manufacturing scabbards and other equipment for the Gorakh Bux and Sheodal Companies (Regmi 1979:21).

Gurungs and Lamas in the regions east of the Trishuli river were granted exemption from the obligations to supply hides and skins to the munitions factory when they promised to join the army under Kaji Nayan Singh and proceed to the Kangra front in A.D. 1805, respect Brahmans, and refrain from taking the flesh of dead cattle (Regmi 1979:22).

Although cow slaughter and beef consumption was banned, allowance to eat *sino* [carrion] of cow, calf, oxen was allowed for those *matawali* [liquor drinking caste] in order that they could supply hides necessary for the military. Since the Limbus inhabited the eastern-most territory of the country - bordering with Sikkim (then an independent state), West Bengal of

British India to the east and Tibet to the North – then they would have no reason to eat *sino* in exchange for supplying hides to the government. In 1854, King Surendra consolidated otherwise scattered legal arrangements and orders in the form of the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code). Richard Burghart summarizes the injunction on cow slaughter and capital punishment upon violation of the injunction:

Persons who commit heinous crime of slaughtering oxen in a Hindu land shall be flayed alive, impaled, or hanged upside down until dead. Their property shall be confiscated and members of their families enslaved (Burghart 2008:196).

As recently as 1963, in addition to continuing with protection of cows the state made amendments to certain clauses of the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code), even protecting the Hindu religion against other religions. For example, it states under Chapter 19, *Adalko* (on interchange):

Within Nepal, no one shall propagate Christianity, Islam faiths creating obstruction to the religion prevailing among the Hindu caste. No one of the Hindu religion shall be taken to the afore- mentioned faiths by converting their religion. Three years imprisonment, if such an effort is made, and 6 years imprisonment if the effort to conversion is completed (Nepal Law Commission 1963).

As the constitution of Nepal 1962 had declared the cow as the national animal, the *Muluki Ain* 1963 amended some injunctions under the *mahal* [chapter] of *Chaupaya ko* [on Quadrupeds]:

Cow and ox shall not be slaughtered for no reason. Even cannot be offered to the divinities and deities. Punishment for killing cow or ox, 12 years. If anyone only promises to kill cow or ox, six years imprisonment (*Muluki Ain* 1963).

It should be noted here that cow slaughter is not directly a crime because it is the national animal but mainly because it is banned by the Country's Code of Law. These two points, cow as the national animal and the ban of cow or ox slaughter by the *Muluki Ain* are in direct contradiction with the declaration of Nepal as a secular state. Such an antithetical legal arrangement on cows in relation to the secular state has deeply polarized Nepali politics. In

addition to others, this is one reason that *adivasi-janajati* peoples have been vehemently protesting against the constitution. Their movement for the secular state of Nepal could not be meaningfully realized even in the “secular” state of Nepal, for which they started a movement through an organized political party since the late 1980s. The *adivasi-janajati* fought for the secular state with the thoughts and expectations that no citizen of Nepal should face a criminal case for consuming beef or slaughtering cow/ox. *Adivasi-Janajati* politicians seemed to have understood that the secular state meant ox slaughter and beef consumption would not be an offense against the law as Nepal was declared both a secular and republic state in 2008 by the Constituent Assembly. But arrests and court cases against ox slaughter continued even in the aftermath of that declaration and continues even now after the promulgation of a new constitution 2015. Such arrests and court cases have been reported from all over the country, even from the Kathmandu valley, the capital city of Nepal. The aggression of police in such cases is elevated to the extent that even the *adivasi-janajati* organization’s leaders, who inquire about such arrests then get themselves arrested by the police.

In 2011, Bouddha (an area of Kathmandu dominated by Tamangs and Sherpas) police arrested and put into custody three Tamang youths with the charge against cow slaughter. The General Secretary of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) went to the police station to inquire about the case in detail, as the arrest was illegal in the understanding of NEFIN. But the NEFIN general secretary himself ended up being arrested by the police there and then, possibly after an exchange of some harsh words with the police.

In 2014, Nepal Police arrested Indra Bahadur Tamang from Sindhupalchok district. Tamang was arrested in possession of 20 kilograms of beef, one *Khukuri* knife and one saucepan. The police had raided the scene based on information given by an undisclosed

informant. The police had to use physical force including shooting a few blank gunshots to arrest Tamang. Some others said to be involved in the incident reportedly fled the scene. Such arrests have prompted number of questions about the status of cows as a sacred and protected animal in a declared “secular” state. Now the questions are also directed towards high caste Bahuns and Chhetris, who do not hesitate to eat beef in restaurants in Kathmandu or elsewhere in Nepal.

In this regard a new website published the following questions and comments after the news of Indra Bahadur Tamang’s arrest:

- i) Owners of five star hotels selling beef steak do not get arrested, but why are the *adivasi* villagers arrested on the [false] charge of killing of cows when they have only eaten the meat of a dead ox?
- ii) Australia’s national animal is a kangaroo, but Australia has not banned kangaroo meat. Tiger is the national animal of India, but tigers can be killed in the national parks with hunting permission in India.
- iii) Why has the state not yet repealed the old Civil Code’s cow and beef-eating related arrangements while those arrangements directly contradict with the secular state, and Nepal’s [interim] constitution?
- iv) What if the endangered one-horned rhino was declared the national animal, thereby repealing the status of the cow as the national animal?
- v) For what reason should they declare the cow as the national animal while this will have a detrimental impacts upon the cultures and food habits of Kirati, Muslim, Christians, and Himalayan *adivasi* peoples?
- vi) What if beef consumption and cow slaughter is banned only for the Hindu Arya and Khas but not for others?
- vii) Imprisoning *adivasi-janajati* against the charge of cow killing is a mockery of the secular state so why are those who are in prison against the same charge not amnestied?
- viii) Why are those Arya and Khas friends - who eat the meat of cow and ox both in Nepal and abroad -not protesting against the laws that prosecute the *adivasi-janajati* against cow slaughter?” (Nepalisamachar.com 2014) [my translation]

The above questions clearly demand new legal arrangements suitable to the multicultural Nepal. The identity of the state of Nepal must not be conceptualized and defined on the basis of *aryan* civilization and Hindu monolithic logic. When even the Bahun and Chhetri have no hesitation to consume beef and when high affluent class Bahun-owned restaurants serve beef

even to their Nepali customers, then there is no reason to ban beef consumption in Nepal. In this regard, former CA member Pasang Sherpa says:

Sherpa, Tamang, Bhote should have right to slaughter cows and eat beef. The state's laws which prohibit them from observing their customs and culture and the laws which prosecute them for observing their rituals can not be considered as democratic, legitimate and equitable." Sherpa goes on to say that "in the first CA, we demanded for the right of the *adivasi-janajati* that they should have right to eat cow meat, but the government tried to table a bill that even prohibited beating a cow, let alone eating cow meat. After our vehement protests, they put off that point. Even after Nepal has become a *loktantrik ganatantra* [democratic republic] and secular state, the laws are still against the cultures and customs of the *adivasi-janajati*. There should be laws that allow the Tamang, Sherpa, Bhote communities to slaughter cows (Nepalisamachar.com 2014) [my translation].

The above cases are some testimonies of how people in the margins of the state have organized political movements demanding for amendments in the laws so as to accommodate their cultures and customs in the constitution, which have otherwise detrimental impacts upon their lives. But how do the politicians who belong to the high caste ruling political parties respond to this debate and their yearning to declare cow as the national animal? One of the leaders of Nepali Congress, Krishna Sitaula, who often plays a decisive role in government, says:

As for the pro-Hindus, we have made the cow our national animal. Now, the animal has constitutional protection and cow slaughter has also been banned. This provision had been removed from the first CA but we brought it back (The Indian Express 2015).

The above statement by Krishna Sitaula clearly corroborates the reason behind the first CA having failed to write the constitution. It is clearer when compared with the ex-CA member Pasang Sherpa's demand on *adivasi-janajatis* right to eat beef. Sitaula's statement also indicates the fact that first CA could not write the constitution because the *adivasi-janajatis* and *madhesi* wanted to inscribe their collective cultural identity in the constitution. In addition, the *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* caucuses held more than a two-thirds majority in the first CA. Had the first CA decided to go for voting to pass the constitution, it would have passed their historical as well

as collective identity-based names as proposed and desired by *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* communities. The cow would not be the national animal. Perhaps fearing that the *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* may inscribe and guarantee their collective identity-based rights in the constitution the voting process in the first CA was avoided at any cost. This was done in the name of ‘consensus’ among the major three political party leaders. In essence, by declaring the cow as the national animal, the ruling caste fulfilled their desire to identify Nepal through the dominant Hindu symbol, namely the cow. With the trinity of dominant Hindu symbols, namely cow, *sanatan dharma*, and *aryan* race enshrined in it, the constitution symbolically signifies Nepal as a Hindu country. This is how and why the constitution making process was orchestrated to glorify the *aryan* Hindu identity while vilifying *adivasi-janajati* collective identities. The leaders of dominant political parties, who also belonged to the *aryan* race, formed a coterie for ‘consensus’, which has been proven to be politically damaging for *adivasi-janajati* peoples. This is the context one should have in perspective in order to look into the *adivasi-janajati* protest against the constitution of Nepal.

The leaders of the three major parties forged an alliance - irrespective of their ideological differences - against the *adivasi-janajati* and the *madhesi* so as to enshrine their own collective identity in the constitution. The polar ideological differences of the three major parties— Nepali Congress (rightist social democratic), CPN-UML (centrist socialist communist), and CPN-Maoist (ultra-leftist, Maoist)—became assimilated into each others’ common interest of *aryan-Brahamanist* identity as all these three parties leadership tiers were comprised of an overwhelming majority of Bahuns, also known as *aryans*. Acclaimed writer Manjushree Thapa succinctly describes the domination of the Bahuns and Chhetris in Nepal:

Brahmins and Kshatriyas — called Bahuns and Chhetris in Nepal — occupy almost all national space. This is a glaring, undeniable fact and it holds true for all the political

parties (including the Maoists), every media house, the entire private and NGO sectors, and the vast informal networks of power — including the well-heeled of Kathmandu who exert immense influence over confused donors and ambassadors (Thapa 2012).

The Brahmans, who remained as advisors to the royal court and the king seemed to have used the cow as a shield to protect themselves from any kind of undesired consequences upon their lives or as a means to benefit themselves in every possible way: politically, economically, culturally, religiously.

Incidents of slaughtering an ox, calf for the ritual and meat purpose have been increased in Nepal after the April Revolution, particularly after the abolition of Monarchy and declaration of Nepal as a secular Republic in 2008. Even during the Maoist Insurgency for 10 years from 1996-2006, the insurgents were often reported to have slaughtered ox for meat as well as for excoriating the state (Holmberg 2006) despite the escalating arrests and court cases for such “offenses”. Many people are behind the bars for this “crime”. The state machinery have their own interpretation. Why would particularly *adivasi janajati* have started slaughtering ox during different rituals particularly after the abolition of monarchy and declaration of Nepal as a secular state. My hunch is that it is not because they were craving for beef for so long for more than two centuries but they do so as to express their resentment against the state. Is beef eating prohibited in a Hindu society because the cow is a national animal? Or there is political reason behind it. I argue that in Nepal the cow is a political animal.

Now one can say that Nepal as a secular country has nothing to do with prohibition of eating beef. Just declaring an animal the national animal shall not be a reason why the state shall have injunctions on eating beef. This is a dubious and ambivalent point on behalf of the state. The term ‘state’ shall not be understood as an abstract entity without any motivation and interests.

There does not seem a logical plausible reason that one must avoid eating beef just because the cow is a national animal? The Phillipines' national animal is water buffalo like animal called the carabao (not so different from water buffalos in Nepal), which is raised for hide, milk, meat. But why does the cow as national animal have to be considered completely differently from other animals, even in Nepal? There are so many other things that are declared to be national symbols: dress, hat, color, national bird, and national flower for which the constitution and civil code are quiet. One wears the national dress, national hat, speaks the national language, and people get smeared with red color powder on their success and achievements as one could see during the elections and other such occasions in Nepal. The 'national language' Khas-Nepali is imposed to be spoken by everyone. Why we do have different standards for taking on and accepting these national symbols, including the cow as the most sacred and others with different purposes? The notion of 'nation' or national has been supported by the term Hindu. Nepali societies were unsuccessfully planned and designed as a single Hindu nation, a nation that was the Hindu culture and the way of life of high caste Hindus. So the ruling caste imposed their own ways of life upon the cultures and ways of the lives of the 'others' as well. The animal that the ruling caste 'worshipped', the costume and color that they liked, the language they spoke, the religion their lives and society were made meaningful and were legally imposed upon others and legally demanded such liking from all 'others' as well. Legal arrangements were designed in such a way that the offenders could be punished accordingly. So the making of Nepal as a nation in the past was the making of a Hindu Nation of Nepal, as PN Shah the 'unifier' and the 'father' of Nepal for the high caste Hindu Hill people, and a conqueror for the *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* communities, said in his *dibyopadesh* [noble instructions] "yo asli Hindustan ho" [this is original Hindusthan]. To make Nepal an "asli

Hindustan” may not be a religious project but it may be a political project. Since the old and real ‘Hindustan’ all across the Indo-Gangetic plain no longer remained as pure and pristine after the Muslim entry into South Asia and the occupation by foreigners. In this context, it is quite understandable that King PN Shah would have liked to build an “*asli Hindustan*” [original Hindustan] across the Himalayan foothills, which would remain untouched and undefiled by ‘others’. King PN Shah in fact did not let any Christians into Nepal during his reign. I argue that the Hindu ruling caste groups even today are so preoccupied with the notion of *asli Hindusthan* that the cow as the national animal in the most recent constitution of Nepal is not a new idea but a continuation of the political project of ‘*asli Hindustan*’ strategically designed by the King of Gorkha in the second half of the 18th century and expanded across the Himalayan foothills through conquest.

Father Giuseppe, who was in Nepal during the invasion of Nepal wrote in 1799 "... the Brahmens..is the same as is followed in *Hindustan*, with the difference that in *Hindustan*, the Hindus being mixed with the Mohammdans, their religion also abounds with many prejudices, and is not strictly observed; whereas in *Nepal*, where there are no *Muselmans* (except one *Cashmirian* merchant) the *Hindu* religion is practiced in its greatest purity" (Giuseppe 1799:310).

This is the context in which Nepali politicians are likely to perceive Nepali national culture and the Nepali nation. It is absolutely with reference to the past Hindu culture and Hindu nation, even in the guise of the secular state of Nepal. The Nepali national symbol after Nepal is no longer the Hindu Kingdom, or Hindu Nation. So the old Hindu identity now is understood and imposed in new ways, namely through the Nepali identity. So the Nepali nation is nothing different from the Hindu nation.

The Politics of Sacred Cow versus the Culture of Sacred Pig

The notion of sacredness emanating from the cow for the Nepali Hindu ruling caste shall be more meaningful and interesting if we look at the term from a political angle. It will be clearer if we compare the Limbus' notion of a sacred pig and the Hindu high caste notions of a sacred cow. Limbus raise pigs and, if seen from a materialist point of view, pork is the most valued food delicacy that a Limbu would crave for. It would be impossible to find a Limbu household with no pigsty and no chicken coop in the backyard or the front yard. Any Limbu who has maintained a Limbu religious and cultural ethos would not slaughter a pig by himself/herself because it is believed that the pig belongs to a deity and divinity.

Limbus believe that humans were the last creations after all other lives made by the *Tagera Ningwafumang Yuma* in this earth. In this respect, pigs are older than humans. But humans domesticated pigs. Since both humans and pigs were created by *Yuma* Limbus believed that pigs were owned by *Yuma*, hence they began to beg to *Yuma* before they butchered pigs for meat. Similarly, when a sow gives piglets, they compulsorily spare one or two piglets in the name of *Yuma*, only to be offered to the *Yuma mang* [divinity], later through a ritual. This could be one reason that Limbus started doing *pooja* [worship] before butchering a pig. Another story is that during the hunter-gathering days when Limbus had not started a sedentary life, pigs guided them through the forests and the places in search of water. After domestication, pigs would go out to graze and would come back home smeared with mud-water. Humans would follow the pig the next time in order to locate the water pond. If the place with an availability of water was inhabitable, humans would settle in that new place. In those days, particularly *Yoppa* [boar] would guide humans through forests. It is also said that *yakthumbas* [Limbus] used to have pig-herds in ancient times. They used to shift their settlements and bring along the pigs. As

the *aryans* (newcomers) encountered the Limbu pig-herders, living a different life, and speaking a different language, the *aryans* called them *Kirat*, then a derogatory term that reverberated in meaning as an ‘uncivilized’ barbarous and violent group. Limbu scholars now believe that ‘kirat’ is a disparaging term.

Another interpretation of why Limbus worship pigs is that the Limbus butcher pigs only after propitiating two divinities, namely *Him Sammang* [home divinity] and the supreme divinity called *Yuma Sammang*, who is said to have created both the earth and all creators including the humans in this earth. As the *pooja* begins, the *phedangma* [Limbu priest] propitiates the divinity, the spear on the altar, and the *phedangma* asks for permission from the divinity to use that weapon for killing the pig:

We were raising your pig, now for such and such reasons we needed to slaughter this pig. Please forgive us for not being able to keep this animal any longer, and please do not inflict any problem upon us.

The pig is always speared through the underarm in order to strike the heart and lungs. After killing the pig, the spear is brought back to the altar, placed with the spear side up with a banana leaf tied to it. The butchered pig’s stomach lining fat is placed on the altar covering the urn vase with flowers. There are different ways to offer raw, cooked, and smoked meats to the divinity. After the offering is finished, the *phedangma* says ‘we offered you the pig already, now these starving humans also want to eat some left over meats, as your ‘*prasad*’ [religious offering].

The true owner of the pig being raised in ones’ pigsty is a deity so it would be an utter violation of cultural rule to slaughter a pig without the permission of the ‘owner’. A pig is both sacred and sacrificial for the Limbus. There is no logical ambivalence in the relationship between the Limbus and the sacred pig. In rural Limbuwan, I have not seen any Limbu house without a

pigsty. Limbu society as a whole comprises hundreds of different clans. Certain clans avoid certain animal meat. For example, the Angbuhang clan does not eat pork but one may still find a pigsty in an Angbuhang house as well for the wife's or daughter-in-law side brings along her own maternal divinity. There are other Limbu clans that avoid other animals, such as the Khewa clan that avoids chicken, and the Yonghang clan that avoids goat meat. Each clan has their own mythical stories explaining the avoidance relationship with certain animals.

Pigs and pigsties look dirty and defiling from the material health and hygiene point of views. Christian biblical writings classify 'swine as defiling and impure' "because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, it is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch" (Douglas, 1992, p. 42). In Nepal too, both pig and pork are polluting to the *Bahun*s, traditionally. A *Bahun* shall neither touch a pig nor consume pork. For a *Bahun* a pig is unclean, thus untouchable as well as inedible. The old civil code (1854) prohibited *Bahun*s from consuming pork and drinking alcohol. There is a stark difference between a cow as 'sacred' for Hindus and a pig as sacred for Limbus. The cow is sacred but not sacrificial for the Hindus whereas a pig is both sacred and sacrificial for Limbus. A cow is sacred but beef must not be consumed. In Christian writings what is unclean is abominable, while what is clean is consumable. From the Limbu cultural vantage point a pig is pure, untouched, clean and undefiled. Pigs are not supposed to be kicked or beaten because the true owner might get angry and inflict sickness upon human's physical body. There are sociological relationships between the Limbus and their divinities as the true owner of pig. The divinities inhabit nearby forests, hills, the fields, the huge chestnut tree, and nearby natural water springs. Worshipping all of these, for Limbus, is to worship the land, the nature, and the territory. For a Limbu woman, a pig is sacred and almost at the level of divinity so that when she is sick or has a fever and

headache, she may ask: “did anyone kick or beat the pig today? I am not feeling well. Would any one go and bring the *phedangma*¹⁰⁸?” So a Limbu woman has enormous faith on her deities and divinities superimposed upon the pig she raises. Then what would she think about the cow in relation to the idea of sacredness and faith? Her understanding towards a cow may be indifferent. For her a cow is neither sacred nor profane. A cow is simply a useful animal, for milk, manure and, even better if the cow gives birth to oxen. But what about eating beef? She would never ever eat beef, nor even taste. Why? A Limbu woman cannot even think of eating beef, not because it is sinful to eat the meat of a sacred and mother goddess cow, but because it is disgusting and abominable. Here we get into the differences between the injunction made by the Hindu state and how a non-Hindu *adivasi-janajati* perceives the state’s order and legal arrangements. The Hindu state may have ordered its subjects to worship the cow as the mother goddess, not to slaughter cows, and to refrain from eating beef because it would be utterly sinful to eat the meat of the mother goddess. But the state injunction is perceived in *adivasi-janajati*’s own cultural context, which looks to be the opposite of and in contrast to the state’s injunction. I argue here that the cow is neither a sacred nor a national animal for for the Limbus. Rather, studies from the 19th century report that Limbus sacrificed and consumed beef:

[T]he Limbus of Darjeeling make small offerings of grain, vegetables, and sugar-cane, and sacrifice cows, pigs, fowls, &c., on the declared principle “the life breath to the gods, the flesh to ourselves.” It seems likely that such meaning may largely explain the sacrificial practices of other religions...in conjunction with these accounts, the unequivocal meaning of funeral sacrifices (Tylor 1874:392).

The case example of from the Limbu society today, and the testimony from the past that they sacrificed and consumed cow meat demonstrate that by constitutionally declaring the cow as the national animal, the castiest state of Nepal has once again inflicted the *aryan* Hindu symbolic domination upon the lives of the Limbus. Interestingly for the Bahuns, the cow is

¹⁰⁸ Limbu ritual performer and a healer

sacred but not sacrificial. An obvious concern arises: did the ancestors of present day Bahuns—*aryans*—never eat beef? BR Ambedkar, referring to the Rig Veda, writes in his essay entitled *Did Hindus Never Eat Beef ?*:

That the Aryans of the Rig Veda did kill cows for purposes of food and ate beef is abundantly clear from the Rig Veda itself. In Rig Veda (X. 86.14) Indra says: ‘They cook for one 15 plus twenty oxen’. The Rig Veda (X.91.14) says that for Agni were sacrificed horses, bulls, oxen, barren cows and rams. From the Rig Veda (X.72.6) it appears that the cow was killed with a sword or axe (Ambedkar, 2015).¹⁰⁹

BR Ambedkar further states that the *aryans* slaughtered cows, and consumed beef even much later than the period of the Rig Veda:

That the Hindus at one time did kill cows and did eat beef is proved abundantly by the description of the Yajnas given in the Buddhist Sutras which relate to periods much later than the Vedas and the Brahmanas. The scale on which the slaughter of cows and animals took place was colossal. It is not possible to give a total of such slaughter on all accounts committed by the Brahmins in the name of religion (Ambedkar 2015).

Considering Ambedkar’s statements above, it is clear that the Hindus had a different project, other than religious and cultural aims, when they gradually stopped sacrificing cows as DN Jha writes in his thought-provoking book, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*:

For over a century the sanctity of the Indian cow has been more than a matter of academic debate—communalist Hindus and their fundamentalist organizations have repeatedly attempted to force it into the political arena (Jha 2002: ix).

The above writings about ancient India in relationship to the cow and the Hindus show that the reasons behind the state’s protection against cow slaughter lay in state politics rather than religious sanctity.

But Limbu culture is defiant and resilient. Limbus have defended their culture and unique collective identity by using the pig and pork as symbolic items to deride the *aryan* Hindu culture and constitution. Furthermore such a cow-based nationalism is hollow and a hoax in a

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.countercurrents.org/ambedkar050315.htm> (accessed: 2016-10-26)

multicultural society like Nepal. The perception and practice of nationalism in Nepal differs in similar ways as to how ideas about the ‘sacred cow’ and ‘beef avoidance’ are perceived and practiced differently in different sociological and cultural contexts. Limbus celebrate the Dasain festival with extravagant consumption of pork and alcohol, even by gifting a large quantity of pork and alcohol to the wife-giver families. What does it mean in an anthropological sense when Limbus consume plenty of pork and liquor, which are otherwise prohibited for Bahuns, during the Hindu Dashain festival? This may be a Limbu way of mocking a Hindu festival.

Social Discrimination and Legal Arrangements

Mara Malagodi states:

It seems clear, however, that even after 1990 Nepal’s juridical order maintained the privileged position of Hinduism. The enduring constitutional ban on ‘causing others to change their religion’ was still designed to protect Hinduism from other religions...Another issue that has been deemed discriminatory towards non-Hindus and Dalits in Nepal has been the criminalization of cow slaughter (Malagodi 2013:240–241).

When we talk about discrimination, even the Bahuns were also discriminated against by the *Muluki Ain 1854*. The *Muluki Ain* prohibited Bahuns from consuming pork, and drinking alcohol. But they gradually repealed those arrangements or they started drinking alcohol and consuming pork in private. But I have not heard or read news about a Bahun being arrested for violating this prohibition, whereas beef-eating is still strictly prohibited and may result in severe punishment.

Alcohol drinking is sinful for the high caste Bahun and Chhetri as prohibited by the law of the land. “In the classic Indian sources, since the time of the Vedas, alcohol drinking had been regarded as one of the greatest sins and as unanimously condemned as the murdering of a Brahmin” (Kane, 1953 quoted in Hofer, 2004:18).



Figure 6.1 Placard Slogan Reads: Discard the Cow as the National Animal

Now there is no legal punishment for high caste Chhetri and Bahuns for violating the legal code about drinking liquor and consuming pork. The prohibitions in relation to Bahuns have been abolished and amended. BP Upreti observed about 5 decades ago:

The most astounding change in Brahmin commensal practices he observed was the liquor drinking habit of Brahmin youths in his field area as well as the rest of Nepal. Previously consumption of liquor of any kind was considered a 'Sin' and ritually polluting to a Brahmin. In 1972 all Brahmin as well as other high caste Hindu boys of above age 18 had either tried rakshi or were regular visitors to a local bar [bhatti] (Upreti 1975:238).

BP Upreti also states that the Bahuns in this study area claimed to have made the Limbus civilized:

Some of the Brahmin even claimed that the Limbu were beef-eaters before their arrival and that their company and influence "sanitized" and "civilized" the Limbus. Brahmins refrained from drinking alcoholic beverages [rakshi]; this abstinence was probably the

source of greatest pride in the Brahmin religious life. But liquor [rakshi] and beer [jad] constituted an integral part of Limbu social life. ... One of the aspects of Limbu social life most disliked by the Brahmin was the killing of a buffalo during a Limbu mortuary ritual (Upreti 1975:143).

Cow as a national animal is so powerfully presented as to be “sacred” and the national animal is only meaningful in its political connotation through which the Hindu high caste ruling groups maintain and continue their domination over others. It is through this recognition that the high caste Hindu rulers alone are the builders of this country. But I have no hesitation to mention here that those advocating for the cow as the national animal might still crave to eat beef at the five star restaurants in Kathmandu or when they travel abroad. These opportunistic beef-eaters are “against beef” only to maintain the ancient Hindu domination in Nepal as the saying goes: *dhanilai chain, gariblai ain* [rules for the poor, entertainment for the rich]. Hence, cow as the national animal and the prohibition of beef-eating in the legal code only replicates the above proverb that consuming beef is a delicacy for the ruler castes while it is a punishment for the ruled caste. To paraphrase Marx here in Nepal’s case, the ruling caste produces only the ruling ideas and strategies. So cow as the national animal is not only the medium through which Hindu domination is maintained but the national animal also masks ambiguous characteristics of the ruling castes in Nepal.

For a common Nepali Hindu family or community, to observe Hindu rituals can be financially both burdensome and even cheap for the same ritual. I have observed time and again in my neighbor community some rituals held at different households. There are certain rituals in which the person who is holding the ritual has to gift away a she-calf to the Bahun priest. Since it is so expensive to give away a live cow, they find an easy solution by giving away a coin (minted in aluminum or copper) with an image of a cow printed in it. Since it is symbolically a cow, one cannot simply toss away the coin towards the priest, the priest asks the novice to lead the “cow”

towards him. Hindu religion is adaptive to a situation like this but the high caste Hindu rulers do not seem to be prepared to adapt to the multicultural reality of Nepal.

An All-Inclusive Constitution is Possible

How could the Constitution be made acceptable to all and embody such features that even the *adivasi-janajati* may feel ownership of it and access? For this and also for the inclusive democratic constitution, every community and culture's unique collective identity and their national symbol, if only in one word or one sentence, must be enshrined in the constitution. I believe that this will make the *adivasi-janajati* feel that they also own the constitution as their collective identity national identity would be inscribed in it, irrespective of the number of caste or ethnic groups. Just like the Hindu high caste groups, even the *adivasi-janajati* deserve due respect and recognition by the constitution. When the *adivasi-janajati* see their collective names and history enshrined in the constitution they will protect and worship the constitution as the bearer, protector and legal recognizance of their identity. For this to happen the state makers, or the ruling caste themselves must come forward and prepare themselves to amend it.



Figure 6.2 Placard Held High with a Message: Victory to Secular State of Nepal

Conclusion

In Nepal, it seems that one cannot escape his/her ancestral identity, as the data shows – why should the Maoist Party - whose cadres and leaders, irrespective of their caste background, slaughtered cow oxen for feasts during the war - have declared cow as the national animal when in power ironically when making the *Naya Nepal* [new Nepal]. It is because of their ancestral identity as the Bahuns, the protectors of cow. For whatever reason the constitution has adopted cow, *sanatan dharma* and *aryan* race. It has therefore created symbolic domination and hegemony of the Hindu *arya* civilization over other non-*aryans*. And it is also to maintain the legacy of the King PN Shah’s instructions.

The Limbu social symbolic relationships with pigs and their anthropologically indifferent relationship to cows shows that the cow is not, culturally, a national animal for the Limbus. The cow has merely an economic value for the Limbus. Therefore the cow does not represent the Limbus primordial identity. It does not mean that we should propose a pig as the national animal for the Limbus. I argue that the cow is the national animal only for the Hindus meaning that declaring the cow the national animal will reflect the “only Hindu” mono-cultural mindset of the leaders of the dominant parties. Consequently the constitution has failed to embrace the country’s multi-religious, multi-cultural reality. In this regard, how long will the mono-cultural constitution of Nepal last politically? Upendra Yadav, the Chairman of the Federal Democratic Forum (FDF) party and a *madhesi* leader, in support of the no-confidence motion against the then CPN-UML government said in July 2016:

The Ranas promulgated a constitution [in 1948] that did not even last for two and a half years, then the NC, the King, and the Ranas together promulgated a constitution that too could not last for 6-7 years, then the King alone promulgated one that only lasted for 30 years [1960-1990]. Then the NC, Leftist Front, and the King promulgated one in 1990, touting that that was among the best constitutions in the world but one of the leftist parties themselves started the peoples’ war to overthrow both the constitution and the monarchy since 1996, which ended in 2006.

This constitution was promulgated without consulting the agitating political parties and forcefully imposed upon the *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajatis*, despite their vehement protests. This constitution has been stained by the blood of Madheshis.¹¹⁰ Although we are in the parliament but we are not here to accept this *naslabadi* [racist] constitution. This constitution did not guarantee the rights of *madhesi*, *adivasi-janajati*, Dalits, Khas, and other marginalized groups. That is why we staged movements, in which the state shot dead 58 peoples including a four year old child. I would call such a heinous act of the government genocide of the *madhesi* peoples. Racism has become dominant in this constitution. Those who have insulted *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajatis*, and are not prepared to accept *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajati* identity have become dominant in this constitution.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ He was referring to the 58 peoples killed by the state in the Madhes movement during the promulgation of the constitution.

¹¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AUfXtH8Avw> (accessed: 8-6-2016)

Upendra Yadav questioned both the legitimacy and the possible longevity of the constitution in the face of its exclusionary as well as discriminatory provisions against *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajati* people.

It is said that the constitution is the most sacred document of the modern democratic society (Godelier 2009; Godelier 1999). Every community and cultural group must feel ownership of and respect to the constitution. In Nepal, the ruling caste made the constitution a sacred document only for themselves. Hence the *adivasi* non-*aryan* Limbus felt excluded from the inclusive democratic vantage point. Guaranteeing the fundamental individual rights - free speech, free movement, free to earn property - all matter to Limbus too but what seems to matter even more is Limbuwan named in the constitution for which their ancestors consecrated their lives defending their territory during the Gorkha conquest. Inscribing Limbuwan in the constitution seems to be of value to the Limbus more than others as only after the province's name is in the constitution will there be real recognition of Limbu historical identity [*aitihasik pahichan*]. Only with this step might Limbus feel that they are also included in and recognized by the constitution.

It seems that cow is declared a national animal by the state for 'othering' the 'enemies' (Holmberg, 2006) of the state and also to hold the *giriraj* [mountain kingdom] under the purview of *aryan* civilization. If the state-makers think that the constitution, the sacred document, must remain pure and undefiled by the 'demonic' *asura adivasi-janajati* others, then this creates two problems: on the one hand, the 'others' become excluded and marginalized from the constitution, which would only mock the 'inclusive democracy' that the current state of Nepal brags about. But also such an 'othering' places those with lower cultural status in the hierarchy on the other, meaning that the ruling caste are constitutionally civilized groups and that the 'others' are the

'uncivilized' groups. But for a solution, the state must go beyond this conceptualization of the state as necessarily comprised of 'uncivilized' and 'civilized' societies. The state should move beyond a monolithic conceptualization that some specific signifiers - the cow - in this reference - truly represent the cultural and national diversity and stark realities of Nepal. The rulers should go beyond the imagination that a state builds on the foundation of dividing cultures into Self versus others, as the *Muluki Ain* [Act of the Land] did in 1854 by creating a high caste *tagadhari* 'self' and lowly *matawali* [liquor drinkers] 'other' together with the 'other' 'untouchables' caste.

Furthermore the Nepalese constitution makers should go beyond the understanding that a society is composed of *chokho jat* [pure castes] and *jutho jat* [polluting castes]. These all are hierarchically modeled and imagined frames of the state. But is it possible to go beyond such a monolithic, mono-cultural as well as vertically hierarchized conceptualization of the state and societies? Indeed anthropologists have proposed such a conceptualization, which looks both relevant and essential in Nepal's case. The state makers or the ruling caste should change their imagination of the state, what it should look like, and how a state based on cultural equality can be founded in New Nepal. Anthropologist Terence Turner argues for "synchronic pluralism" (Turner 2004:197), that all societies and cultures exist side by side in contemporaneously-spatially-distributed patterns.

In an inclusive democracy, if you truly believe that the constitution is the most sacred document shared by every different culture and community in the country, the constitution should respect the history of the *adivasi* non-aryans too, and therefore recognize their identity. Eulogizing Hindu *aryan* history alone is not what the *adivasi* fought for when overthrowing the Rana regime – or during the Nepali Congress's armed rebellion against the Panchayat regime, or during the Communists' underground politics in the 1970 and 1980s – or during the *jana*

andolan I in the 1990s and, most importantly, during the People's War of which the *adivasi* were no less important in strength than those of other forces in overthrowing the monarchy. A stark question could be raised now in the wake of the constitution being promulgated, which really enshrined the primordial identity of the Hindu. For what rights and for whom did the *adivasi-janajati* fight against in every political revolution or movement from the 1950s until today?

The Limbus were expecting that New Nepal's new Constitution would recognize their ancestral history too but their hopes were shattered. The new constitution has left no stone unturned in order to fulfill the project of *asli* Hindusthan, contrary to the inclusive democratic state. The new Nepali state yet again marginalizes and excludes *adivasi* communities from recognition of their collective identity. In this sense, from the vantage point of *adivasi-janajati* identity the Constitution of Nepal 2015 is yet another mockery of inclusive democracy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

Our Limbuwan is dear to us

Our beloved Limbuwan is adorable to us.
Raising soil-clenched fist, we sacrifice our lives,
Our Limbuwan is adorable to us.
Carrying along Chest-filled pride of history,
Prepared for oblation; we, the archers,
Our pride is high like Faktanglung.
Our Limbuwan is adorable to us.
We have been fighting and fighting; we will fight again;
Following the foot steps of Kangsore, we march ahead.
Founding our own Identity,
Our Limbuwan is adorable to us¹¹²

(Rajkumar Dikpal) [my translation].

The Cultural Foundations of Limbuwan

The politics of Limbuwan is a culturally founded politics. It is in the imagination of individual Limbus. It is popular among Limbus not just because Limbuwan based political parties have the strength and capacity to convince individual Limbus to join them but because Limbuwan is the Limbus ancestral asset, the essence of their own identity. Limbuwan based political parties so far seem to be only facilitators, mainly benefiting from the affirmative sentiment of individual Limbus towards Limbuwan. This is not to underestimate the importance of the Limbuwan based political parties. Political parties are much needed and desirable to

¹¹²मुठ्ठी माटो उठाई अर्पिदिन्छौं ज्यान; हामीलाई प्यारो लाग्छ हाम्रो लिम्बुवान ॥

इतिहासको गौरव बोकी छातीभरि; बलि चढ्न तयार छौं हामी धनुर्धारी ॥

फक्तालुडो झैं उच्च हाम्रो स्वाभिमान; हामीलाई प्यारो लाग्छ हाम्रो लिम्बुवान

लड्दै लड्दै आएका हौं फेरि हामी लड्छौं; काडसोरेको पाइला पछ्याई हामी अघि बढ्छौं ॥

स्थापित गर्दै हाम्रो आफ्नो पहिचान; हामीलाई प्यारो लाग्छ हाम्रो लिम्बुवान ॥ (Raj Kumar Dikpal)

transform the culturally imagined Limbuwan into political organization and activism. However Limbu individuals, both women and men alike, do not need any explanation as to why Limbuwan should be desirable for them.



Figure 7.1 Limbuwan Volunteer Carrying a Placard During the Ringroad March Pass. May 2012

Chumlung has been able to bring together all Limbus who were otherwise divided across different political parties to form the *sanyukta Limbuwan morcha* [Joint Limbuwan Front]. In this regard, Limbuwan is an imagination that involves all Limbus, uniting them together for a common cause. Culture is defined as a ‘binding force’ for individuals of a society. Culture is also defined as “capacity” when a society is capable of producing/reproducing itself. Limbuwan’s imagination was seen in associated activities performed by Limbu people, politicians, cadres, Chumlung officials and members, well wishers, Limbus in Nepal or abroad and Limbus who

supported either the mainstream parties, Limbuwan based parties, Chumlung, or any other organizations

***Nun-pani ko sandhi* and the Political Justification of Limbuwan**

A scholar on Limbuwan's history and politics and a journalist, Bhawani Baral, writes:

Limbuwan had with the Gorkhali state the *nun-pani ko sandhi* [treaty of salt and water] in which both *nun* [salt] and *pani* [water] would not lose their taste and quality but would result into a new quality in terms of political, social and cultural taste. Limbuwan has a politically established status. It has also gained in part constitutional recognition. Limbuwan has been repeatedly recognized legally in the past. The past treaties and accords [with the Shah Kings] justifies this. Limbuwan has been established by the present political movement too. Hence Limbuwan is a people-endorsed politics. Limbuwan has been proposed even by some political parties in their political manifesto too. None of the political parties have ignored or gone against Limbuwan. Even the Nepali Dictionary published by Nepal Academy, the government of Nepal's own institution defines Limbuwan as "the hills across the Koshi and the Mechi zones, permanently settled by the Limbu people from a long period of time." Limbuwan was not at all incorporated under Nepal as a defeated state, rather Limbuwan had joined Nepal as a suzerain state.

Limbuwan's movement did not rise up only when *loktantra* [democracy] was reinstated. Not even raised by the Maoists during the *jana yudhda*. Whence the then Shah, Rana rulers began to seize Limbuwan's autonomy thenceforth arose the Limbuwan movement. There were armed and without-armed movements of Limbuwan even before 1990. Late Imansingh Chemjong had established a political party named as *Limbuwan sudhar sangh* (Limbuwan Reform Association) with non-Limbu leadership. Bir Nembang, the founder of the Limbuwan Liberation Front (1988), himself was put in jail, spent years in exile. He is in Limbuwan's politics even today. In this, the Limbu's *mukti* [liberation] is the first question. Similarly, the liberation of all inhabitants of Limbuwan is the basic condition. The federal Limbuwan province should be created on the basis of cultural rights, history and identity (Baral 2012) [my translation].

Many scholars say that identity is ephemeral and that the *adivasi-janajatis* in Nepal should not be focusing on identity for their political organization because identity is so changeable, as in you have it today but you may not have it tomorrow - *aja chha bholi chhaina*. Identity keeps transforming and changing. Having seen Nepal's case, I can say that individual identity or the identities of individuals are ephemeral and ever changing but so long as it is a collective identity, it remains forever. However collective identities will continue to be

transformed along with an ever-changing social, political, economic context. For example, the central unifying source for the Limbus was *kipat* land (Caplan 1970; Caplan 1991) until the 1970s and 1980s. But now the source of the central unifying reference for the Limbus is Limbuwan itself.

Limbuwan Politics on Two Fronts: Political Parties, Social Movement and Fronts

The politics of Limbuwan has been in progress at present through two fronts i) through civil political parties and ii) through social movements. Limbuwan's civic political party base is just beginning. For the last 10 to 12 years, Limbuwan based parties have witnessed constant break aways and splits. Such continuous splits within the party have demonstrated a negative political image about the party. In this regard, the Limbuwan based parties have not been able to garner as much support and sympathy from the people as they might have done.

However, Limbuwan's politics viewed through social movements in the leadership or coordination of the Limbu representative *adivasi* organization, Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, has been effective, unifying and consequential. The movements and fronts are effective and unifying in the sense that their methods have brought together Limbus who were otherwise divided across different organizations and political parties, for the common cause of Limbuwan. In this regard, Chumlung is a pivotal organization in unifying the Limbus for the cause of Limbuwan.

The Unfulfilled Dream of *Mukti* [*Muktiko adhuro sapana*]

Limbus dreamt of liberation through the establishment of Limbuwan. For this Limbus not only took part in the armed revolution for their own liberation but a Limbu, GB Yakthungba, had given the name *jana mukti sena* [Peoples Liberation Army-PLA] when it was formed in Calcutta to wage an armed revolution (1950-51) in Nepal. GB Yakthungba led the then PLA and liberated the country, becoming the first Inspector General of Police later, and also Nepal's Ambassador to

Burma afterwards. But Limbus did not seem to be satisfied as IS Chemjong's Limbuwan Reform Association's (LRA) political agenda and objectives demonstrated (as described in chapter two). Their continued delegations to the Shah kings (Chemjong 1957), even after the installment of democracy in 1951, in order to defend their *kipat* land, autonomy, and development also shows that Limbus' *mukti ko kalpana* [imagination of liberation] had not been fulfilled by the *sat sal ko kranti* [revolution of 1951].

Every revolution in Nepal has been followed by important appointments of Limbus by the state and responsibilities have fallen upon the shoulders of Limbu individuals. GB Yakthungba became the first IGP, but this did not mean that Limbus were liberated. Most recently the Chair of both the CAs in 2008 and 2013 was a Limbu but that did not help to inscribe Limbuwan in the constitution. Therefore, the meaning and justification of liberation should be understood and realized at a structural and societal level in general, not at individual level in particular.

The self-construal attitude of the ruling parties and the ruling caste to enshrine their own primordial identity as constitutional while ignoring *adivasi janajati* and *madhesi* identities has sparked off social science researchers, writers and politically conscious youth to hark back their own understanding of *mukti* [liberation]. They have asked what sort of *mukti* had the *adivasi janajati* and *madhesi* desired for when they fought for *prajatantra* [democracy] and for *lokatantra* [democracy]? Why did the *adivasi* Limbu fight for democracy in 1950-51 and for what kind of *mukti* did they seek? Did they desire for cultural equality or economic development? As I understand it, *mukti ra samanata* [liberation and equality] were two fundamental motivating factors for Limbus to join the *jana mukti sena* [Peoples Liberation

Army] in the revolution of 1950-51. But the imagination of liberation has remained unfulfilled for Limbus to date.

A Clash of Identities: The Hindu State-makers versus the Others

The State of Nepal was founded on identity politics. If one considers King PN Shah's expansion of his kingdom - also known as the building of modern Nepal among the mainstream casteist politicians and social scientists - as the beginning of present day Nepal, Shah was the one who also sowed the seeds of the Hindu Kingdom, which would germinate, grow and prosper for 10-11 generations after his life. The monarchy has gone. Nepal is no longer a kingdom. Nepal is no more a Hindu State in its form but the content and symbolic cultural substance of the past Hindu state - the cow, the *Aryan* identity, the *sanatan dharma* - still prevails in the 2015 Constitution. *Adivasi janajatis* and *madhesis* have boycotted and disobeyed this constitution. The Constitution Day for others is called The Black Day for *adivasi janajati* and *madhesi* peoples. *Adivasi janajati* and *madhesi* feel betrayed by the main leaders of the main parties [*sirsha partika sirsha netahru*] in promulgating the constitution, as the constitution failed to duly recognize *adivasi* and *madhesi* identities as different cultural wholes. On the one hand the ruling caste and ruling parties have successfully enshrined their ancestral identity in the constitution as represented by the national animal of the cow, constitutional race of *Arya* and *sanatan dharma*. But *adivasi janajatis* and *madhesis* have boycotted the constitution for not having recognized their identities as at par with other identities. The 2015 Constitution is now a new ground zero for the clash of identities in Nepal. Limbus will remain a part of the ongoing clash between identities and will remain the same so long as the exclusionary state-based casteist democracy [*jatiya lokatantra*] prevails in Nepal. If the state makers and hardcore developmentalists, including social scientists, still find the Limbus and Limbuwan “troublesome”, “quarrelsome”

and “difficult to deal with” for the “progress and prosperity” of Nepal, then so be it. They were “quarrelsome” and “difficult to deal with” for Hindus and the Buddhists (Hamilton 1819; Kirkpatrick 1811) even two centuries ago.

***Adivasi* Cultures: From Society to Community**

Godelier’s argument about how indigenous societies become relegated to the status of community from society due to the ‘colonial’ expansion of the state is relevant when looking into the process of Nepal’s *adivasi* societies being downgraded to ‘communities’. This occurred as the Hindu Gorkha state conquered relatively autonomous and independent states thereby exploiting them in a colonial fashion. Godelier says that when those indigenous societies had autonomous status with their own governance as well as a defense system, they were societies. But when the state conquered them, thereby incorporating their socio-cultural as well as economic modes of production under the conquering state, these states become downgraded to ‘communities’. Godelier writes:

When [Baruya] lost sovereignty over their mountains and their rivers, and over their own persons, the Baruya ceased to be a society, and became a local "tribal community" under the authority of a state, an institution totally alien to their history and their ways of thinking and acting (2009: 145).

In this regard in Nepal, the Rais, Tamangs, and Limbu were enjoying the status of society but after the King PN Shah’s invasion these societies became relegated to a community. Similarly, Godelier also explains in detail about the importance of defending one’s territory to qualify as a society. Limbus have similar history of fighting to defend their territory. I have used the term *that-thalo* in Nepali, which is a close translation of the term ‘territory’.

We thus see what it means to have a territory, a set of natural elements ---lands, rivers, mountains, lakes, sometimes sea - that provide human groups with resources for their livelihood and development. A territory can be conquered, or inherited from ancestors who conquered it or appropriated it without a fight (if they settled uninhabited regions).

A territorial border must be known, if not recognized, by the societies that occupy and exploit the neighboring spaces. In all cases, a territory must be defended by force, through the use of arms and organized violence, but also through rites that appeal to the gods and other invisible powers to weaken or annihilate the enemy (Godelier, 2009:145-146).

While I was finishing my dissertation, Tamangs in Nepal celebrated the 61st Anniversary of the Founding of Nepal Tamang Ghedung with the program's main topic: *ghedung ko chha dasak ra Tamang andolan* [Six Decades of the Ghedung and Tamang Movement]. The program attendees included many Tamang leaders representing different political parties, representatives from the International Tamang Council, and All India Bouddha Tamang Association, Calcutta , and many other dignitaries. Addressing the program, the former Ambassador of Nepal to South Korea, Kaman Singh Lama, called for a political front. He said: "Only political consciousness would bring us our ethnic right. Hence the Tamangs who have imagined a multi-nations state should unite politically and go ahead to achieve that goal." At the end of the program, the chair of the Ghedung, Mohan Gole, said "[i]n the past 61 years, the Ghedung has been successful in establishing customs, festivals, costumes, and in the days ahead, we should establish our political cause as the main issue for the movement to achieve our political right." (esamata.com 2017) [my translation].

The case of the Tamangs' realization that they should now focus on "politics" rather than on costumes and so forth is proof that the *adivasi janajati* organizations in Nepal should focus on "politics", and only then can they achieve the essence of their collective identity: Tamsaling. To me, these processes are the harbingers of the future of Nepali politics.

Arya and Non-Arya Peoples had Different Aspirations and Expectations of Prajatantra

[Democracy] founded in 1951.

Bhogiraj Chamling writes:

[I]nspired by the ethnic sentiment and organized thereafter, the Kiratis' imagination of ethnic liberation was the life breath of the Liberation Army in 1950-51 revolution in Bhojpur. The very inspiration for Kirati ethnic liberation was the real source of fighting zeal. This fact may be misunderstood mistaken for 'narrow communalism'. But the fact is 'an oppressed ethnic group's quest for ethnic liberation itself is a contribution towards making the pan-Nepali nationalism solid and strong. Pan-Nepali nationalism will not solidify without realizing ethnic equality, lingual equality, and religious-cultural equality in Nepal. Bhojpur's Rai to be involved and organized in 1950-51 revolution with the feelings of ethnic liberation meant an additional positivity and strength to the democratic revolution (Chamling 2073 v.s.:67)

Chamling's conclusion demonstrates that the quest and inspiration for ethnic liberation [*jatiya mukti*] was fundamental to the Rai and Limbu involvement in the *jana mukti sena* [PLA], in the revolution of 1950-51, which is otherwise understood as the 'revolution for democracy' [*prajatantra*], meant an additional contribution towards Nepal's democratization process (Hangen 2010). Nepali historians seem to have overlooked this fact. “The feelings of ethnic liberation that arose in 2007 BS should not be overlooked...The same feeling, the same sentiment once again arose during the Peoples' War (1996-2006). The *adivasi* have transcribed their history through their involvement and activities in different revolutions observed by Nepal so far, but the Nepali history writers are yet to acknowledge this” (Chamling 2073v.s.:64) [my translation].

Nepali Politics is Caste-Based not Class Based

Politics in Nepal hitherto has been based on castiesm (Chakraborty 2000). Now new identity based political parties are emerging. On the one hand such a new political emergence is “an indicative of the failure of dominant parties” (SG. 1999: 2912) , as in Nepal’s case they have

failed to address the aspirations of indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples in Nepal wanted at least to have provinces names based on their history, territorial identity and linguistic features. But the dominant parties misunderstood such an identity based demand as divisive politics. In this regard, the *adivasi-janajati* in Nepal are fighting an uphill battle to be constitutionally recognized as culturally different. At this moment, their movement seems to have hit a snag in the face of seemingly democratic but substantially casteist politics in Nepal. The problem is with the state and the ruling political parties.

Identity, Not Economic Inequality, is the Real Basis of Politics in Nepal.

The politics of Limbuwan, from its genesis and even today, is not based on economic and developmental interests. Limbuwan politics are based on the claims of *saswat pahichan* [primordial identity]. No individuals can escape their *saswat pahichan* so long as they care about who they are as a cultural being, and as a member of human society. Such *pahichan* [identity] is based on *purkhauli itihās* [ancestral history] about the ancestors who gave their lives to defend the *that-thalo* [territory]. This is why the invoking of the past war with the Gorkhali soldiers generates real political meanings in present day Limbuwan politics. The Limbu's war history, rather than defining events in the past, can be seen as providing the seeds that produce new political relations in Limbu society. The imagination of belongingness to a Limbuwani *that-thalo*, irrespective of where they live, now motivates Limbu people living in England, Hong Kong, USA or elsewhere who set ablaze the constitution of Nepal after feeling excluded by the state.

Two Identities: Dominant versus Subservient

During the tenures of both Constituent Assemblies (2008-2012, 2013-2015), a new talk of the town surfaced in Nepal and among Nepalis abroad that the political parties, and therefore

the politicians too, were divided into pro-identity [*pahichan badi*] and anti-identity [*pahichan birodhi*] groups. The parties, known to be champions for liberating Nepali people from the centuries old feudal suppression and oppression in Nepal, were now characterized as anti-identity [*pahichan birodhi*] parties based on their own unsubstantiated generalizations that delineating the federal provinces on the basis of identity would result in divisive consequences for Nepal. After the first CA failed to promulgate the constitution within the slated time in June 2012, internal conflict within the so-called “anti-identity” parties escalated so much so that half a dozen central level leaders from *adivasi-janajati*, *madhesi*, and *muslim* backgrounds quit the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML). These central level leaders’ renunciation of the CPN-UML caused further impact upon its wings as many cadres and leaders associated with students and youth wings also quit the CPN-UML (described in chapter 5), subsequently founding a new party called the Federal Socialist Party (FSP). This new party’s main *mantras* were *sanghiyata* [federalism], *jatiya samanata* [ethnic equality], *pahichan* [identity], and *samajbad* [socialism]. *Bargiya mukti ko lagi samajbad, jatiya mukti ko lagi sanghiyata* [socialism for class liberation, federalism for ethnic liberation] was the FSP’s main slogan. It was also said that they deserted the CPN-UML because it went against identity [*pahichan ko birudhda*] as the CPN-UML did not support the CA’s sub-committee’s proposal of 14 federal states and 23 autonomous areas, mainly based on ethnic identities.

A question may be asked: Did the CPN-UML’s main leaders really hold an anti-identity perspective on delineating the federal provinces? Did they really believe that delineating the provinces on ethnic and linguistic lines would be so divisive that it would break the country into pieces? To me, to characterize the political parties as *pahichan birodhi* [anti-identity] simply because they were not supportive of ethnic or others identities is a mistaken judgement and

unsubstantiated generalization. Were the dominant parties and their main leaders *pahichan birodhi*, then they would not have enshrined the Hindu primordial symbolic markers: cow, *aryan*, and *sanatan dharma* - the dominant symbols signifying the Nepalese state makers' collective ancestral identity - in the constitution. The decision of the state makers' or the main leaders of the dominant parties to enshrine those three Hindu symbolic markers into the constitution clearly demonstrated that the state makers or the ruling caste groups were as much *pahichan badi* as the *adivasi-janajati* and *madhesi* allegedly were. Having known how the state has been protecting cows and Bahuns for the last six centuries (described in chapter six) it would not be correct to assume the state-makers as *pahichan birodhis*. The simple fact is that the state-makers enshrined their identity in the constitution while denying the same for *adivasi-janajatis*.

The takeaway from the discussion above on pro versus anti identities is that no individuals, groups, and societies can be *pahichan birodhi* [anti-identity] in Nepal. The history of identity politics in Nepal - self-identified as *arya* or *sanatan dharmi* among the ruling castes and the state-imposed identity of *matawali* upon the non-Hindu, non-*aryan* others (described in previous chapters) - demonstrates that the state created two different but hierarchical identities, namely a dominant identity and a subservient identity. The dominant identity was considered symbolically pure and higher than that of the *matawali* identity. In this regard *matawali* identity seemed to be assigned to create "the other", an adversarial identity by the state makers as the legal injunctions in relation to the protection of cows and Bahuns and other discriminatory legal provisions against the *matawalis* demonstrate. The *matawali* identity has been known as *adivasi-janajati* identity until now but their status as "the other adversarial" "enemy-like" identity seems to have remained the same in the eyes of the dominant political parties, led by the ruling caste.

Anti-National Identity and the Panchayat Regime's Legacy

Adivasi-janajati identity politics is considered to be divisive in the eyes of the dominant political parties and their leaders. The ruling groups of the ruling parties now characterize the *madhesi* identity and *adivasi-janajati* identity based political parties as adversary and enemy-like parties. Such an adversarial relationship between the dominant ruling parties and the *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajati* identity based parties in Nepal is an exact reminiscent of those relationships that could be seen between the politicians who supported the Panchayat regime under the absolute monarchy and the then banned political party leaders some four decades ago. The then Panchayat polity had its own rhetorical understanding of terms such as nation [*rastra*] and nationalism [*rashtrabad*]. Only the Panchayat regime's genuine supporters were said to be *rashtrabadi* [nationalistic] then. Interestingly, supporters and the leaders of the banned parties (Nepali Congress, Communist Parties) were called *arashtriya tatwa* [anti-national element] during the mid-1970s when Panchayat politicians were at the helm. Those who believed in multi-party democracy and did not support the Panchayat polity were characterized as *arashtriya tatwa* [anti-national elements] by the ruling groups then. *a. ta.—arashtriya tatwa—*[anti-national element] was the abbreviated term used to derogatively denote the democrats then, and multi-party democracy was said to be divisive for the “mono-cultural” pan-Nepali nation. This was done in similar manner as to how the *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajati* identity based political parties and their leaders are charged as being divisive now.

The then Panchayat regime's *arashtriya tatwa* are ruling the country now. Interestingly enough, the same definition of *rashtrabad* from the time of the Panchayat regime has been resurrected by some ruling parties in the face of *madhesi* and *adivasi-janajati* identity movements. Given the resurrection of the *rashtrabad* from the Panchayat regime, one shall not

be surprised if the ruling parties and ruling groups will begin to characterize *madhesis* and *adivasi-janajtis* as the new *arashtriya tatwa* [anti-national elements] in Nepal soon.

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