

CHAPTER: 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Nepal is a country of great cultural diversity. The racial, ethnical, cultural, linguistic and religious diversities have characterized Nepal as what **Toni Hagen** called “the ethnic turn-table of Asia”. The national census of 2001 has identified 102 caste and ethnic communities and 92 dialects in Nepal. These caste and communities are broadly divided into two major ethnic groups; the Indo- Aryan language speaking Caucasoid group and Tibeto-Burman language speaking Mongoloid group. The former group belongs to the Hindu caste communities while the latter group belongs to the indigenous nationalities of Nepal (1961:59 quoted in Gurung, 2009).

David Gellner (who represents most of the Nepalese Hindu scholar’s voice) claims that for many years, people belonging to different castes, religions and languages of Nepal have been living together in tolerant harmony without violent conflict with active adaptation and re-adaptation with high caste and Parbatiya cultural forms, in varying degree like influence of Nepali on others’ language (1996). In the context of making culturally homogenous ideal nation-state **Prayag Raj Sharm** (1992) notes that “the search is on for a single cultural identity that would make Nepal a nation-state rather than merely a state” (1992 quoted in Fisher, 1993:13).

On the other hand, there are also sociologists who put quite contrary standpoint. Nepali sociologist like **Gopal Sing Nepali** urges that “Parbatiya culture will no longer work as a model for nationhood” (quoted in Fisher, 1993:13). **K.B. Bhattachan** (1995) takes it “Intergroup harmony as a myth” which never existed in the history of “modern” Nepal and will be never until the state’s role and nature remains the same. **Dr. Shah’s** statement also exposes that “intergoup harmony and cooperation remains very much the norm” in Nepal which is patently manufactured myth (1993:7 quoted in Bhattachan, 1995; Shah, 1993:35). Again, **Sharma** (2004) is of the opinion that there are several studies which

show that ethnic groups in Nepal are more, interrelated than divided and that the totality of social order in Nepal must be understood in terms of cultural pluralism. The process of synthesis and acculturation has been going on between peoples for centuries (2004 quoted in Limbu, 2007). However, denying this kind of landscape posed by Nepalese scholar on Nepal which is “myth” in Bhattachan’s term, and subsequently, he already had warned Nepalese scholars and politicians as “the crux of the problem remained with the 1990 constitution that explicitly prohibited ethnopolitics and that denied ethnodevelopment. If the state continues on to suppress, sometimes ruthlessly, any demands generated on the basis of ethnicity, religion, language, region, and culture than the only option left to ethnic and low caste groups will be to stage ethnic insurgency in case their demands always go unfulfilled” (1995). Bista, in Fatalism and Development describe the internal motifs of some Hindu pundits as “one of the main argument put forward for the elimination of the various ethnic culture is the need to develop a strong national identity. But some pundits are arguing that this can only be possible with cultural homogeneity-with the complete institution of caste values” (Bista in Fisher, 1993, Whelpton, 1993). And he strongly refutes that “pluralism is not necessarily a problem for the development of ... a nation” (Fisher, 1993:13).

According to Nepali, “Nepal must build its own cognitive foundations if its claims of a separate nation-state are to be sustainable. This means generating awareness and creating pride in indigenous traditions, heritage and personalities. We seem to make much fanfare about foreign events and dignitaries, but we fail to recognize the contribution of our own Khas, Kirat and other local heroes”. The scholar suggests that celebrating the memory of Yelambar, an ancient Kirat king would be a good start in tracing authentic Nepali roots. Among other, the Magars’s military prowess, Sherpas’ mountaineering feats and the Tharus’ quintessential cultural uniqueness could be propagated as national heritage. The national pantheon must therefore include personalities and events, historic as well as mythical, from all communities (Nepali quoted in Shah, 1993:7-10).

Additionally, Prof. [Gopal Sing Nepali](#) notes that “ there is another solution on offer that while local variations enrich the total cultural milieu, the effort should be create a strong macro level Nepali culture at the national level”. [Yalung Kirat](#), Editor of Himalaya magazine, which seeks to highlight the ethnic heritage of the Nepali hills, is also of the view that the best way lies in gradually developing an all-Nepali culture in which everyone can pride while at the same time allowing local variations to flourish. But what he says is that, firstly, “existing discriminations and inequalities across caste, ethnic and class lines must be removed”. He further adds, “Otherwise unscrupulous politicians and parties will get fuel to fan the politics of hatred to create exclusive enclaves (quoted in [Shah, 1993:7-10](#))”. If the state holders, politicians and bureaucrats had perceived it genuinely in right time, more than two decades of “democracy” would not have gone in vain.

In the modern world, the concept of ethnicity has witnessed a massive attention with ethnic revivals across the globe. In Europe and the Americas, ethnic movements unexpectedly surfaced from the 1960s and 1970s; in Africa and Asia they have been gaining force since the 1950s. It is not that the issue of ethnicity was not felt as important in the past but the emergence of the ethnic identity as a major social and political issue in Nepal is a relatively new phenomenon.

1.2 The Ethnic Movement in Nepal

It was in late seventies and early eighties that the growing self-consciousness of the ethnic elites led to the formation of ethnic organizations. The turning points were the students' riots of 1979 and the National Referendum of 1980, which led to constitutional changes undermining the conservative basis of the Monarchy system. These organizations started informal talk and in 1986 it led to the formation of the *Sarvajati Adhikar Manc* (Forum for the Rights of All Nationalities). In the People’s Movement of 1990, the ethnic organizations made active participation under the name of *Vividh Dharma, Bhasa, Jati tatha Janajati Sangharsha Samiti* (Various Religion, Languages and Nationalities Action Committee)([Tilouine and Dollfus, 2003:228 in Limbu,2007](#)).

Yet the ethnicity largely remained undefined and thereby unrecognized. In 1990, Nepal Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities or NEFIN) was founded as a federation of eight different organizations. Together with other interested parties, in March 1994 NEFIN formed a committee named “the National Ad Hoc Committee for International Decade for the World’s Indigenous Peoples of Nepal” in response to the UN Resolution of December 1993 calling for a Decade of Indigenous Peoples. The definitions offered by NEFIN for indigenous Peoples in Nepal are discussed below.

Indigenous communities are referred to those communities;

- Who possess their own distinct and original linguistic and cultural traditions and religion based on the ancient animism or those who do not claim “The Hinduism” enforced by the state, as their traditional and original religion.
- The existing descendants, whose ancestors have established themselves as the first settlers, people who have their own history (written or oral) and historical continuity.
- the communities, that have been displaced or deprived of their own land for the last 4 centuries, particularly during the expansion and establishment of modern Hindu nation state and deprived of their traditional right to own the natural resources like the Kipat — communal land, water, minerals, etc.
- those who have been subjugated in the state’s political power set-up (decision-making process) and whose ancient culture, language and religion are in non-dominant state and their social values neglected by the State.
- Those whose society is traditionally erected on the principle of egalitarianism- rather than the hierarchy of the Indo-Aryan caste system and gender equality- rather than social, economic and religious subordination of women, but whose social norms and values have been slighted by the state.
- Which formally or informally admit or claim to be ‘the Indigenous People of Nepal’ on the basis of the aforementioned characteristics (quoted in Bhattachan, 1997:109-132).

The Task Force on the Nepal Foundation for Upliftment of the Nationalities (1996:13) has defined the term *Janajati* (Nationalities) as those Nepalese people “who have their own Mother tongue and traditional culture but do not fall under the traditional four-fold *Varna* of Hindu system.” The task force has identified nine fundamental features/attributes of the *Janajatis*, and these are: distinct collective cultural identity; traditional language, religion, tradition, and culture; traditional social structure based on equality; traditional geographical area; written or oral history; we-feeling; absence of a decisive/critical role in politics and government in modern Nepal; indigenous people; and those who declare themselves as “*Janajati*”. The task force in its report has identified at least 61 indigenous ethnic groups in Nepal. The Commission for the National Language Policy Reform (1994) had identified more than 70 languages spoken in Nepal. Interestingly the Rais speak in 38 languages (quoted in Bhattachn, 1997:109-132).

At present NEFEN has been changed and is known as NIFIN or Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities. It is an autonomous and politically non-partisan, national level common organization. It is formed with the mission of acquiring social equality and justice for Indigenous Nationalities by preserving their distinct social, political, cultural and linguistic identities and by promoting their representation in every aspect of national life (Pamphlets of NIFIN in Limbu, 2007).

But now, the definition of Janajati and Adivasi has been merged into the single term “Janajati” by the **High Level Task Force for the Revision of Indigenous Peoples’ List (HLTFRIPL, 2010)** of the Nepal government. The HLTFRIPL has also exceeded the number of “Janajati” (Indigenous Nationalities) from 59 to 81 in 2010 A.D. (2066 B.S.) while it was 59 in numbers in 2059 B.S.

The first decade (1990-2001) of indigenous people’s movement can be traced with the identity movement. The main agendas of the movement were exclusively related to the perseveration of culture, language and religion in the state. There were no such demands and agendas of each community as separate identity within the same community in the early period of the Indigenous movement, e.g. within the Rai community, Gurung

community, Sherpa community but today there are several groups who are demanding distinct identity. Each and every community is now demanding for separate identity in the context of democratic federal Nepal. This type of intra ethnic identity debate is a new issue in the second period of indigenous movement in Nepal. [And this shows that Nepalese indigenous peoples are going to build their identity on the basis of their historical basis/relationship with their own ancestral land, territory, cultural ties, blood relationship and whose essential unity are being expressed in a common culture, which has remained fundamentally unchanged through the centuries despite of the intervention of the "modern" state and their one sided policy such as one language, one culture, one religion and one dress.](#)

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem

The intra ethnic identity debate among the Rai peoples is a new issue in Nepal. Some groups of Rais are demanding for separate identity in terms of cultural practices, languages, religion and geographical spaces. Before this debate, all the Rais were generally considered to be one single group. History says that after the annexation of Kirati principality into the Gurkha state in 1773 A.D., king Prithvi Narayan Shah promised with them to secure their lives and property and the local chiefs and headmen were given the title Rai (chief) ([McDougal, 1979](#), [Necolitte, 2006](#)). Rai is technically a term meaning “headman” and in some district are called “Jimi” or “Jimidar” and in other areas “[Khambu](#)”, but over the years became the popular generic term to refer to entire ethnic group ([Bista, 1967](#)).

There is no historical evidence to indicate when the Khambus became Rai. However, general belief is that when the Sen People migrated to Nepal from Bengal, they gave the title Rai, so that they could live peacefully with them and from another angle, it could also be possible that these Khambus themselves created these titles mimicking the tribes of the southern plains ([Gautam and Thapa-magar, 1994](#)). Therefore, on one hand the possibility of the word Rai emerging as stated above exists, while on the other hand other possibilities can be observed, which was found on a copper-plate inscription that a Jumla

King Punya Malla, used dating back to Shak Sambat 1259(1338 A.D.)”. However, the word “Rai” came into full use only after Prithive Narayan Shah annexed Kirat areas to his kingdom (Gautam and Thapa-magar, 1994). Similarly, Kajiman Kandangwa is of the opinion that Kirats of Nepal were called Rais during the rule of Sen Kings of Makawanpur and the Rais inhabiting in the east of Arun river were later called ‘Limbu’ by Gurkha rulers after the annexation of Pallo Kirat (Kandangwa 1990a in Subba, 1985). There is a saying, *Jati Rai, Uti Kura*, meaning “there are as many languages as there are Rais”. Therefore, the Athpaharia, Bahing, Bantawa, Chamling, Khaling, Kulung, Lohorung, Mewahang, Thulung, and Yamphu Rai are all different sub-clans on the basis of their linguistic differences within the generic term Rai (McDougal: 1979, Toba: 1992:7, Tamang: 1996).

After the territorial conquest of Nepal, P.N. Shah declared Nepal as the *ashali Hindistana* meaning Nepal as the true Hindu kingdom and declared Nepal as the common garden of four Verna and thirty Six castes. In practice Nepal never become a common garden of all communities. But it remained private vassal of so called high caste Hindu Bahun and Chhetries. The Panchayat political system headed by absolute monarch was also engaged in a new project to modernize Nepal and attain national integration. But rather than developing a new model of ethnic pluralism, the Hindu rulers of the Panchayat engaged themselves to officially promoting ethnic homogenization by imposing the concept of one nation, one culture, one language, one religion, and one national identity (Gurung, 2009). The National Census of 2001 has identified 102 caste and ethnic communities and 92 languages in Nepal (Gurung, 2009). Now more and more groups are emerging and claiming for separate identity after the establishment of – High Level Task Force for the Revision of Indigenous Peoples’ List’ [HLTFRIPL] set up by the government of Nepal in 2009.

Now, the same ‘Rai’ identity is being discarded by some of the Rai community after the political change of 2062/63 B.S. through the people’s movement in Nepal and they are now demanding to enlist them into separate ethnic groups. The people’s movement for the restoration of [multi-party] democracy and subsequently the new Constitution of

1990, which ended the almost 30 year period of the Panchayat system, has certainly changed the general context of an issue like ethnic identity (Gellner and Karki, 2008). Since then many Rais, in particular in urban centers, begun to voice ethnic demands in the altered public arena. Due to the great variety of Rai languages and cultures, now it has been particularly difficult to achieve unity in the form of a distinct Rai ethnicity (Gaenszle: 2000, 1990). Interestingly, it should be noted that there is no consensus among such Rai organizations, e.g Yayokha, and recently founded Rai institutions e.g., the Kirat , The Kulung , the Athapaharia , the Mewahang , Rai Danuwar , the Lohorung , the Kirat Kyoech , the Chamling , the Thulung , the Yamphu , the Gankhari Rai , the Sampang , the Bantawa [HLTFFRIPL,2009], who are predominantly residents of urban area, seeking for separate ethnic identity. But the Yayokha has of the view that those institutions and persons who have appealed to enlist them as separate Rai ethnic groups, is not the authoritative voice of majority and they do not represent the official spirit of the Rais. But its extreme form has been seen in Shavapokhari and Nunadhaki VDC of Sankhuwashava where some Rai people have changed their identity into Wonem Limbu and some other members of the same Rai community have been planning to change their Rai identity into Wonem Limbu (Kantipur Daily, 2009).

Ethnic activities in Nepal have grown in sophistication. In the context of emergence and development of ethnicity and identity in Nepal, Gurung(1999) views that the manifestation of ethnic / caste associations and ethnicity in Nepalese politics is due to an improper understanding on the part of the Nepalese government regarding the totality of Nepali culture and society. Discrimination and exploitation of the ethnic groups of Nepal on various grounds are triggering ethnic consciousness and ethnic movements. The acceleration of ethnic movement as a result of ethnic consciousness, especially after the restoration of democracy, is very much present in Nepal today. The ethnic groups today experience ethnic identity as more important and relevant than class and caste.

The Interim Constitution (IC) 2006 has addressed issues like secularism, affirmative action, linguistic recognition, proportional representation for various ethnic groups to acquire identity and fair representation in the governance. Today many other ethnic groups are also fostering their movement for their own federal state with ethnic autonomy and self-determination with their distinct ethnic and cultural identity.

In this regards the proposed study had academic and policy relevance and sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the cultural, linguistic and religious bases for claiming the Limbu identity among the Wonems who were identified as Rais until recently?
- Are these features the sole basis of separate cultural identity for the Wonems?
- How these demands of the Limbus are being recognized by the state?

1.4. Conceptual Framework:

There may be various motivating factors with regards to the distinct ethnic identity making. I would like to clarify it through the theoretical understanding of Primordial, Instrumentalism and Situational or Constructivism approach in this conceptual framework. The conceptual framework that I have portrayed may be, to some extent, able to clarify the motivating factors of claiming distinct ethnic identity among the Woneim Limbu community for this proposed study who were previously considered as belonging to the “Rai” people.

Instrumental Approach: opponents of primordialism are known by the two different labels- namely Instrumentalism and Modernism. In theoretical discussion of ethnicity it is instrumentalism that is opposed to primordialism (Bhattachan, 1998). It defines ethnicity as an instrument of elite group where some educated and politically dominant people make it as a means to get economic as well as political benefits. The supporters of this approach are Brass (1997 in Guneratne, 2000), Comaroff (1987 in Guneratne, 2000), Eriksen (1993 in Guneratne, 2000), Gellner (1997) and Guneratne (2000). They claim that ethnic leaders make historical factors such as discrimination of high-caste elites, growing awareness of ethnic group, marginalization, lack of pluralism, deprivation of ethnic groups as a means to get economic and political benefits.

Primordial Approach: the position of primordial is based on the assumption that “a group identity is an indispensable aspect of a personal’s personal identity”. The supporters of this approach are [Armstrong \(1982, in Guneratne, 2000\)](#), [Connor \(1978, in Guneratne, 2000\)](#), [Shill \(1957, in Guneratne, 2000\)](#), [Smith \(1986, in Guneratne, 2000\)](#), [Ven De Bergh and Thomson \(1989, in Guneratne, 2000\)](#). It defines the identity by the metaphors of blood i.e. one blood and one’s essential biological unity is expressed in a common culture, racial, linguistic, cultural symbols, dress, and distinct cultural system which remains fundamentally unchanged through the centuries ([Guneratne, 1994](#)). It basically says that persons are born inheriting their own inborn quality and it can’t be separated from them.

Situational or Constructivism: [T.K. Oommen](#) notes on the situational approach that it is not so much the attributes of ethnicity that are important, but the property of the situation in which they obtain and operate ([1990:34 in Sharma, 1990](#)).”It defines ethnicity as a situational construct. Persons are bound to make their identity according to the historical situation and state policy. It assumes that identity making process depends upon the state’s historical, political, social situation ([Guneratne, 2000](#)). [In the past](#), State Policy or process of “modernization” of state was directed to the regional, cultural, linguistic, ethnic homogenization, one nation, one language, one culture, one symbol/identity, and Hindu nationalism. Then the time was extremely severe to the Indigenous Peoples because they had recently lost their state and had nothing to do with the state except accepting the title.

I duly prefer both primordial and situational approach with regards to the identity making of the Wonem Limbu than the Instrumental approach. There was a vital role of the state to make them as “Rai” because they were bound to take the “Rai” title at that time and such situation was created by the state for them. [And now](#), on the other hand, they have changed their Rai identity due to the emotional, cultural, territorial and lingual attachment and similarity to the Wonem Limbu. There is no any vested interests of the campaigners or related community than being re-union with their own original blood and own community. In overall term it is a quest for the original roots.

1.5. Objective of the Study:

The general objective of this study was to describe the motivating factors of claiming distinct ethnic identity among the ethnic groups who were previously considered as belonging to Rai community of Nepal. The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

- To explore and identify the motivating factors/concepts which contributed to rise for the claim of distinct identity among the Wonem Limbus,
- To understand the local people's, individual's and local leader's perceptions on the debate for distinct ethnic identity,
- To assess the perceived benefits of separate identity formation. Who benefits from separate identity formation such as local individuals, local leaders or whole community by identifying themselves as separate and distinct ethnic groups?

1.6 Importance of the Study:

This study will contribute to find out the actual motivating factors of Rai community's claim to be codified/ enlisted as distinct clan group such as Wonem Limbu who were previously considered as belonging to Rai people of Nepal. Since, any research/study has not yet been conducted about this kind of issues in the Rai community. This study might be useful to those people who are interested to study the ethnic identity and reasons of cleavage of the Rai community and different and several other governmental and non-governmental level institutions. It will be also useful to those people who are unknown of their language, ritual, festivals and their similarity and dissimilarity. It will be useful to understand the local people's perception on the identity debate. It may not be an all-encompassing exploration about the intra ethnic-identity debate, but it will, of course, open the door for further discussion. And, it will be also helpful for the rulers, policy makers, bureaucrats, academicians, So far I assume. In overall term, I believe that it will be a contribution in sociology and anthropology of Nepal.

CHAPTER-2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Context of Ethnicity

Ethnicity has been a pre-occupation for the social sciences since the last Sixties. The concept of ethnicity has been applied in a variety of ways in the study of cultural differences and social interaction. This approach can be divided into two broad categories. On the one hand are those who believe that ethnicity is primordial and natural. On the other, ethnicity is viewed as being historically contingent, relational and shaped by the material and social forces of the time. The fact of its increasing presence in academic discusses in this period reflects a growing awareness of the political salience of cultural identity in the modern world. It is apparently first used by the sociologist [David Riesman in 1953 A.D.](#) ([Guneratne, 1998, 1994, 2000, Gellner, 1997](#)). While many have seen ethnicity as a reaction to the process of modernization and it is the contemporary expression of a primordial sentiment ([Guneratne, 1998:749-773](#)). Ethnic identity is formed under the conditions of modernity and its importance generally grows as modernization and globalization proceed, so it is a modern phenomenon.

Theoretically, it has two categories of analysis. On the one hand are those who believe that ethnicity is [primordial](#) and natural, which means, that “a group identity is an indispensable aspect of a person’s personal identity ([Guneratne, 1994](#)). According to the primordial position ethnic identity has always been as aspect of social identity and is often characterized as essentials. The idea of primordial is an essential identity, defined by the metaphor of blood: an ethnic group consists of people who are one blood, and whose essential biological unity is expressed in a common culture, which has remained fundamentally unchanged through the centuries. Again ethnicity can be subsumed under the rubric of social-historical, i.e, they emphasize the contingent nature of ethnicity ([Brass \(1974; 1991, Comaroff, 1987, Eriksen1993: cited in Guneratne, 1994\)](#)).

The Opponents of primordialism are known as [instrumentalism and modernism](#) who consider ethnic/national identity as creation of elite group to gain economic or political advantage ([Bhattachan, 1998, Gurung, 2007](#)). It is viewed as being historically contingent and shaped by the material and social forces of the time. It assumes that, ethnicity, in a word, is historically contingent. It is a form of identity that is constituted through social contact; it must be defined in relation to other ethnicities; but it is also a phenomenon shaped by the process of the state formation and economic development or modernization. Similarly, it advocates that ethnic identity is created through the purposeful activities of dominant classes or elites. So, elite consciousness is a pre-condition for mass ethnic consciousness; it is elite consciousness which lends color, form and direction to the subjective beliefs of the mass of people ([Brass 1994; 1991 and Breuilly, 1982 in Guneratne, 1994](#)).

Ethnicity, on the other hand, [Gaenszle](#) argues, would then be the kind of ethnic identity which is formed under the conditions of modernity. Ethnic identity can be understood as the cognitive and emotional attachment to a particular ethnic unit as the result of the continuous attempt of individuals or groups to harmonize concrete experienced reality, such as encounters with other persons and new situations, with an ethnic self –image inherited from the past. Accordingly ethnic identity in the pre-modern sense can be seen as deriving from concepts and self-images which are firmly rooted in an encompassing cultural tradition and thus remain relatively stable ([1997](#)).

In summary, [Guneratne](#) defines ethnicity, from the instrumentalist perspective, in a word, is historically contingent, is a form of identity that is constituted through social contact; should be understood in relation to other ethnicities which is shaped and affected by the process of state formation, economic development, as well as modernization([1994](#)).

2.2 The Context of Identity

Ethnic groups and ethnicities are not fixed phenomena but are constantly being created; i.e. objective realities such as differences of language, territory, religion and custom are constantly being converted in the light of particular historical circumstances into the basis of a subjective consciousness or self-awareness. Objectively speaking, ethnic consciousness does not require any great degree of cultural distinctiveness *per se*, but it does require that the members of a given ethnic group who believes in their cultural distinctiveness which is seen in the context of Woneim Limbus who have once got the title “Rai” as a head person in village in historical circumstances and used to observe Hindu deity but now they are creating “new” identity in a new historical circumstance where they find political situation, to some extent, quite flexible for them and beginning to observe their own Dharma(i.e. Kirata Religion). Sociologists and anthropologists (Instrumentalists) conclude that the importance of ethnicity generally grows as modernization and globalization proceed, and that ethnicity as understood and experienced today is, to a very large extent, a modern phenomenon. So, ethnicity must therefore be explained as a response to contemporary pressures, and not as a leftover of some previous types of society or period of history (Gellner, 1997:3-31). In many ways, perhaps most, cases, majority are not defined by their ethnicity in the same way as minorities “majority ethnicity” tends to be more implicit (Gellner and Karki, 2008).Ethnic groups are not static, either culturally or socially; they are a dynamic product of interest-group articulation and cultural identity. Within Nepal, there are many examples of group that have attempted to raise their relative status in terms of the caste system and in doing so have changed practices and identified themselves as higher-status group (Fisher,2001).

Now, I turn the point of “modernization” frequently quoted by Gellner (1997) and Guneratne (1994, 1998, 2002) where they duly lack myriad explanation as compared to the S.L.Sharma(1990) as he minutely explains a vivid account on the salience of ethnicity in modernization. According to him, there was a stream of thought which maintained that modernization tends to wipe out ethnicity. But a contrary view drawing

on the recent experience is that modernization may bring about resurgence (renaissance/revival) of ethnicity. Toennies' theory of social evolution from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft holds the view that modernization neutralizes ethnic diversities. This idea complements with the idea of Kerr' (1960 quoted in Sharma, 1990) that industrialization will eventually overwhelm ethnic and cultural differences, creating thereby a 'homogenized' industrial society. In the same vein, there are Rostow (1960) and Hyden (1983) who affirm/declare that market forces will marginalize ethnic affinities (quoted in Sharma, 1990).

On the contrary, there are a number of scholars, who contend that modernization does not necessarily lead to de-ethnicization; rather it may crystallize ethnic consciousness. In this regards, Eisenstadt (1973:358 in Sharma, 1990) observes that industrialization has evoked a variety of responses in different countries due to the diversity of internal conditions prevalent in them. Giving example of Zimbabwean Tonga ethnicity, Murphree (1988:133, in Sharma, 1990) reports that ethnicity tends to persist in spite of modernization because it served a purpose for the group involved. Wallerstein similarly finds no evidence of the decline of Gemeischaften in modern times (in Sharma, 1990).

The two perspectives identified above have gained salience in anthropological studies of ethnicity as well. Leifer (1981 quoted in Sharma, 1990) distinguishes the 'development perspective' from the 'active ethnicity perspective': The development perspective' main argument is that 'since ethnic identities have no role in the mechanics of the market, they should lose their meaning in the orientation of individual.

In contrast, the active ethnic perspective posits that 'economic development does not necessarily entail decreasing salience of ethnic distinction in the mechanics of the market' Barth (1969:10 quoted in Sharma, 1990). Corner (1972:372 quoted in Sharma, 1990) observes that since the 1970s ethnic consciousness is definitely in the ascendancy as a political force. Phadnis(1989 quoted in Sharma, 1990) too shows how ethnicity daunts nation-building in the countries of South Asia.

MARXIST POSITION

In Marxist analysis the centrality of class and class struggle tends to reduce ethnicity to a mere epiphenomenon which can be traced to [Marx and Engle's \(1949 quoted in Sharma, 1990\)](#) hope of international unity of working class on the role of capitalism in assimilating various ethnic categories. They hold the view that “the supremacy of proletariat will cause them (ethnic categories) to vanish faster. [Lenin](#) also assumes that with economic development ethnic resistance to assimilation will decline [\(1966:608-9 in Sharma, 1990\)](#). Thus the well-known Marxist position is that ethnicity is bound to wither away in the face of genuine socialist revolution. On the other hand, scholars such as [Mafeje \(1971 quoted in Sharma, 1990\)](#) and [Wallerstein \(1977:281 quoted in Sharma, 1990\)](#) regard ethnicity as false consciousness which is manipulated by political elites to serve their own interests.

But neo-Marxist has of different view in this regard and argues that development of capitalism, particularly uneven development accentuates ethnic consciousness rather than diminish it [\(Smith, 1979:21-37 quoted in Sharma, 1990\)](#). [Bonachich\(1980:9-24 quoted in Sharma, 1990\)](#) has of the view that , in fact, the bourgeoisie divide the working masses along with ethnic lives to produce(rise) the ethnic consciousness.

ETHNICITY

There are two conceptions of ethnicity:

- 1.1. as a cultural construct
- 1.2. as a situational construct

As a cultural construct, ethnicity signifies a composite of symbolic markers, real or putative used by the members of an ethnic group who define themselves and are defined by others as having a distinctive identity [\(Cohen, 1974: x quoted in Sharma, 1990\)](#). These characteristics may include any combination of the following,

- I. Cultural attributes such as language, religion and values,
- II. Territorial attributes like region or locality, and
- III. Biological attributes like descent and kinship (Burgess, 1978:269 quoted in Sharma, 1990).

In summary, Sharma (1990) says ethnicity connotes a sense of distinction based on common abode (i.e. geographical origins), descent and culture or any combination thereof. In this sense, ethnicity is a construct which serves as a basis ascriptive identification.

As a situational construct where Oommen (1989:302 quoted in Sharma, 1990) has the exception standpoint to the idea of original abode as an attribute of ethnicity and argues that ethnicity is ‘a product of disjunction between territory and culture; it results from territorial dislocation of people from homeland’. Sharma (1990) is positive to this statement and sees giving Indian example trueness and views same idea as it takes on a special salience in alien settings. But he says it is not enough reasons to assume that dislocation between territory and culture is a necessary condition for the rise of ethnicity. Rather conjunction of territory and culture has emerged as a crucial factor behind a number of ethnic uprisings in India.

Oommen (1990:34) in realistic sense says, “Methodologically it is not even possible to specify the crucial attribute because what is crucial is determined by the contact. Therefore it is not so much the attributes of ethnicity that are important, but the property of the situation in which they obtain and operate (1990:34 quoted in Sharma, 1990). Ethnicity signifies the emergence of ethnic consciousness from a situation of multi-ethnic competitiveness. It serves as an affective mode of mobilization. Making a standpoint, Bentley (1983:1-6 quoted in Sharma, 1990) interprets “ethnicity as an emergent process of power struggle.”

In summary, ethnicity does not always stem from cultural tradition or nationality, but can be created and recreated in contemporary society. Ethnicity is an idea that it tends to take on the characteristics of minority, not in the numerical sense but in the political sense of the term.

Finally, both the conceptions are relevant for the debate on the effects of modernization/globalization on ethnicity. The cultural conception of ethnicity is a basis to the homogenization thesis, while the situational conception is germane to the 'plurality' thesis. [Sharma \(1990\)](#) favors the situational conception as being more realistic and relevant in the contemporary context.

2.3 Empirical knowledge on 'Rai' community

Various national and international ethnographers have studied about the Rai community such as their origin and the history, culture, economy etc. The term 'Rai' originally refers to the heads of descent group among the contemporary population labeled with the ethnonym 'Rai' which is an artificial designation of recent origin under which a great number of more or less endogamous local groups with considerable varying dialects are subsumed ([Hofer, 1979:142](#) in [Guneratne, 1994](#)). The term, "Rai" is not by origin an ethnonym but a title conferred by Hindu rulers upon one segment of the tribal chieftains of East Nepal in recognition of their Semi-autonomous status, but also with the idea of incorporating them into the state administrative system. He concludes that, the "Rai" as an ethnic group has thus arisen as the result of a specific historical development. They are practicing their own Muddhum, political and cultural system and there was no sense of separateness among them; they viewed that the neighboring Rai sub-tribes not as different cultural units, but rather as other branches of the same tree: all sub-tribes have the same mythic origin and thus equal ritual status. Ethnicity, on the other hand, would then be the kind of ethnic identity which is formed under the conditions of modernity, i.e. in the context of an emerging nation-state ([Gaenszle, 1997](#)). In recent years, however, the ethnography of Nepal, reflecting the general shift in anthropological

concerns, has begun to move away from the parochial conceptualization of discrete and self-sufficient cultures isolated in their own locales ([Gaenszle,2000](#)).The Thulung Rai community's cultural identity was situated along a tribe –caste continuum. The egalitarian Rai community observes experience and conceives the caste system which penetrated into the Rai community. It seems that the Tulung have been experiencing and reacting to a massive historical process in a manner so fragmented and piecemeal that its systematic nature has not been apparent to them ([Allen, 1997](#)).

Much heterogeneity is used as an argument for the role of the nation state in the forging of ethnic identities. Ethnicity in Nepal can not be understood apart from the external political factors that have impinged on villagers' lives. There are several analyses from the Himalayan region in which ethnicity derives from colonial or quasi-colonial representation. The Tamang are a good example of whose internal heterogeneity can be credited in large part to the role of the state. The Tamang have only recently come to see themselves as “one people with a common origin, history set of clans”. After studying a smaller Tibeto-Burman speaking group, the Yakha, as Russel suggested, identity can be generated more peacefully in order to avoid dissolving in the national level “melting pot”, which used to consider as Rai in dealing with Gurkha recruitment officers. In search of their own ethnic identity the Yakha sometimes present themselves one of the Rai tribes. On the other hand, they see themselves as culturally and linguistically closer to the limbu than Rai, but distinct from both larger groups ([Levine, 1987:86, in Russell, 1997:325-350](#)).

In conclusion we can summarize that a distinct inherent essence does not make the group different but rather their specific historical experience of migration and land occupation does. The mythologies are transformed into political claims on a national level in which specific territorial links are so important which can be seen now in Nepalese political and cultural context

CHAPTER: 3

RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction to the Study Area (the Swachi village)

Sankhuwasabha district lies in Eastern part of Nepal. It consists of 34 VDCs including Savapokhari. It is situated at the height of 5,000 meters from the sea level (ISRC, 2007/08). There are 553 households (HHs) and 3105 total population. Economically, 517 HHS are engaged in agriculture, pasturing, poultry and cattle herding, 29HHS having nothing, 36HHS are landless. In overall, Literacy number of female and male over 6 years are 684(52%) and 555(41%) out of total numbers. There are 659 Rais, 1304 Limbus, Tamangs 561, Brahmins 92, chhetris44, Gurungs 159, Magars 65, Dalits 179 and other are 42 respectively on the basis of caste and ethnicity (NLA, 2004).



Figure 1: the Swachi Gaun (village) which is the original land of Wonem Limbu in Savapokhari VDC.

3.2 Rationale of the site selection

Savapokhari VDC is located at the Eastern part of the SankhuwaShava district. The reason behind the selection of this area was that, Savapokhari is the main residential area of Rai and Limbu community. And Some ethnic group here, i.e. Rai people have changed their identity into Wonem Limbu. According to their claim, after the unification of Nepal by king Prithivi Narayan Shah, they had got the term “Rai” and begun to write as their Jat though they had been practicing their own Limbu culture, language and dress and Mudhum. Some other households of Savapokhari were also strongly seeking their own distinct ethnic identity ([kantipur daily, 2009](#)). There was a dearth of authentic research of the motivating factors of being enlisted into separate Jat/community who were previously considered to be Rai community. Study conducted on the Rai community, more attention has been paid to the ethnicity, social, cultural and religious pattern of them. Factors which motivated these simple people towards distinct ethnic identity have not been studied yet. Therefore, Wonem Limbu of Savapokhari in SankhuwaSava district was purposively selected as the study area. [According to my respondent there are around 65 to 70 households of Wonem Limbu and among them, I chose some key respondent who are relevant for my study to provide relevant data. Due to the economic, time and other various constraints I could not include all households. However, I assume, became able to include the historical and mythical dimension associated with the Wonem Limbu to justify my study.](#)

4.2 Research Design

Research design addresses the planning of scientific inquiry – designing a strategy for finding out something ([Rai, 1996](#)). The researcher followed primarily descriptive ethnographic research approaches. While applying the descriptive method, the researcher carefully recorded all the observed events, debates, local perception, statements made by the locals, problems and activities from the study area and described as faithfully as possible. Special focus had given to those factors that led them to get separated from Rai identity.

4.3 Nature and source of the data

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Required primary data were collected from the field work. Secondary data from various relevant literatures such as ethnic organizations as well as library, published and unpublished articles, documents, books, internet, research agencies, CBS reports, and other publication of different organizations were used. The nature of data was predominantly qualitative.

4.4 Data collection Techniques

Historically, anthropologists use ethnography method for the collection of empirical data from the natural field (Rai, 1996). This method comprises observation; key informants interview (KII), focus group discussion (FGD) etc. Rapport –building is very important for anthropological researchers.

4.4.1 Observation

To make the observation as a scientific tool, data were collected through formulated research objectives/purposes. The researcher collected all information by way of his own direct observation. The researcher observed the social and cultural facts of the study area, different aspect/relations of local people to each other and perceptions of neighboring. According to my field observation in native place what I found there was that there were various remarkable things and issues which can be sufficient to distinguish them as separate groups i.e. Limbu as they claimed themselves. Such as their different cultural practices, language, and Muddhum which helped me to generalize them as Limbu origin. The inscription found/written in the forehead of the temple located in Barahbise Bazar is the fantastic testimony for the scientific evidence which reads as “*Rai Nara Bahadur Dwara Nirman Giriyaiko*” (it was erected by Rai Nara Bahadur). Another, testimony I got was that their collective/ community genealogy (Bansawali) which also proves that they were the Limbu before the annexation of Limbuwan in 1774 A.D. After that they were given or they received the title “Rai” as a title to govern the local area.

4.4.2 Key Informant Interview (KII)

KII was used to collect information about their history, overall aspects of motivating factors, various causes and constraints of changing their previous “Rai” identity, that were not obtained from direct observation. Educated people in the Rai community, elderly people, previous political leaders and teachers who had knowledge about their past, history and present socio-cultural and racial condition, was selected as key informants. The researcher consulted also with villagers to gather other information relevant to the study who belonged to other caste/community. All of them whom I interviewed were seen positive towards them and no sign of conflict or contradictory opinion found during my field study from the same caste and other caste, except one person who is the local leaders of one dominant political party. Though he opined positive attitudes toward the identity formation however his overall argument was focused on the time and circumstance of the State they chose to proceed which is very important that I became able to better understand social scenario (I have put his detail opinion in next chapter).

4.4.3 Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

FGD technique was used to generate information on the specific issues about the subjective factors, such as the role of local leaders to raise the concepts/ideas of separate ethnic identity. The members of FGD were from the same community and other community as well. The FGD was conducted with the person who involved in this debate/movement for separate identity. The researcher conducted some FGD. The researcher also involved other groups, castes. FGD was based on the following question:

- Local people as well as leaders’ perception on the movement?
- Specific motivating factors for the local people and leaders to raise separate identity?
- Local initiatives on promoting and managing the identity movement?
- Perceptions of other people/community on the issues of separate identity?
- Social, cultural, linguistic and religious practices/system which support their movement in the present?

4.5. Data analysis

The data collected from the field study were analyzed by using simple tools and methods. This was conducted at three stages, i.e. reading the field descriptive notes and identifying the relevant themes/concepts; concluding relevant materials under relevant themes and developing generalization. Secondary data were analyzed descriptively by using computer software package.

4.6. Limitation of the study

Every research does have its own limitations and constraints as well, and my research was not exception in this regard. The limitations of the study were as follows:

1. This research covered only the Wonem Limbu community of Savapokhari VDC in SankhuwaSava.
2. This study was conducted for the completion of the partial fulfillment of master degree in Anthropology. So, it was not applicable for a detailed research due to the limitation of time and resources.
3. This study adopted more anthropological research tools and methods.

Chapter: 4

Short Ethnographic Review of Rai and Limbu People

Now, let me discuss some ethnic term as Rai and Limbu and their history in general to be clarified about the subject matter mentioned above and some research findings about the Woneim Limbu which help to illuminate their historical aspects to fulfill the research question in precise way.

4.1 The Rai Community

Rais are descended from the ancient Kirati (Vansittart, 1915: in McDougal, 1979). The name Kirat is for the first time found in the Yajurveda (Chhatterji, 1951). Hindu epic Mahabharata also describes the “Kirats” who inhabited the country between the Sun Kosi River and Bhutan. The ancestors of Kirati entered Nepal’s Eastern hills through the Barakhshetra gorge of the Kosi Valley (Mc Dougal, 1979, Tamang, 1996). The Rais are ethnically closely related to both Limbus and Sunuwars (Toba, 1992). Lord Buddha, who is considered as one of the greatest leaders and teachers of mankind, was thought to be of pure or of mixed Kirat origin (Chemjong, 2003). Rai is title conferred on Khambus or Yakthungbas by Hindu kings around the tenth to seventeenth centuries and Limbu is a comparatively recent term used for Yakthungbas inhabiting in the area east of Arun river; a tributary of Koshi. The term Limbu became popular since the rule of Prithivi Narayan Shah (Subba, 1985).

According to Swami Prapannacharya, the use of word Raya (Rai) dates back to almost 2000 years and an old Sanskrit text “Kavya Sudha Nidhi” written in 1096 A.D. (Sake1017 or 1152B.S.) in Bhojpatra (birchbark) was found preserved in Royal Library of Garhwal, U.P. of India whose commentator was Harka Bali Raya of Chamling group (clan) from Khotang, the eastern part of Nepal. He further comments that eastern Nepal was the settlement of Rais prior to second millennium A.D. and several common names of clans of present Rais and Limbus also suggest that Rais and Limbus were the same

branch of ancient Kiratas inhabiting in the same areas. The physiognomy, rites of passage, belief system, and even the details of Muddhum and some similarity in the dialects in comparison of other ethnic groups also substantiate this assumption (1994a in Subba, 1985). **Kajiman Kandangwa** is of the opinion that Kirats of Nepal were called Rais during the rule of Sen Kings of Makawanpur and the Rais inhabiting in the east of Arun river were later called 'Limbu' by Gurkha rulers after the annexation of Pallo Kirat(1990a in Subba,1985).

4.2 The Limbu Community

Limbu one of the ethnic groups of east Nepal, has its distinct culture. This ethnic group is mainly found in Taplejung, Panchthar, Ilam, Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Dhankutta, Terathum and Sangkhuwasabha districts, in an area of 16,358 sq. Kilometers. Historically known as "Limbuwan", this area lies between the Arun River in the west, the border with Sikkim and West Bengal states of India in the east, the northern parts of the plains of Mornag, Sunsari and Jhapa in the south and the border with Tibet, China in the north, almost covering an area of 11,655 sq. kilometers. This region is also known as "Pallo Kirat". Limbus are not only confined within the boundary of Nepal, but are also scattered throughout the hill territory of West Bengal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur states of India (Subba, 1995, Gautam and Thapa-magar,1994).It might be possible that the reason behind their migration towards these places, that: first, the severe situation caused by the Gorkha intervention made them flee there and the most powerful reason may, quoted in Subba, be the implementation of the **Land Reform Act in 1966 A.D.** Subba also notes that powers, privileges and facilities of Limbus were ended by the implementation of Land Reform Act in 1966. The great majority of Limbus were in vicious cycle of debt and all their properties, including land, were mortgaged. The Act compelled them to be displaced from their land and almost 80 % of the total went into the hands of Non-Limbus. The wave of migration of Limbus from Limbuwan to other places, especially to Terai, started since then. Because of this reason, today Limbus are not confined in Limbuwan but are found in Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari and other places as well (Subba, 1985).

Despite of their distinct culture, tradition and religion of their own, they are living together with their Hindu and Buddhist neighbors. They have a long tradition of narrating or reciting Mundhums and performing certain rituals and observing ceremonies in their own distinctive ways. Muddhum is a legend, folklore, prehistoric accounts, sermons and moral or philosophical exhortations in poetic language. It is a scripture living in oral tradition. It denotes to “The Limbu religion’ or “The Limbu religious literature” also (Weider and Subba, 1985). There is no doubt that the Limbu and Rai have, since remote antiquity, been following their own traditional Kirati religion, which is quite different from Hinduism, Bhuddhism, Islam or Christianity. On the other hand [Mabohang and Dhungel\(1955 in Subba,1985\)](#). opine that the descendants of Lilimhang of Susuwaden (Capital in East Nepal or within the region of seven rivers) or the progeny(offspring) of Limbukhang, great grandson of Lilimhang, were known as Limbus.

Limbu belongs to the Mongoloid physiognomy inhabiting the area popularly known as Limbuwan especially after the annexation of the Kirat land into the Gorkaha kingdom in 1774. The modern concept of kirat land is east of Kathmandu valley subdivided as wallo Kirat, or near Kirat, the land stretched between eastern border of Kathmandu valley and Makwanpur to the Likhu –Sunkosi river mostly populated by Murmis or Tamang, Suanwars, Jirel, Thami; Manjh Kirat or Middle Kirat, the land between the river Likhu in the west and Arun in the east mostly inhabited by Khambus or Rais; and Pallo Kirat, the land between the river Arun and Mechi. Limbus are a branch of Kirata segregated by the Gurkha rulers with special grant of land privileges and local authorities in some particular areas (Limbuwan) from the rest of their kindred. Historical document reveal that the term “Limbu” was used by Gurkha(Nepal) administration after 1774. The decrees and letters of Sen Rulers before the unification of Nepal and the genealogies of various clans (Thar) of Limbus also divulge that the Kirata leaders were conferred the titles of Raya and thus they were known as Raya and later Rais ([Subba, 1985](#)).

4.3 History of Limbuwan

The groups of ten chiefs were called Limbus or Archers and the land which they won with the help of Li or bow and arrows were called Limbuwan (Chemjong, 1948). There is also another episode regarding the name Limbu and Limbuwan. During later half of seventh century a Tibetan marauding troop, under the leadership of Lhaso Mong attacked the principalities of east Nepal and Sikkim. With the help of Licchavi king of Nepal valley, Shivadeva and Lapche (Rong) troop of Sikkim, local Kiratas (Rai-Limbus) drove the troop of Lhaso Mong from their Janapadas (small republics), who were ruling there for about twelve years. Thus the Janapadas west of Singalila range, which was liberated from Lhaso Mong's rule by local people with their weapons-arrows and bows (Li) began to be known as "Limbuwan" and troops as Archers i.e. Limbus (Dahal, 1984 in Subba, 1985). Kandangwa (1990b) opines that Gurkha rulers might have called the inhabitants living around the ranges of Limbusringam, which is the Sanskritized version of Lumbasumba (Kanchenjunga) as Limbus and the land east of Arun and west of Mechi was named 'Limbuwan' after 1774 with the notification of demarcation in 1830 and again with the name of administrative division-"Zilla Pallo Kirat" in 1861 (1990b in Subba, 1995). Kainla also opines that literally "Lingba" denotes "self-grown or emerged", so "Limbu" may have been derived from "Lingba" and there is also a place named Lingba in Limbuwan which also supports this assumption. So it is hard to rely on any assumption relating to the naming of the word 'Limbu' (1992, in Subba, 1985). Chemjong is also of the opinion that Limbus were the branch of Syan Makwan tribe of North Burma and had entered into east Nepal before 7th century. During 7th century another branch of Sen Makwan tribes under the leadership of Mungmaorong entered into the plain region of Limbuwan and built a fort in Rongli (Rangeli). The place occupied by them soon began to call Morong (Morang). Limbus remained rulers of this land until the Gorkha ruler became their sovereign. Limbus fought with Gorkhas for twelve years and finally the Gorkha ruler granted a commission, with certain ruling powers to the chief of each district or Thums and land and tax privileges for his community members, which led to the agreement for ceasing war (Northey and Moris, 1927 in Subba, 1985).

4.4 The Kirata

The Kiratas were a very heroic tribe (Joshi, 1998). Swami Prapannacharya has presented the vivid/stunning accounts and references of Kiratas even from **Rig Vedic** text in his renowned volume named-“**Prachin Kirat Itahash**” (Ancient Kirat History). According to him, Kirata was a Rishi (erudite priest) of king Asamati and Yayati, Kakshivan, Ghosa(female), Sawara Kirata were some of the erudite/scholarly sages who were known as experts of hymns(Mantra) of Rig Veda and there were also Chumuri Kirata, Salwa Kirata , Pipru Kirata, Tugra Kirata, Varchin Kirataa, Druhyu Kirata, Dhuni Kirata, Sigru, Yakshu(Yaksha) Kirata, Sawar, Pulinda, Shaka etc(1994b in Subba,1985). Enough evidences have been found in confirmation of the fact that Kiratas are one of the ancient races of India in search of origin and antiquity of kirat people. **Chemjong** has referred to them as inhabitants of Mediterranean region, who later mixed with Aryan people in Mesopotamia or Assyria. Hindu scriptures reveal that Ashurs are non-Aryans, opponents of Aryan authority and supremacy and detester of Aryan cult. These facts obviously show that Kirata belonged to the non-Aryan groups of people (1966a quoted in Subba, 1985). **Chatterji** (1951a) has proposed the name ‘Indo-Mongoloids’ for the people with the traits of Mongoloid physiognomy and Tibeto Burman language group, including Kiratas, with the assumption that they had entered into India in the remote past before the influx of Aryan-speaking Nordics and these Indo-Mongoloid Kiratas were in constant touch with Dravidians and Austriacs since remote antiquity and, later on, they mixed up with Nordics and contributed for the evolution of composite Indian (Aryan) culture. Most of the western historians and ethnologists in the past have maintained the tradition of describing Kiratas as having the characteristics of Tartars or Mongoloids and thus suggesting some linkages with the people of central Asia in the remote past.

According to **Singh** (1990b in Subba,1985), lots of information are given about Kiratas in ancient works and various sources, such as Vedic literature (4500-1000 B.C.), Great epics – Ramayana and Mahabharata, Mahapuranas and Upapuranas (B.C.600-200A.D. and 300-600A.D.).**Bangdel** has more specifically remarked that Rais, Limbus, Jyapus(associated with the Newar) and Tharus belong to the ancient Kiratas(1982 in Subba, 1985).

[Manusmriti](#) describes about twelve kinds of Kshetriya. Similarly, Skanda Purana gives the accounts of the kingdom of Kirat king Vijaya with one hundred and fifty thousand villages and Vayu Purana mentions that there were colonial Kiratas in the east and Yawana in the west of Jambu Dwipa(Indian Peninsula),([Subba,1985](#))

4.5 Original place

Himalayan region was always a favorable abode of Kiratas since the hoary past. Toponym of this region also suggest that the land occupied by Kiratas extended from Kumaon in the west to Sikkim and Assam in the east and from the remote Himalayan peaks in the north to the Veheda, Koshala, Magadha, Vaisali and Anga(in modern Utterpradesh and Bihar) in the South and almost the whole area of Nepal in particular , were inhabited and governd by Kiratas sometimes in the remote past with a noteworthy feature of divided tribes confined in a number of small states ([Bista,1992 in Subba,1985](#)). Various sources reveal that Kathmandu valley was under the rule of the Kirat dynaty form circa first millennium B.C. to second century A.D. According to Gopalraj Vangsavali 32 Kirat Kings ruled over Kathmandu valley. The Kirat genealogy of [W. Kirkpatic](#), [D.Wright](#), [Sylvain Levi](#) and [Itihash Prakash](#)(History Publications), Kathmandu mention the number of rulers as 27,29,28 and 25 respectively and the years of their rules and names also differ to each of these sources([Shrestha,1985a in Subba,1985](#)). Most of the historians believe that the Kirata rule was overthrown by the Licchavis sometimes between 2nd to 3rd century A.D. according to [Sing\(1990c\)](#), Kirata rule in Nepal (Katmandu valley) continued to the first quarter of the 8th century A.D.

4.6 Historical Background of Wonem Limbu

According to my informant, in 1831 B.S., the so called founder of modern Nepal Prithivi Narayan Shah and his successor Rana Bahadur Shah gave the title of “Rai” for the first time to the local limbu of recent women limbu as a local ruler who were then headman of their local area. And now they are around 70 households in this VDC and some of them migrated to the Kathmandu and Tarai for better lives. Their forefather mostly got married with the "Rai" women but now they are getting married with the same clan. They have their own ancestral priest called 'Phedengma' in Limbu language. Phedengma who observes most of the ritual practices. According to my informant before then they were Limbu; practicing Limbu Muddhum, culture and language form their origin. It was the state which lured and compelled to accept the “Rai” post to the simpleton Limbus who were, to some extent, seen positive to take the post because they had recently surrendered their kingdom into the hand of Gurkha ruler and instead they got the Royal decree of “Kipat” land and the title “Rai”.s

4.6.1 Myth of the Origin of Wonen Limbu (what does the Mudhum say?)

These Wonem Limbu believe in their own mythical origin about their origin and have several interesting myths. According to their myth, they originated from the Saptakoshi gorge and spread towards the northern part of the Arun River, i.e. Arun valley. My key informant says about their myth of origin as: “Once there lived an old man who belonged to the Magar caste. He used to hunt and fish for his daily living and one day he happened to cast his net over a fish and succeeded to catch her and brought to his home and she has one mythical name, i.e. **Limbuni Machha** or **Gosah** (Limbuni Fish). At the evening meal time he began to cut his prey for cooking but for his great surprise, all of sudden he found a child of men from the womb of that fish. Actually, the fish had eaten the sperm of the Siva, the great lord while he was engaged in romance with his wife Parvati in the Saptakoshi River. At the mean time the “Fish” succeeded to have his sperm and got pregnant and finally she was caught by the fishermen. And the new human child was reared by the old man by feeding named -Sinjali goat milk and as the

time passed on its own way the boy also grew old and one day he got married and had seven children. The old man had nothing to share with his sons as land and other sources for his sons and ordered them to take their own path for their living and the boys did so. Some of them went toward the southern part, some eastern part and some following the bank of Dudha Koshi and Suna Koshi River. Two of them named **Hangsengwa** and **Hangyoungba** took the path of **Arun River** and when they arrived at the confluence of the Arun River and Sava Khola and they decided to divide the river to each other and the youngest brother took Sava Khola as his share and little brother got the Arun River as his share because Arun was big relatively to the Sava Khola. When they proceeded towards their own destination the little brother denied to go far leaving his youngest brother and decided to join with his brother and returned back by jumping the **Katle Bhanjyang** [hill] which separates the Arun river and Sava Khola disguised himself as a fish and met his brother. Again they joined together and walked for a long time and finally at the evening of the day they reached at a place named **Badare Dovan** i.e. the confluence of **Yaaksuwa River** and **Sava River** which is situated at the northern part of the **Barhbise Bazar**, takes one hour now. When the day got dark and they happened to see a fire burning far in the hill and the youngest brother asked his little brother to fetch the fire and noticed him that if he gets late fetching fire he would be going by cutting the banana trees and little brother would be following him. Then the little brother went to fetch the fire. When he reached the hill he found a girl in a cottage webbing/knitting her woolen garment [**Taan Bunne, e.g. Allo garment**]. They engaged in talking for a long time and when he returned back to the former place he did not find his youngest brother and also saw that the log of the banana has grown with its core leaf very long. Then he came into a conclusion that his brother has gone before several days ago. In fact, he could not notice the nature of the banana that can grow in some minutes or hour. And thinking that his brother had already left him, he returned back to the same place and met the parent of the girl. He decided to live with them together. As the time passed on, he got married with the daughter of those old men and spread their generation more and more. In fact, **Hangsengwa** the youngest brother had gone to the Taplejung district by crossing the Northern Hill. The old man was not other than the Budhauri.

4.6.2 Two dimensions of Wonem Limbu

There are two dimensions of Wonem Limbu who are historically and since immemorial past interrelated with them. They are the **Budhauri** (the unknown) and the **Magars** (Aale Magar).

4.6.2.1 Budhauri (the unknown)

They are the first settlers of this place. No one had settled there before them and they are the oldest human community. They live in the Northeast part of the Barhbesi Bazar which is the confluence of three small rivers: Lankhuwa River, Sava River and Bhoti River (Khola). They are the father-in-law of the Wonem Limbu. They have no their own language, culture and Mudhum and definite history on origin. There are no educated persons among them and they are now four households. According to the **Mudhum, Hangyoungba**, the little brother who went to fetch the fire lived with them and spread their generation till now. But what the interesting point here is that nobody knows who were they, where from at that time. Somebody assume that they were the **wild** men(*Ban Manche*) at that time or most primitive man in anthropological term, here and there searching for living who had no other relatives except their family and definite culture, language and history and were single family. The **Budhauri** family could not spread over the period as relatively to the Wonem Limbu did. Until now, they are respected by the Wonem family as their old family and they have harmonious relation each other and no marriage exchange with each other as well.



Figure 2: the settlement of the Budhaule family in Savapokhari VDC, which is about 200m far away from Barhbise Bazar.

4.9.2.2 The Magar Priests and the Temple

Relationship between the Thapa Magars and Wonem Limbu of Savapokhari VDC dates back to the time the Thapa Magar had looked after their forefather by feeding milk of “Sinjali” goat. Therefore they have not only social and cultural relationship but also blood relations as well. So, the local headmen “Rai” preserved them as an integral part of them and endowed some land as “Guthi” from immemorial time.



Figure3: the temple where Magar priests observe the Puja (worship) twice a day.

Similarly, once there used to happen frequently a great trouble by the Sava River (Khola) which could not give the native people of Savapokhari and Barhbesi Bazar to live peacefully and comfortably. According to them the river would not flow in the same and regular line or direction instead sometimes to one direction and sometimes other and used to cut the fertile land of both sides frequently. One day, to find the cause of trouble made by the Sava river, one Limbu priest (i.e. **Phedengba**) observed a ritual cult/process (**Jokhaana Herne**) and what he found and suggested to the Wonem Limbu was that there was a “ancestral place” (**Purkhauli Thau**) originated by itself in the bank of that river which was causing that misdeeds and he should be worshiped/repatriated regularly by their decent i.e. the Magars. It was because the Wonem Limbus was gone to that place without the family/decent of the Magars who were the close forefather of Wonem Limbu. And they brought one Magar family to observe the ritual practice to make the spirit of forefather happy and peaceful.



Figure4: the “Ancestral place” where the spirit of Magar’s forefather said to have originated and the temple in the background of it.

It is because, therefore, the Magar families have been also living with the Wonem family since their origin. They were brought with the respect way there by the Wonem Limbu family and gave some land as grant for their living.

There is a provision of giving the Guthi land for magar priests for the daily worship of the temple. There are three major places i.e. an ancestral place of Magars and two small temples near it. For the worshipping of the temple, there are two Magar priest who observes Puja[worship] in the morning and the evening shift respectively. The priest who observes Puja in the morning gets 30 Muri land where 30 Muri i.e. 1800 kg rice can be grown and the priest who observe in the evening gets 20 Muri of land where 800 kg rice can be grown over one year. There is another person who is sweeper who gets 15 Muri lands who clear the temple daily.



Figure5: One Magar priest observing the evening worship (Puja) in local temple.

But what the most interesting point here is that the Wonem Limbu who claims to be the Kirat origin simply observes the deity of Hindu religion as **Siva** and **Parvati**, **Ganesh**, **Kumar**, **Bhimsen** and **Machindranath** in the local temple. It has also an oral history that “once the local headmen “Rai” gone to the kathmandu to visit the then ruler Shah king in the process of collected tax paying and he brought the statue of the **Machindranath** whose worship is observed in the Kathmandu and Lalitpur district” says my informant.

One of my key informants blames them as: “This Limbus were the puppet of the then rulers who were always engaged to get the power from the central government and they were the local ruler i.e. “Raja” or king for the local people and wanted always to be in the power and retain it at any cost. It is not great surprise to have such Hindu God’s statues among the Kirati community because they (Limbu) always wanted to make the Hindu and Khas rulers happy by showing such Hindu symbols around them. Every year they also used to observe the great Hindu festival “Dasian”. At that time each and every caste and family had to observe some slaughter of animal like goat, pigs and buffaloes and they

had to deep their hands into the animal blood and mark them in the forehead of the front door or any front part of the house so that that could be seen easily by the local Jimmawal or else persons who used to come to inspect whether the family or house observed or not the Hindu festival”. The statement indicates that the cultural/religious practices of any defined groups largely depends upon the characteristic of the state and to some extent so does the identity making of them/such groups.

4.7 What is “Subhangi”?

According to my key informant who is one of the active member of Rastriya Jana Mukti Party and district coordinator and former candidate of Constituent Assembly says about this as, “Subhangi Chadaune” or offering Subhangi was the first and regular process of curtailing Rai, Subba, Dewan, Mukhiya, Majheeya and the Yaakha of their **Lal Mohar** or **Royal Decrees** and land and forest, in other words, it was the breaking up promises by the state themselves with the simpleton Kirati Limbu which was made on the mutual understanding between the state and the Limbus of Eastern Nepal”. This can be found in details **Mahes Chandra Regme**’s account (1999).



Figure6: Researcher with the native respondent of Savapokhari, who is the main campaigner.

He goes saying on, “To grab or curtail the fertile land for their settlements in the Limbuwan the cunning Bahun and Chhetris introduced so called a more “higher post” than the “Rai” i.e. “Subba”. The title “Rai” was also given to the local Limbu by the same rulers for their benefits to maintain the local administration after the unification of Limbuwan. The title/post Rai could be gained by the local Gimmawal Limbu/ “kipat” holders only when they offered 30 Mury land and 30 rupees to the state from the “Kipat” land. Which land would be transformed into “Raikar” land and the title holders had to collect some Taxes from the Raiker land holders and most of the Raiker land used to hold by the Bahuns and Chhetris or anyone who were settled by the state. There was a provision of retaining the land by the Kipat holders according to which if a Raikar holder could not plough or tiled the land for ten years the land automatically would be gone to the possession of Kipat holders”. According to my observation the term “Raikar” is made up of two words i.e. “Rai” and “Kar” [tax] which means the land to which tax should be paid to the Rai title holders in the condition of his land receiving from his “Kipat” land.

He says, “The title Subba could be gained only when the Rai title holders could offer double amount of land and money i.e. 60 Mury land and 60 rupees in comparison to the Rai title, that is called, “**Subhangi Chadaune**”. Who could not offer such amount of land and money to the state remained in the same or to some extent lesser title “Rai”. According to my key informant “it was a great violation of “Lal Mohar” or Royal Decrees for the Limbu by the state, agreed by both side. Through the **Subhangi Chadaune** [offering Subhangi] by the Limbu and offering title Subba by the state, there grew the penetration of cunning Bahuns and Chhetris in the pure Limbuwan territory. On the other hand, there grew other competitions among the Rai title holders Limbu to be enlisted as “Subba,” the great. It brought a kind of social and racial difference within the same limbu i.e. who could give the amount for Subba they got the title Subba and began to be known as subba caste but who could not offer such amount of money and lands remained in the same Rai post and became as Rai caste”.

The process of offering “Subhangi” is also mentioned in [Caplon’s book \(1970\)](#). He says, “It was the deliberate job of the state holder (khas ruler) who always wanted to grab the fertile land from the hand of the local kipat holder limbu and always engaged to project different types of conspiracy against the simpleton limbu and also against the “**Lal Mohar**. And now, the same “Rai” title holders ‘limbu’ who could not have offered the Subhangi, are the recent “ Wonem Limbu”, officially who have recently changed their Rai identity into women Limbu under the Citizenship Act of Nepal,2063 (16)” .

4.8 Who were they first, after all?

According to my key informant they were “originally the Limbu people of Pallo Kirat and used to observe similar cultural practices as other Limbu did. After the annexation of the Limbuwan land into the Gurkha kingdom, we/our forefathers accepted the title “Rai” from the Shah rulers as a post and began to write it before our name e.g. Rai Nara Bahadur, Rai Thir Bahadu” etc. but over the years, decades and centuries it became our generic term to refer to all our community because we were regularly in contact with the Rai peoples around us. Although we share some similar cultural practices with the Rai peoples but as a matter of fact, strong proof that distinguishes us from the original Rai is that we don’t have the name of sub clans such as Chamling, Bantawa, Mewahang, Kulung, Thulung Lohorung etc as do the Rais. We were and are regularly known from the sub-clan of Limbu i.e. Wonem Limbu and simply observe the every ritual practices of Limbu people”.

CHAPTER-5

RESERCH FINDINGS

5.1 Motivating Factors of Distinct Identity Making among the Wonem Limbu

According to my informant despite their different language, culture and ritual practices they gave continuity to hold the Rai title before their name and they think that in the context of changing Nepalese political scenario, it is high time and relevant to come in consciousness and go back to their original caste and culture to identify who are they now .We are limbu by dint of limbu culture, language and ritual practices. What he told me was that in the Lal mohar there was a provision /agreement which was land giving as Kipat in the full possession/ownership of the local headmen limbu which was forever for them as long as their forerunners live in this Earth and also the land could not be sold for other persons and caste and that was made between the local Limbu king and the then king **Prithivi Narayan Shah** that either party would never violet the agreement. They promised each other that either party never violets the agreement, if in case of such act the **Dar Santana** i.e. successors of either side be extinct from that time on from this Earthy world”. This has also quoted by **Regmi (1999)** in this way that by the terms of a royal proclamation issued in 1774 A.D., immediately after the conquest of **Pallokirat**, the Limbu chiefs were permitted to “enjoy the land from generation to generation, as long as it remains in existence.” The proclamation added: “In case we confiscate your lands, may our ancestral gods destroy our kingdom. In the name of various cunning post and law and regulations to curtail them of their possessed land and forest such as Forest Act, **Land Reform Act, 1964**, they violated the agreement made between them. As a result, the Shah dynasty has been eliminated from this country due the violation of that covenant between us (they think so far!). If the Shah dynasty could keep the promises intact, possibly the **royal massacre** would not be happened in Nepal!”

According to my observation there are some important factors which motivated and facilitated them to get separated from previous identity and some of them are as follows:

A. Cultural, Ritual and Languial factor: According to my respondent in conversation, meetings and talking they were asked which caste belonged to them. In that case, they used to be in dilemma whether to say Rai or Limbu. If they say Rai as their caste there was no any Rai culture in practices and if they say as Limbu they were written already as 'Rai' officially. So they gradually began to think uneasy and proceeded for changing their caste/Thar.

B. Ethnic Institutions: Another factor was to be some of ethnic group, institutions who helped them to proceed, they agreed to proceed for further official steps to change Rai title by studying and listening their written and oral history and ethnic leaders were also seen positive in this regards from local, district level to central level as well.

C. Political Factors: political situation is another factor of changing identity. In fact, political scenario in Nepal to some extent is positive for ethnic group of Nepal. The political parties of Nepal are willingly or unwillingly taking ethnic agendas formally or informally despite the lack of strong implementation in practice as promised in their electoral manifestos. It is because of the long and strong movement of the several Nepalese indigenous people and institutions. And they seem to have taken some advantage of this flexible political situation which is flexible in comparison to the past situation where Shah Dynasty and autocratic Rana dynasty ruled over the Nepalese people who used to appoint the local headmen as Gimmawal giving the title "Rai"

My one informant who belongs to other caste blames the women Limbu in the context of changing their "Rai" identity into Wonem Limbu as: One," By luring of the title /post "Rai", they (the state) succeeded to rule local ethnic groups. At that time the title "Rai" was enough and honorable to post for them and were praised and honored by all his subjects in his Kipat/Birta. In this period, they never realized that the Rai was a post and their real caste was not Rai. But when the same Shah and Rana dynasty began

curtailing them of their Kipat land and local rights to rule the local people, they began to feel and know inferior and the conspiracy of rulers against them. When Kipat was abolished by the Panchayat rulers [i.e. Bahuns'/Chhetirs] the title [Pagari] Rai, Subba, Gimi, Majheeya were also seen outdated and they began to realized their own culture, language and caste and began seeking their real identity and no doubt this is the real motivating factors which led them to get separated from the Rai title which has no any more relevance today. Two, in the context of federal republic Nepal, there are several political and ethnic parties/institutions demanding local and regional autonomy. In this process in eastern Nepal, Limbuwan Council of Limbu people is struggling for its own self-autonomy region. This event stroked the mind of the Wonem Limbu leaders of this area because what they thought was that neither they are culturally and linguistically Rai nor the Limbu by dint of official citizenship. In this way they found themselves in a minority as well as paradoxical group within the potential Limbuwan state. Hence they initiated to convert their caste. At last, the relevance of Lal Mohar and the title Rai has also gradually lost its own real ground for them. They thought that the title Rai without Kipat and Lal Mohar has no more relevance for them rather it created several social, cultural and racial obstacles for them. On the one hand they call themselves as Rai but have no any similarity in culture and language. Their close relatives always observe limbu ritual practices and speak limbu language and this Wonem Limbus also does but their caste is labeled as "Rai". It was questioned frequently for them so many years/ times from their relatives/neighbors".

My own direct observation also suggests that "Rai" was title for them in this community, specially for Limbu which can be seen and proved observing a small temple located in the Barhabise Bazar dating back to around 2015 B.S. on a small inscription which reads as: "Rai Nara Bahadur dwara nirman gariyako [i.e. this temple was erected by Rai Nara Bahadur]" and another a small temple next to this dating back to 2030 B.S. which reads as: "Rai Bhim Bahadur dwara nirman gariyako"[i.e. it was erected by Rai Bhim Bahadur]." This temple was re-built by the local "Rai" headmen after the destruction of 1990 B.S.'s earthquake.

Another interesting proof is that the “Bansawali” prepared by the Wonem Limbu community where every name of their forefather begins from the title Rai but their caste never found after their title and name.



Figure 7: the temple with the historical inscription which can be seen in the tow sides of the main door and above of it that reads as“**Rai Nara Bahadur dwara nirman gariyako [i.e. this temple was erected by Rai Nara Bahadur]**”

At last, I would like to add one [brief story told by the key respondent](#) which is full of having ethnic consciousness and also can help illuminating the motivating factors which might possibly be the main cause/factors of real identity seeking.

This goes like this “once there was a **tigress** having some cubes and rearing them happily and peacefully in their own beautiful and heavenly land. But one day one hunter came and succeeded to have her killed. But the cubes became able to escape from there leaving their mother dead. After some days they happened to join with the flocks of the sheep and

goats. In the course of time, they learned the culture, language and living style of the neighbors and failed to learn/identify actually who they were and where from they? but one day one tiger came and tried to catch his prey but all of a sudden all prey began to run away from him and to his great surprise what the tiger noticed there was that there were not only sheep and goats but also were the cubs running away! So he decided to catch them and followed them and became able to do so. When he caught them successfully then he interrogated them with why they were escaping from him by the way they belonged to the same group. To his great surprise, what they replied was that “No! We are not. We are this and that”. And he decided to get them to the near river and introduce who actually they were. When they reached to the river and the tiger get them saw their face in the river water and told them that you were not sheep or goat at all, but the great tigers who have their own territory and should have the nature and quality of a tiger but not such coward sheep, goat and other animals. Then they became able to notice who really were they and joined him. And Babu, similarly this story duly applies with the condition of us (the Kirati/Adibasi). Once who used to live in their own kingdom and had their own sophisticated Kirati civilization but when the outsiders penetrated into this Kirati land the condition of aboriginal Kirati became the same as the mentioned story’s cubs whose land and culture and language (mother) were killed through so called “one nation, one language and one religion. Yes, there was no such time and opportunity for us due to the nature of state to raise voice for identity and could not be possible to change identity despite of our long and repeated efforts. But this is the high time for us to be identified with real identity because the political scenario is, to some extent, flexible now due to the long movement for the rights of Indigenous people in Nepal. And if the political scenario was not favorable to us, our campaign/movement would not have been possible for that we have been spent our decade times”.

5.2 Local leaders, People, Individual and other Caste view on distinct identity

All my informants in the Savapokhari VDC were belonged to the Wonem Limbu except Magars and Budhauri. According to them after the unification of Nepal Prithivi Narayan Shah appointed local headmen as a local administrator who could be a proper ruler in the native place having the local knowledge and situation by creating different types of title and post such as Rai, Mukhiya, Yakhaa, Geemi, Majheeya and Subba. At that time, the Limbu of the Limbuwan had already lost their land or “Gave” it to the Shah dynasty in an agreement so called “Lal Mohar” and in returns they also got the title “Rai”. Here an interesting point made by a respondent of Bhojpur district who belonged to the Rai caste is quite important. I was there in a field study for some day for Rai community’s Ethnographic Profile conducted by **National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities**, Lalitpur, 2010. I asked him why Limbu only have the **Lal Mohar** and not with the Rai in Majhagirat and he simply replied as: “at the time of battle and encroachment of P.N. Shah into the Kirati territory the Kirati of Majhagirat who are also called “Khambu” asked them for help and suggested them to fight against the Shah by unifying their people and soldiers to protect the homeland but they denied it and P.N. Shah became success in stratagem and make the Limbu handover the land to him without any difficulties. So they were cheated by the P.N.Shah in the name of **Lal Mohar** (Royal Decrees) which had no any meaning and relevance if they could not utilize the land with full power and possession as they did in the past. The Rai never accepted the proposal of P.N. Shah of various cunning greeds and lure rather accepted the battle and subsequently death for homeland. The Limbu had accepted the proposal of “**Mita**” or “close friendship” through which P.N. Shah succeeded to slay and make other Rai escape from their homeland. The Khambu became weak and escaped toward the Darjeeling and Sikkim”. He said excitingly “if the Limbu had helped for the Khambu the Kirati territory would have never been gone to the hand of cunning and treacherous P.N.Shah. The Limbu brother gave deceive just for a **Lal Mohar** (Royal Decrees) which internal meaning was not to make the Limbu real Jimmawal but a servant to look after his “Garden of all caste” as stated in his “Dibya Upadesh”. If only they knew the conspiracy of P.N.Shah in right time they would have been the king of their own land forever but not

servant. That is why Rais have no Lal mohar”. Which can be, to some extent, justified by this accounts on them as: “Limbus remained rulers of this land until the Gurkha ruler became their sovereign. Limbus fought with Gurkhas for twelve years and finally the Gurkha ruler granted a commission, with certain ruling powers to the chief of each district or Thums and land and tax privileges for his community members, which lead to the agreement for ceasing war” (Northey and Moris, 1927 in Subba,1995).

On the other side, in the same vein my key informant, who belonged to the same Wonem Limbu, also told me, to some extent, similar story in the relation of Limbu and the P.N. Shah as: “There was a brave and strong Limbu King named “**Hilihang**” and also called 17 times winner (i.e. **17 Jeet Raaja**) in Taplejung district and he and his State was attacked 17 times by the P.N.Shah but failed. There were 10 Limbu kings with 10 Limbuwan and the centre was the **Bijayapure** which is located now in Sunsari district and the king of Bijayapur was **Budhikarna Khewahang**. In this way when he failed to get victory over the Limbuwan he made a conspiracy against the Limbuwan. As a result, he planned to be the little brother of King **Hilihang** and won the emotional support by promising that if the Limbuwan was attacked by any other party he would be there to support them and vice versa. In this way P.N.Shah consolidated his military power and political strategy in the Limbuwan and secured his place within them after he slew **Hilihang** and together with them he attacked in the **Bijayapur**, because it was the strongest state in the Kirat territory but the king **Buddhikarna** escaped towards the sikkim and even there P.N.Shah sent some spy and succeeded to fetch him alive and slew him after cruel punishment of three days in the same **Bijayapur**.”

The later informant’s saying also meets the crux point of the former informant i.e. the “**Mit Lagaune**” or being a respectful friend/ holy friend in Hindu beliefs through which P.N.Shah succeeded to overcome the Limbuwan state. After the unification of the **Khambuwan** and **Limbuwan** he needed somebody to conduct local administration as well as he also had to settle down the cacophony of that region and he appointed the local person giving different post as a local ruler such as ‘Rai’, ‘Subba’, ‘Gimmawaal’, ‘Majheeya’, ‘Dewan’, ‘Gimnee’, ‘Yakha’ etc.

In my view, it had two objectives: **One**, to give conundrum to the local headmen as if they were coroneted as a new king there, which helped to maintain the then Shah regime and the cacophony of that region, too. **Two**, conundrum of self respect felt by the Kirati headmen which helped them (Shah) regime to abstain them from their daily “big royal duty.”

According to my key informant, in the meantime, the Wonem Limbu of the Savapokhari VDC also had achieved the title “Rai” as a “compensation” of their State and begin to write it before their name in the beginning period as “ Rai Git Bahadur, Rai Nar Bahadu, Rai Tila Bahadur” etc. In the course of time, it became their caste as popular generic term to refer and also used to be proud of it. Before the people’s movement of 2046 B.S. in Nepal there used to be little discussion on the issue of distinct identity among this Rai community. When they became aware of their culture, language and racial issue, they found it how they were made “Rai”, different culture and ritual practices they observe was not the same as do the “real” Rai. Therefore they stepped for changing their loaded identity into “real” identity. According to my key informant it has been one decade for identity movement and have struggled for many times and places in different manner.

According to my key informant, First of all they listed the family or Household number of Wonem Limbu in Savapokhari VDC and held a joint meeting of same community under the chairmanship of Thir Bahadur Wonem Limbu and submitted it to the Janajaati Mahasang [Federation of Indigenous peoples] and **Yakthum Chumlung** [Yakthum Council] in district level to central level for their information and permission and they also accepted their proposal after long and serious study and permitted for further legal and official permission to change their clan. They submitted an application form to the CDO of SankhuwaSava stating what they want officially. After the three months of submission of application form, the home ministry of Nepal gave the authority to the CDO office to grant them what they want to changing their “Rai” identity into “Wonem Limbu” under the Citizenship Act,2063(16) by studying minutely. The Wonem Community called upon the government official, journalists and other persons in their village after they fixed the date and place of big programs where they officially changed their Rai identity or“Jaat”.

5.3 Perceived Benefit

In the context of the benefits they received from the changed identity, my key informant says like this: “All the covenant and provision made between the State and the Limbu kings first violated by the State to grasp the land of simpleton Limbu. If the state is so one sided and does not accept and implement the provisions, then only the Limbu are not compel to obey or give continuity such provision and we are feeling that our own distinct identity is in crisis. We are Limbu by dint of our Limbu culture, ritual practices and Limbu language but we still hold the title Rai. So it became a paradoxical situation. In one hand, we all Limbu people here observe the Limbu culture and speak Limbu language (but I found nobody speaking their own language. One person told me that they almost have forgotten their own limbu language due to the cultural assimilation with the native Rais) but our caste is written as Rai. First, it was our title/post, later on became our caste due to the improper understanding and lack of flexible administrative and political situation. We were aware of that but could do nothing due to the political situation and system and it’s high time and relevant to correct our own identity. It is not our biasness towards other caste and people. And now, all people of this region are happy to have this chance converting their caste into Wonem Limbu and no one voiced against my campaign rather /instead they were seeking such persons as me who took the first step for collective benefits. Most of the members of the Wonem community have changed their ‘Rai’ identity into Women Limbu. But whose name has already been written or enlisted as ‘Rai’ and are governmental official/personnel they are given a special card until the new citizenship they receive legally/officially. And there are still going on such process of correcting the identity. Who are in abroad for their living and business remained uncorrected.”

5.4 Perception of Limbu Community on Low Education Status

There are few educated people among the Wonem Limbu. According to my key informant there is only one person who has passed Master level and there are no more than five persons who have passed Bachelor level among them. He told me the historical reasons behind this cause which goes like this:

“Once Nepal was a large country and its border stretched very far and most of the Indian land belonged to Nepal at the time of East-India Company. **Tista** of India (now) located in Eastern Nepal and **Deradun** of India (now) in Western Nepal was belonged to Nepal but later these territories were lost by Nepal. Dominant of the population of there were the Nepalese too. The East-India Company never introduced the bias and discriminatory education system. They gave equal right to read and write to all people. And the Nepalese people were not the exception to have studied high standard education there. Indian and Nepalese people together were taught equally. But when East-India Company became compel to leave India, they deliberately fragmented India into Two parts i.e. Hindustan and Pakistan by creating a visionary leader in Pakistan. Because East-India Company was very much aware of that one day India would be a great and economically powerful country in the world. Meanwhile they also called Nepal to take their parts of territory back which was lost in battle, when they were preparing to go the United Kingdom. It is because they still wanted to narrow down and fragment the Indian Territory rather it was not their gifts or endowment for Nepal. But Nepalese ruler i.e. Rana regime feared to return back our land instead. It has also reasons that it is because if they returned that land, it meant to return back the educated people of simple Nepalese people where they had got higher and advanced education which was direct threats to the then Rana regime and unstable for their autocratic rule. Therefore, they did not return back our land. And, in the same time, they never allowed to open public school for general Nepalese people’s children. When Rana regime fell down and Brahman rule began. They also followed the same path; however it was not so rigid in form. But their practice was the same and their internal intention was to set back Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities by imposing ‘Sanskrit’ education from class one to class Ten in school level instead of introducing the mother tongue vocabulary for them. To some extent, they succeeded in failing the

indigenous peoples in examination fantastically. Subsequently it hampered them and most of them could not reach up to the class ten and those who are lucky to have the chance of SLC examination most of them used to fail in “Sanskrit” and compel to leave the school forever. So our village and native school is facing a severe scarcity of good and honest educated teachers. It is because due to the state’s discriminatory education system”.

5.5 Perception on how they lost their royal decrees (“Lal Mohar”)?

I would like to commence my account on how the Limbus lost their Kipat to make it more reliable with the accounts of **Mahes Chandra Regmi** which states as: “In fact, the government of Nepal followed an ambivalent policy toward the Kipat system of landownership in Pallokirat. No doubt, it desired to extend state control over Kipat lands, but it also had to recognize the strategic location of Pallokirat in the Nepal –Tibet-Sikkim tri-junction. Moreover, the Limbus were a turbulent community that long remained unreconciled to Gorkhali occupation and rule. Kipat policy was therefore largely guided by the objective of gradually reducing the area under this form of land tenure; subject to considerations of political expediency (1999).”

According to my key informant, “Once the forests of all side around them belonged to the “Gimmawal” of native place which was provided in the covenant of Lal Mohar i.e. Royal Decree /red sealed which could not be abolished until the either party i.e. state or local Gimmawal violates the terms and conditions between them. Lal Mohar had provided them the full right over the land and natural resources. It is the promise by the state to the Rai and Limbu in the period of political unification. After the defeat of Gorkha soldiers in battle despite of their raids and skirmish on Limbuwan, P.N.Shah urged and persuaded the king and local village headman to amalgamate/ accept their king to him and handover their land to his kingdom, in return he gave the Limbu king and people the full rights over the land which could not be sold and buy by either side, i.e. **Lal Mohar**.”

When democracy was brought about by the Nepalese people in 2007 B.S., then Bahuns/Chhetri regime began indirectly. They were eager and jealous of Limbuwan's fertile land and dense forest and similar rules and regulations began to introduce to curtail simpleton Limbu of their possessions. And for this they introduced forest act in 2015 B.S. in the name of maintaining forests and they posted forest staff and ranger to protect the forest from the government side who predominately belonged to the elite Hindu caste. Then it was the turning point from where the conflict between State and local indigenous people began. When the local indigenous people used to cut down (burn down) the forest (slash and burn) for seeding and cultivation then the state ranger would come near them and used to tell why they did this and that against the state forest rules. Then the Lal Mohar holders Limbu used to show their Lal Mohar and interpret their applications, provisions and promises made by the state. Then the ranger used to become compel to go back with empty hand. This acts and reactions of Limbu people strongly stroked the ill and treacherous mind of the state holders (i.e. Bahuns/ chhetris) and always engaged how to curtail Limbu people of their fertile land and forest. As a result, one day, state called upon the Lal Mohar holders all indigenous people of eastern Nepal with their "original Lal Mohar" at Kathmandu (then Nepal) and pretended to introduce some more facilities and provisions from the state side and kept the "original" Lal Mohar from the hand of simpleton Rai and Limbu. But days and week passed they did not notice them what is going on there rather began to pretend to conceal the truth and delayed in the name of this and that. This caused the simpleton Lal Mohar holders Rai and Limbu irritating and made loud voice against them but they were jailed and later released with some terms and conditions. After that, they returned back to home with their empty hand and begun awaiting some more provisions and facilities from the state side. But they delayed and delayed until the conflagration of the SinghaDarbar in 2030 B.S. which fantastically gave and helped the state holders a good /strong opportunity to pretend and conceal that the "original" Lal Mohar was burnt along with the fire of SinghaDarbar! In this way Rai and Limbu lost their "original" Lal Mohar and were slowly curtailed of their own land and forests by the treacherous Bahuns/Chhetris.

Later on, they introduce the concept of “**Community Forestry**” which internal intention was not to give benefit to the local indigenous people but to curtail them of their traditional rights over the natural resources.”

Even again, this fantastic saying can be, to some extent, proved if we look at the **Regmi's** document which states as “**the government of Nepal followed the policy for encouraging non-Limbu immigration into Pallokirat in order to break the Limbu hegemony over landownership. In particular, it refused to recognize Kipat landownership rights in waste lands within traditional Kipat holdings and permitted non-Limbos to reclaim lands under Raikar tenure (1999)**”.

Similar story can be found in **Chaitanya Subba's** accounts which is also germen to quote here for its relevance as: “ The Kipat system (tribal or ethnic ownership or land), local authority with certain administrative powers (Subbangi), contract system in land tax and special local court with some judicial powers (Amal system) granted some autonomy to Limbus. But indirect encroachment occurred from time to time in the authority and privileges of Limbus through inspection (Janch) and land survey (Napi), new taxation, offering of fertile paddy fields for army, and division of Subbangi (encroachment in the rights of primogeniture relating to Subbangi) through the offering of certain area of land, and imposing various rules and instructions (**Shrestha, 1985d in subba, 1995**).

CHAPTER-6

SUMMERY

In the **first chapter**, I have discussed the historical background of Nepal, ethnic movement in Nepal and research problems such as what is the cultural, linguistic, religious and geographical basis for claiming different identity within the Rais? What contributed to raise the concepts of separate cultural identity among the Rai people? How these demands for Rai people are being recognized by the state? How the rural Rai people have understood the demands/movement for their separate identity?

In the conceptual framework I have applied three theoretical approaches to clarify the real motivating factors of Wonem Limbus to convert their identity and I applied the primordial as well as situational approach to prove my study authentic. In this chapter I have mentioned my objectives of the study and why it is important and relevant to study in the present Nepalese context.

In the **chapter two**, I have reviewed some theoretical aspects of ethnicity and identity making from primordial, instrumental as well as rigorously from the Marxist perspective to better understand the ethnicity in the modern context.

In the **chapter three** I have discussed the research methods which include introduction to the study area, rationale of the site selection, research design, nature and source of data, data collection techniques which includes Observation, Key Informant Interview, and Focused Group Discussion. Additionally, I have also mentioned the limitations of the study.

In the **chapter four**, I have reviewed some ethnic term as Rai, Limbu, the Limbuwan, the Kirat, their original place and the historical background of the Wonem Limbu as well as their myth of origin which is mentioned in their **Mudhum**. I have also mentioned the two dimensions of them e.g. the **Budhuli** and the **Magar Priests** and their historical

relationship from the immemorial time to the modern time. This chapter also includes the system of “**Subhangi**” which played a vital role among the Wonem Limbu to become as “**Rai**” and “**Subba**”. At last, I have tried to clarify the real history of them by comparing the statement made by the key informants.

In the **chapter five**, I have tried to find out the real motivating factors of converting “Rai” identity into “Wonem Limbu” by exploring the core factors, by getting the statements made by the local leaders, peoples, old people, and key informants. I also have tried to assess the perceived benefits made by the local community by converting their identity and similarly I have also got the perception of their on low education and how they lost their **Kipat land** which also helps to understand the relationship between the state and the indigenous peoples.

Finally, summarizing the **last chapter** I have concluded this dissertation by comparing the study of [William F. Fisher \(2001\)](#) and [Guneratne \(2000\)](#) on the identity making. [Fisher](#) says that, in conclusion, identity must be seen in the present situation of any human society no matter how they have undergone changes or faced barrier in the history comparing Thakali identity with that of the Kali Gandaki River’s nature. However my findings are a little bit different from him that the identity conversion Wonem Limbu is directly linked to the known history i.e. historical mistakes are corrected by the Wonem Limbu community in the context of flexible state situation.

Similarly, [Guneratne \(2000\)](#) concludes his finding with the saying that the Tharu identity is directly linked to the education, eliteness, effect of modernity and state building. According to him there are no more cultural, historical aspects of them to get united each other than three things in common as: their citizenship in Nepal, their common ethnonym, and the association of that ethnonym with a particular territory, i.e. the Terai. But what I strongly want to prove is that to be identified as distinct or collective groups or to merge in another identity is to be consciousness to the common ancestry, blood and to share common historical and cultural experience.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude this dissertation with the exquisite saying of [William F. Fisher \(2001\)](#) and [Guneratne \(2000\)](#) which can help illuminate the facts about the fluid identity that human society carries.

One:

In the context of Thakali fluid identity [Fisher](#) writes as; “it was the river that gave me an analogy to use to convey my thoughts to the Thakali, a river whose peculiarities would be obvious to all of them. Thakali culture is like the Kali Gandaki River. It flows in a wide riverbed that allows it to break up into several meandering streams that merge again downstream. These separations and margins vary **unpredictably** over time, but the separated channels always rejoin further downstream. If you ask me which channel is the main channel, how could I answer? I could tell you which stream was the strongest one today, but I could not tell you which channels was the original or true channel of the river. The flow of the river changes from one season to the next, from one year to the next. Other individual viewing the river in another year or in another season and comparing it to our description would recognize it to be the same river by its general location and by the general boundaries of the riverbed hemmed in by the mountains, but they would find the specifics of our description inadequate, even inaccurate. The river changes over time. Sometimes, it flows peacefully and at other times with great **turbulence**. At any specific time it may be deeper, shallower, stronger, or weaker than others. It may run in one channel or in five. But it is nevertheless the same river”.

Similarly, the case of the Wonem Limbus are like the one river which once separated from its original stream to other direction and flow and now seems to have merged again in the downstream after long time and flow on its own way. The Thakali case can help to understand and illuminate the Wonem Limbu case, so far I think. No matter after how long time they rejoined in the downstream again. At least they have decided to seek for their original identity despite of the state’s will to divide and rule principle done in the remote past. But there is something to consider with the case of identity making.

According to Fisher (2001) the latter one, but, has to create its identity from the new process. Giving an example of the Thakali case he says, “Ironically, the attempts by the Thakali over the past two decades to define their identity and clarify their practices reveal that to return to tradition they must first re-create it, but this process of re-creation establishes tradition in a way in which it has never existed before. That is, to return to tradition – to become Thakali again- is, in a way, to become Thakali for the very first time ”.I think it is because in the course of long time, departed from the mainstream, they might have lost many of their cultural and religious traits. They have to create it from different strategy to cope with the social environment. They seem to holding the Primordial concept for identity making.

Fisher says the focus on process rather than product redirects our attention to the formation and reformation of boundaries and suggests that boundaries are permeable, fluid, and always already in the process of becoming. He concludes that the process of constructing boundaries is an ongoing one in which boundaries, rather than being rigidly constructed, remain fluid (2001).

It is the zeast point of his book. Having such kind of nature of the identity, one single group is now divided into several group in terms of distinct identity which applies with the Rai case. They view that, having distinct culture and languages; it is our right to be recognized as a separate group/caste and that is our right.

According to Gaenzle language and cultural variation occurs within the same groups as a result of geographical distance or remoteness, historical and migration experience of the community or it is because of the geographical migration and historical experience of human being (2000). It is not so big issue as has been raised by the some Rai indigenous groups in Eastern Nepal.

TWO:

[Guneratne](#) offers in his book a theoretical perspective on ethnicity that emphasizes its grounding in the political and material conditions of life. He does not agree with the perspectives that see a shared culture or shared symbols as a necessary precondition for the emergence of shared ethnic identity. [Similarly](#), he has tried to address the conundrum posed by the Tharu elites' claim to ethnic unity: why people who seem to share so little in common, and who, by their own admission, considered themselves unrelated and distinct as recently as fifty years ago, have come to think of themselves as one people and have developed a sense of peoplehood through which to situate themselves in Nepal's polity.

He accounts, to understand about identity, that prior to modern times (that is, before the end of Rana rule in 1951), the Tharu of different regions did not think of themselves as all belonging to the same "Jat". There was little intercourse between Tharus from different districts or region, and perhaps little knowledge about other groups of Tharus. Giving example of [Ramanand Prasad Singh](#), a Tharu who served **King Mahendra** as his attorney general, remarked about the early days of the Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha, "as a matter of fact, [once] we became educated we thought of exploring for ourselves, [and] we used to hear that there are Tharu, Tharus here, and Tharus everywhere. So we used to go from one district to another....there was an institution called the Tharu Welfare Society, Tharu Kalyankarini, we founded it. And then it used to inform others about their own common origin."

It is the facts most of all his arguments heavily rely on and mine too. Because the key informants of him and mine both belongs to the educated, well-being and politically conscious family towards the ongoing social and political situation and their own ethnic interests. [But Guneratne \(2000\) fails to know the situation/condition deliberately created by the State which caused them forget their own language and culture and they learned other's cultural practices. And the history/nature of Nepal has always been remained "divide and rule" and in such situation there was no any chance to raise voice for ethnic identity and it would be leveled as "non-national" voice and would probably sentenced to the jail.](#)

He concludes that according to the points made by Singh's that modern Tharu identity is not received from the past but has emerged from the conditions of modernity, the outcome of the organizing efforts of people whose life experiences are being transformed through modernization and state building. But I disagree with this conclusion of Guneratne. It is because "the condition of modernity" is not only the sole cause for, in the context of Nepal, ethnic identity making or seeking and what I strongly argue is that there is a historical exploitation, marginalization of ethnic groups, one nation, one language, one culture, one dress, one religion state policy and most probably "divide and rule" policy of Shah rulers. So it is not only situational approach but also primordial approach that Nepalese ethnic group applying. In my case, the identity making process of Woneim Limbus was directly connected to the written history or past which is well known for all and is not connected to the modernity rather with the flexible political situation which was not existed in the past.

Again, what I want to say here is that like the Tharu identity in Tarai who are much affected by the modernization process and state building which cannot be duly applied in the same process of identity making process of Woneim Limbus and the circumstance between the Tharus and the Limbus are quite different. According to his theory of ethnicity –whether primordialist, modernist, or instrumentalist-that stresses its derivation from culture are too limited. So, shared culture is not only the determinant factors for the development of ethnic consciousness. For example, in the beginning of **Tharu Kalyankarini Sabha**, they had only three things in common: their citizenship in Nepal, their common ethnonym, and the association of that ethnonym with a particular territory, i.e. the Tarai. So, ethnicity is contingent upon the historical circumstances in which it develops. Although the existence of some ethnic labels can be traced back to centuries. And such elite's activity as a process of creative imagining are encouraged or enabled by the changing circumstances of life. Therefore, ethnicity is the outcome of specific historical processes that shape a society's experience. Elites act to interpret and give voice to this experience. And very often these processes throw up leaders whose views are at odds with those of the old leadership. As **lionel Caplan** puts it with reference to the Limbu of the eastern hills of Nepal, "cultural identity becomes political identity in the context of the confrontation over..... Land (natural resources) (1967:113 in Guneratne,

2000). State role is very much crucial for ethnicity with reference to the Tharu of Chitwan that when the hill people began to serve to “Nepalize” the Tharu population, it has also sharpened the sense Tharus have of being a distinct people. Therefore, like [Leo Despres \(1984 quoted in Guneratne, 2000\)](#). And [Joan Vincent \(1974 Guneratne, 2000\)](#), [Guneratne](#) treats ethnicity as “a mask of confrontation”; an ethnic consciousness exists only in opposition to other ethnicities against which it defines itself. So Tharu ethnic identity is defined in contrast to that of the hill people, primarily immigrants of the dominant Brahman-Chhetri castes (2000).

Thus the sharpening and political articulation of Tharu ethnic identity was the result of or partially an outcome of the state’s own activities i.e. state/Panchayat laid policy of “national integration” and so it does apply with the case of the [Wonem Limbu](#) where once the state gave them the title and became known as “Rai” and the same community discarded it when they found political situation flexible and the state also agreed with them.

Here, [Guneratne \(2000\)](#) seems to advocate the state as the prime agent or exponent of "civilization". But what he fails to understand is that state is not required to name or define that what is culture, religion, and living style of other ethnic group rather such ethnic groups are historically sovereign and possess the capacity to define who they were and are now and know their relationship with the state, colonizers/outside and can maintain their civilization and keep their identity intact. What they expect from outsider is that they have the right to define themselves what they like.

At last what I would like to conclude is that these [Wonem Limbu](#) were made "Rai" in one historical period that can be labeled as "form" which was situationally created. But in the "content" they always remained "Limbu" by dint of their emotion, Language, culture and emotional attachment to the territory. So it is not the instrumentalism approach that I want to prove rather from over all term, and evidence it can be primordially proved that Nepalese ethnic groups are seeking their identity through their own language, culture, religion, blood relation and specially their historical relation with their territory.

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