

THE MAGARS IN POLITICS

A CASE STUDY OF PALPA, KASKI AND MYAGDI DISTRICTS

A Dissertation

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POLITICAL SCIENCE

By

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LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

We certify that this dissertation entitled “**Magars in Politics: A Case Study of Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi Districts**” prepared by Uma Nath Baral under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for final examination by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** in **POLITICAL SCIENCE**.

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APPROVAL LETTER

This dissertation entitled “**Magar in Politics: A Case Study of Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi Districts**” was submitted by Mr. Uma Nath Baral for final examination by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science. I hereby certify that the Research Committee of the Faculty has found this dissertation satisfactory in scope and quality and has therefore accepted for the degree.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Ph.D. dissertation entitled **"Magar in Politics: A Case Study of Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi Districts"**, I have submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University (TU), is entirely my original work prepared under the supervision of my supervisor. I have made due acknowledgements to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The results of this dissertation have not been presented or submitted anywhere else for the award of any degree or for any other purpose. No part of the contents of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

Mr. Uma Nath Baral

Date: March 11, 2011

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ABSTRACT

Background of the Study: Nepal does not have a long history of ethnic activism. It appeared systematically only after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The ethnic groups, along with other excluded voices sprang up due to the open environment, freedom and basic human rights that came about only with the re-establishment of multi-party democracy in 1990. Undoubtedly, the changing political situation favoured the activism of ethnic groups and other marginal sections of the society to air voices along with the demand for seeking more ethnic rights. The favourable atmosphere after 1990 encouraged numerous ethnic organizations to surface and promote their ethnic identity and to fight for inclusion in society and polity. The restored democracy in 1990 could not change the traditional exclusionary structures of the state which continued to affect the lives of the ethnic and other subordinate groups. All these people continued to suffer and were deprived of political, social and economic power and opportunities, due to the domination of a few elite from the high caste groups as well as the exclusionary structure of the state. Therefore, Nepal's political experience of 1990s exposed the limitation to procedural and ritualistic democracy.

Ethnicity got a mainstream issue of Nepalese politics because of Maoist war that launched in February 1996. The Maoists urged the ethnic people to support the war assuring them to provide ethnic federal state. This conflict was based on the Magar settlements of the Athar-Magarant and had gradually extended among the other rural parts due to the active support by the people of marginal and excluded territories. Maoists succeeded in fuse their insurgency with ethnicity.

Nepali politics entered into new dimension since the first quarter of the year 2006, which introduced Nepal as the republic state and on the way to inclusive democracy. The political upheaval in the beginning of the 21st century ended with the result of restored democracy. Particularly, in Post April (2006) Revolution, different ethnic organizations have flourished and began the movement for their proper participation with ethnic identity in the various sectors of the state. Hence, the debate has begun for seeking inclusive democracy through the proportional representation of different social groups in proportion to their size of population and demand for ethnic federalism. Ethnic issues have been taken as marginalized, oppressed, suppressed and unprivileged strata of society tended to acquire a major political unit of Nepalese politics. Ethnic activism, however, has now turned into political power, nurtured by increasing social acceptance to some major demands of ethnic

groups, i. e. inclusive democracy, sharing power in proportion to the size of population, federalism on the basis of ethnicity. But two key questions are yet to be explored. “Are the common ethnic people aware of the rising issues of their demands? To what extent are the ethnic activists mobilizing the ordinary people for their own collective and community rights?” These issues are studied in the context of the rise of Magar ethnicity. “Do the Magar ethnic people at the local level know about the ongoing activism carried out in the name of their empowerment? To what extent are they involved in both ethnic and non-ethnic politics? How do they perceive democracy, political parties, state restructuring and federalism?” These are some of the research questions related to Magar ethnic politics at grass roots and the researcher has tried to explore and analyse these issues through this study.

Objectives of the Study: The objective of this study is to explore the Magar ethnicity in politics from different angles, like analyzing its participation and representation in the various state institutions, its interests and demands, its views and perception on current pressing issues of Nepalese politics, and investigating the activism of the Magar organizations for socializing and empowering the Magar people and its culture. This study particularly intends to find out the role and perception of the Magars living in western hills on democracy, political party and federalism, and finding suggestions for their inclusion in mainstream politics.

Research Methodology: This study is an empirical study largely based on primary sources of information. Primary data was collected using various research tools, i. e. questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and participatory observation. It has applied both probability sampling method (systematic random sampling) and non-probability sampling (purposive and snow palling samplings) methods for collecting primary data. A regional level seminar was also organized for discussing the outputs of survey research. Data that were collected through survey and interview (quantitative) was coded, tabulated and analysed by using the computer software programme called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data were systematized by using the technique of Content analysis. While using this method descriptive and contextual analysis were used for interpretation and analysis of data and information through transcribing the field note and other related documents. Besides, the study also obtained secondary data through literature review, study of governmental and non-governmental documents.

The field areas of this study were Palpa, Kaski and Myagdi districts which are situated south to north in the western hills and Known for its socio-political history and natural beauty.

With an aim to cover different variations these districts were selected by using purposive and judgmental sampling. Palpa is the centre of the southern Magars where they have been indigenously dominating through settlements since the unknown past. Likewise, Myagdi is also a Magar dominated district and the Major part of the northern Magars. In the same manner, Kaski received its fame of the ethnic activism. This is an eminent place where the people throughout the country, particularly Magars and Gurungs from western hills have migrated for settlements. At the second phase of sampling, nine sampling sites - three from each district – were selected. These sites were chosen taking into consideration of internal variation among Magars on several accounts, i. e. culture, clan, mother tongue speaker and non-speaker, majority and minority in population of selected areas, geographical location (near and far from district headquarters) and political factors (dominated or subordinated in local or selected areas).

Major Findings: 1. Data concerning with different organs of the state and political parties show that the Magar ethnic group has negligible representation in proportion to its population. Therefore, they are unprivileged and disadvantaged in the polity of the state. Both, activists and general respondents equally perceive that the educational and political awareness, and unity among the Magars along with the inclusionary state are required for empowering them in the state affairs.

2. The history of the Magar ethnic activism formally started under the *Langhali Pariwar* in the early 1980s and then under the Nepal Magar Association since 1992. The main demand of their activism in Post 1990 Democracy (*Janandolan I*) was to seek the recognition and to promote their primordial ethnic identity. The Magar ethnic organizations have demanded the proportional representation system and ethnic federalism for seeking inclusive democracy through their activism in Post *Janandolan II* (April-2006 revolution).

3. It has been found that due to activism of various local level organizations, the Magar people in villages are politically trained like the urban people. In Magars' perception people's government, human rights, peace, development, rule of law and inclusion in the polity are the aggregative and deliberative meaning of democracy. The effect of Maoist's war and their mobilization in democratic movement, caused the Magars to know and understand about the democracy and ethnic values. This has been found that they do not consider the Monarchy in the price of democracy.

4. The study also finds that the involvement of Magars in party politics is greater than their ethnic organisations which are limited in a few urban centers. Their inclination towards the party politics, however, helps in flourishing the different ideologies and values in the

democracy. Political socialization through education, economic and family backgrounds are the major factors that influence Magar people in their attitudes as well as their role towards party politics. It has also been noticed that compared to the centric and rightists parties, left parties are in better position among the Magars.

5. Those who are affiliated and influenced by the policy of Maoists pointed out that this is the way for their liberation by establishing the Magarant ethnic autonomy. Whilst, those Magars who opposed them expressed that Maoists could do nothing for the people at the grass roots, however, they catalyse the grievances of the Magar ethnic people for their power seeking interest. Nevertheless, Magars believe that they have significantly contributed to the Maoist war and it facilitated in promoting their ethnic identity.

6. As per Magars identify, the restructuring of the state and inclusive democracy are needed to address the interests of the local people and their diverse identities. Nepal's diverse ethno- demography requires a combination that would give support to different levels of government and produce a system where people and societies are empowered and there are venues for expression of different ethnic and territorial identities through self-rule. Therefore, they have suggested that there re at least two levels of autonomous governments – the federal provinces at the regional level and local unit governments at the grass roots level- should be mentioned along with the devolution of power, resources and decision-making authority in the new constitution. Hence, they support the Proportional Representation System based on the strength of each group and identity of ethnic population in the different organs of the state. As they believe that it is the best institutional design for inclusion Magars and other excluded and disadvantaged groups in the main stream politics.

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